UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Ripping the Veil: Collective Memory and Black Southern Identity

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Communication

by

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The Dissertation of Patricia Davis is approved and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microform and electronically:

Chair

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DEDICATION

For my parents, Simon C. and Ollie F. Spencer, and my daughter, Joelle

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Signature Page……. iii

Dedication…… iv

Table of Contents……. v

Acknowledgements…….. vi

Vita…….. vii

Abstract of the dissertation……..…… viii

Chapter One: Ripping the Veil: Collective Memory and Black Southern Identity…… 1

Chapter Two: So That the Dead May Finally Speak: Space, Place, and the Transformational Rhetoric of Black History Museums……. 49

Chapter Three: Ghosts of Nat Turner: African American Civil War Reenactments and the Performance of Historical Agency, Citizenship, and Masculinity……. 98

Chapter Four: From Old South to New Media: Museum Informatics, Narrative, and the Production of History…… 152

Chapter Five: Conclusion…….. 188

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Ripping the Veil: Collective Memory and Black Southern Identity

by

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My study investigates processed through which African Americans articulate an identification with the South through the reconstruction of cultural memories of slavery and the Civil War. The objective of the dissertation is to examine the ways in which multiple, contradictory, decentered, and fragmented subjectivities are produced and expressed through a variety of vernacular media forms. Using a mixture of interviews, historical research, and critical textual analysis, I analyze history museums foregrounding the black experience of slavery, African American Civil War reenactments, and a digital media Memory Book site. These forms enable vernacular media producers to construct narratives of the period highlighting black historical agency, connecting the history of slavery to its contemporary legacy, and recovering the emancipationist vision of the war. In so doing, they critique and revise dominant

historical narratives of slavery and the Civil War that construct 19th century memory, as well as contemporary southern identity, as white.

Chapter One: Ripping the Veil: Collective Memory and Black Southern Identity

1.1. Introduction: Project Overview

This dissertation argues that African Americans are utilizing a variety of vernacular media forms as means of connecting with an emergent southern identity centered on collective memories of slavery and the Civil War. By providing a critique of mainstream media narratives positioning blacks as historical victims and contemporary "social problems," those engaged in constructing this identity do so through the production of historical agency that occurs both at the level of the neglected history presented, and at the level of representation itself. Vernacular media forms allow "ordinary" African Americans to become producers of historical narratives and thus provide a substantially productive means for the critical interrogation and destabilization of racialized orthodoxies about the nation's past.

In a reversal of well-known migratory trends of the early- to mid-twentieth century, African Americans are returning to the South in significant numbers as a means of connecting (or reconnecting) with historically significant places and institutions (Falk, Hunt, & Hunt, 2004). These return migration trends include not only blacks born in the South, but also northern-born (defined as any area of the country outside of the South) blacks, as well.[1] In their study of the factors motivating North-South migration, Cromartie & Stack (1989) emphasize the importance of familial and social ties as prime

[1] The subject of African American return migration has been studied extensively. For more information, please see Long & Hanson, 1975; DaVanzo & Morrison, 1981; Robinson, 1986; Smith, Longino, & Leeds, 1992; Adelman, Morett, & Tolnay, 2000; Frey, 2001.

reasons for the return "home." In distinguishing between household and homeplace, they contend that it is homeplace, or individual ties to a place that have been nurtured over a lifetime and handed down through generations, that have marked this trend. Moreover, scholars of southern history and culture agree that these trends represent more than the desire to gravitate toward the region for its economic opportunities. Historian C. Vann Woodward (1996: 496) has noted that "the attractions for those returning were mainly old cultural constants…the values of place and past, the symbols of traditions of region rather than race," while literary scholar Thadious M. Davis (1988: 6) has suggested that African American return migration represents "laying claim to a culture and a region that, though fraught with pain and difficulty, provides a major grounding for identity." These claims are supported by demographic research. According to a report compiled by the Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy at the Brookings Institution in 2004, the region has experienced a net in-migration of 566,000 African Americans from 1995 to 2000. The urban centers of Atlanta, Charlotte, N.C., Dallas, and Washington, D.C. were the top destinations, with college-educated blacks the primary demographic. In addition to economic growth and modernization and improved race relations, the "longstanding cultural and kinship ties the region holds for black families" were cited as the reasons for the new migration.

This particular subjectivity complicates common assumptions about black identity in a number of ways. Essentialized notions of what constitutes blackness, advanced by both blacks and whites, preclude assumptions regarding any identities that don't fit into narrow, and often stereotypical, conceptions about what black people are or should be. While the invisibility of whiteness itself as a subjectivity allows whites to

assume a multitude of identities, including a "regional whiteness" tied to *southernness*, African Americans are often pigeonholed into constricted categories of what constitutes an "authentic" black identity. The perception of an essentialized blackness that marginalizes identification with the South has been fostered, in part, by centuries of popular cultural productions set in the region in which southern blacks were (are) caricatured, demonized, or rendered invisible. These images have conspired to ensure that, in spite of the fact that the region has the largest concentration of African Americans in the country, southern identity is typically understood to mean *white* southern identity. The cultural traditions, symbols, myths, institutions, and memories the whites of the region have constructed are commonly construed as a reference to the entire region. Moreover, this exclusive configuration of southernness is not limited to the uninformed, nor to those who have vested interests in racialized conceptions of southern identity. Historian James Cobb (2005: 262), writing of "racially enlightened" cultural observers, notes that even those who sympathized with the plight of blacks in the pre-civil rights South conceived of the region largely in terms of whiteness, identifying southern whites as "southerners," while identifying southern blacks as "blacks."

A closely related way in which assumptions about black identity are complicated by the notion of a black *southern* identity lies in the common perception of the region as a bastion of reactionary white conservatism and violence. Media-fed images of black passivity and victimhood, particularly during slavery, create a discursive schema of the region in which it is difficult to imagine a black sense of belonging to a place so fraught with pain, misery and assumed lack of agency. African American recovery of this

subjectivity, particularly through the utilization of media practices more commonly associated with white southern identity, represents provocative possibilities.

Because this identity represents a departure from the narrowly-prescribed images of both *southerner* and *African American* as cultivated through certain mainstream media forms, it is alternately constructed through the utilization of non-mainstream, vernacular media forms and practices. My three sites, history museums privileging the black experience of slavery and the Civil War, African American Civil War reenactments, and participatory digital media, afford vernacular historians the opportunities to represent their memories in a broader public sphere. These alternative forms, in turn, thrive because of the influence of dominant mass media. Most of the reenactors I interviewed became interested in reenacting after watching the film *Glory*, the African American Chairman of the Board of one of my subject/museums explained to me the ways in which media portrayals of the Civil War help stimulate interest in the museum, and many of my research subjects described for me, in detail, the ways they use the news media to publicize their grassroots efforts to disseminate African American experiences of slavery and the Civil War.

As opposed to top-down, traditional media forms in which commercial imperatives and barriers to entry often shape the content and uniformity of historical representation, alternative, vernacular media forms allow practitioners to exercise a significant degree of agency over their own representation. This project fills in gaps in mainstream communication research by privileging the experiences of African Americans, rather than those of an assumed white norm. Additionally, by locating my work within three vernacular media forms, rather than the traditional mainstream media,

I open up a space for analyses of race and representation that falls outside of the popular cultural arena. Furthermore, in examining the ways in which African Americans use these vernacular forms in order to construct an alternative identity that allows them to evolve from historical objects to historical subjects, this project offers a departure from previous studies of collective memory, identity, and representation, which typically assume a stable subject position.

1.2. You're going to do *what?* How I came to study black southern identity

Whenever I encounter someone within either academic or nonacademic worlds, I am regularly asked about the subjects on which I am focusing my dissertation research. When I tell them that I am studying, among other things, Civil War reenactors, I invariably encounter a surprised facial expression, typically accompanied by the verbal expression, "You're going to do *what?*" The occasionally verbalized, but often unspoken assumption is: You're black—why would you want to talk to those rednecks? When I tell them that, in actuality, I am studying *black* reenactors, the expressions (d)evolve from surprise to shock: *Black* people do that? I also occasionally encountered, to a lesser extent, surprise at my revelation that I am studying black history museums dedicated to displaying memories of slavery and the Civil War. Again, the often-unspoken assumption was: why would black people want to display *that* history? These reactions, which I encountered mostly in California and the northeast, seemed to disappear once I arrived in the South. These regional disparities in the understanding of African Americans' relationships with their own history underscored my own assumptions about my project, and was one to which I could personally relate.

As a child growing up in a small, working-class town in southwestern Virginia, I often saw the Confederate battle flag or its image emblazoned on t-shirts, posters, lunchboxes, and other artifacts. Most African Americans would be unable to give a definitive answer if asked at what point in their lives they began to perceive the flag as a racist symbol, and I was certainly no exception. What I did know, however, was that at some point I learned to recognize the flag represented a certain virulent, violent racism that originated with the Civil War and only grew in intensity throughout the twentieth century. Whenever one asked the bearer about the meaning of the flag, the response was, invariably, "it's not about race, it's about heritage." Although this reply was typically intended to end conversations, for me, it was always the beginning. I had many questions, some of which I articulated, most of which I did not: What, exactly, is meant by *heritage,* and how, exactly, does the flag fit into it? Why that particular symbol? Exactly *whose* heritage does the flag signify? It also occurred to me that this response signified, perhaps more than the personal racial sentiments of the speaker, just how neatly and successfully whites had managed to remove the issue of slavery from memories of the Civil War. As bondage was a profound and irrevocable part of my heritage (one that could not be summarily written off and erased like a bad debt), I wondered how such a symbol of one aspect of southern heritage had become a synecdoche for *southern heritage*. Additionally, I noticed that there were many towns, schools, streets, and other public spaces named after prominent Confederate generals, such as Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson, and JEB Stuart. Both of these sets of expressions of identity, one individual and private, the other collective and public, suggested that the normative image of a *southerner* did not apply to me, nor to any of

the millions of African Americans who lived in, hailed from, or were only one or two generations removed from, the region.

These questions eventually faded from my consciousness upon leaving Virginia to attend historically-black Howard University in Washington, D.C. Though I saw no Confederate flags there, save for a onetime Ku Klux Klan march in downtown D.C., I did notice a subtle disdain for most things southern. With the exception of Atlanta, Memphis, New Orleans, and a few other urban centers, the South was generally imagined to be a rural, backwards region with an ugly history, a marginal present, and no redeeming value. There was a sense that those whose families had left the region during the great migration or, even better, had never lived there, had hit some imaginary jackpot to the great benefit of their descendants. The region's cultural obsession with Civil War memory, in particular, made it anathema to a productive contemporary black identity. The perception of black victimization during and after slavery rendered the region, its history, and culture off-limits to common notions of what constituted modern blackness. Many of the other African American students from the South whom I knew at Howard and other universities had experienced the same perception.

Many years later, in 2000, while living and teaching undergraduate communication courses in Atlanta, I was intellectually intrigued when the Confederate battle flag made another set of appearances; this time on a broader level, and in as explosive a manner as possible: long a part of the Georgia state flag, the "stars and bars" as it was popularly, if inaccurately, called, was in danger of being removed in favor of a more modern, inclusive symbol of a state attempting to project a more global, modern, inclusive, twenty first-century image. The flag's meaning took center stage,

becoming the topic of political debate before a national media audience. Although the meaning of the flag was quite clear in post-*Brown v. Board of Education*-1956 when it was first raised, its symbolism had now suddenly become ambiguous, as the slogan commonly employed in favor of keeping the flag soon became "heritage, not hate." This, of course, brought back memories from my childhood inquiries about the flag. I also noticed that the numerous southern references to the war, such as "the War for Southern Independence," and "The War Against Northern Aggression," served the purpose of writing slavery and African Americans out of its history by privileging a set of tropes centered on white victimhood. Most importantly, I was particularly interested in the rhetoric employed by Georgia Governor Roy Barnes' speech before the state legislature in favor of changing the flag. His attempt to establish his credentials as a "son of the South" before urging his colleagues to do what was, in fact, a very "un-southern" thing raised even more questions in my mind: Exactly *whose* heritage is being celebrated here, and what is the role of the modern state in constructing a (regional) heritage, and an especially racialized one, at that? How, exactly, did such a narrow conception of *southerner* come into being in the first place? How is it that African Americans, who have always comprised a substantial percentage of the region's population, whose history in the region is integral to both southern and American history, and whose culture significantly permeates a more generalized southern culture, have been largely excluded from popular notions of southern identity?

All of these experiences have converged in my interest in examining the communicative practices imbricated in the construction of African American southern identity. My intellectual and personal interests in media studies have afforded me a

keener awareness of why African Americans have been excluded from popular understandings of normalized *southernness*. Mainstream media structures and institutions, deferential to various economic, political, and cultural considerations, have presented a picture of history and culture that has not been kind to blacks, to say the least, thereby helping make it possible for a Confederate symbol considered unambiguously racist by most African Americans to remain part of state-sanctioned artifacts such as flags at the dawn of the twenty-first century.[2] This is especially the case when it comes to portrayals of 19th century southern history, whether the representational sin is one of omission, distortion, or hostility. Nevertheless, as an African American, native southerner, and communication scholar, I find myself drawn to these very same media productions. For example, as many issues as I have with the revisionist history, Lost-Cause nostalgic romanticism, and racist stereotypes in the film *Gone With the Wind*, I have often found myself glued to the television set every time it makes its three-hour run on *Turner Classic Movies*. The film reveals much more to me about the thirties' social and cultural milieu in which it was produced than it does about the South, the Civil War, or the 19th century in general. It is mass media's function as social text that I find intriguing, and what this function reveals to us about the social status of American blacks over the century has not been encouraging. However, as media, in conjunction with other societal institutions, have conspired to erase African American historical agency from antebellum and Civil War histories, and from the

[2] Although the Georgia flag was eventually changed to a less-controversial version of another Confederate flag, the Confederate *battle* flag, or St. Andrew's Cross, remains, as of this writing, as the official state flag of Mississippi, and is featured atop the statehouse grounds in South Carolina.

southern identity they construct, they can also be used to reclaim these things for African Americans. It is this goal, accomplished through the vernacular, which this project engages.

1.3. Theoretical framework and key concepts

There are two distinct, yet interrelated, theoretical threads I pursue with this project. The first involves the notion of an emergent African American southern identity. Subsumed within this thread is the question of the relationship between collective memory and identity, as well as the notions of both regional and racial identities centered on collective memories. The second theoretical thread involves the use of vernacular media forms, which entail discussions of representation and the public sphere. In this section, I will discuss each of these threads and their constituent concepts.

What is identity?

The question of identity has been the preoccupation of much scholarship in cultural studies in recent years. Far from settled, the concept has become increasingly problematic as the influence of poststructuralist ideas has facilitated a shift from a conception of identity as stable and universal to one in which it is "increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices, and positions" (Hall, 1996:4). It is this fragmentation, this multiplicity of identities and positions within identities, which explains the wide and often contradictory experiences that construct what appears to be

a singular, dominant identity. Furthermore, as identities are constructed within the play of specific modalities of power, functions of exclusion as much as inclusion, defined by what one is, as well as what one is *not*, they are produced inside rather than outside of, specific discursive formations and practices. Our knowledge of them is furthered by attention to the multiple sites involved in their configuration, particularly those outside of the parameters of mainstream communication research.

Communication is substantially imbricated in the formation of identity. At its most basic level, identity is constructed, maintained, transformed, and expressed through the shared interactions of an individual self within a multitude of social worlds made up of other people, institutions, and discourses. Our shifting identities are formed and transformed according to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems around us. Thus, communication processes, as mediators of the world, do the fundamental work involved in identity formation. These processes of mediation, of meaning-making, are never complete, are always transformative, and, most importantly, are constantly contestable and contested.

It is this shifting nature of these processes that form the basis for the emergence of a black southern subjectivity. As the dominant cultural context of society changes, so do the meanings attached to black identity, southern identity, and black southern identity. Since the close of the Civil War, African Americans have had an ambivalent relationship with their southern past and any sense of identification with it (Rampersad, 1989, Blight, 1994, 2001, Eyerman, 2001, Moses, 2004, Cobb, 2005). During the early years of the twentieth century, the combination of white sectional reconciliation and an emergent black uplift ideology which displaced perceptions of black rural southerners

as the quintessence of blackness and racial historicity in the United States initiated the process of disavowal of black southern identity; the Black Arts and black power movements decades later, with their discursive focus on the urban ghettoes in the North as sites for black redemption, put the final nail in the coffin of black southern subjectivity.

Contemporary black identity has been constructed through mass media as anathema to southern subjectivity on a number of fronts: it is urban-centered, where the South is imagined as rural; hip, modern, and progressive while the South is imagined as provincial, backward, and regressive. However, the final years of the twentieth century brought about the development of what Davis (1998) calls the "regionality of the black self." For Davis, the return to the culture and region represents a major grounding for identity. As this project will demonstrate, this return does not represent a subjectivity in conflict with the multitude of identities to which some may lay claim, nor does it necessarily entail an actual physical return to the region. Fundamentally, African Americans inside and outside the South are defining their blackness, in part, by drawing on their southern roots and reclaiming their southern heritage. As many southern whites have embraced the images associated with the "southernization" of American culture, increasing numbers of blacks have looked to their historical roots in the region as an integral aspect of an identity that is fluid, decentered, and under constant transformation.

What, exactly, is southern identity, and what role does collective memory play?

In order to understand the concept of a black southern identity, it is important to unpack the construction "southern identity," as well as the central role of collective

memory in shaping it. A group's sense of cultural or ideological unity, or, in the words of Benedict Anderson (1983), an "imagined community," is often forged through sets of inherited values, symbols, and discourses. A continuing sense of community is constructed through discourses that articulate unity and difference. Southern identity is, fundamentally, an articulation of difference. As stated earlier, identities are defined by what they are; they are also defined by what they are *not*, or what Susan-Mary Grant terms a "negative reference point" (Cobb, 8). The concept of southern identity has always been defined in opposition to the North. The basis of this sectional identity has always been its perceived distinctiveness, which originated with the region's plantation economy. The disappearance of slavery in the North created two regions. White southerners began to develop a strong sectional identity because of the conflict over slavery; this sectionalism intensified once the North began to be associated with abolitionist sentiment. The war itself helped construct a more general collective identity among whites, as participation in the war effort superceded geographical and class differences in defining "southernness." In other words, the creation of a new collectivity, the Confederacy, cut across class and gender lines in order to make whiteness a more important category.

As the war ended and became part of the past, cultural memories, rather than articulations of difference, began to form the basis for southern solidarity. The role of cultural memories in the construction of group identity has been the subject of much scholarship, beginning with the Durkheimian notion of "collective consciousness," and most famously articulated by Maurice Halbwachs (1925/1992). Halbwachs argued that memory is always group-centered, as the individual is always the product of a

collectivity or community, and memory itself is the outcome of interaction. As such, it is constructed and reconstructed through a variety of discursive practices. It is at this level of group consciousness that collective memory intervenes in the formation of southern identity.

During the Reconstruction years, 1865-1877, Civil War memory replaced slavery as the central role in southern identity. Defeat in the war ultimately served the function of strengthening white sectional identity, and, during Reconstruction, the Lost Cause myth proved to be a sustaining force for the defeated South, becoming a "means by which many post-bellum white southerners found self-identity" (Boles, 534, Cobb, 64). Political speeches, church sermons, pamphlets, journals, novels, and other media produced during the post-Reconstruction years worked to successfully recast slavery as a benign and civilizing institution, position Reconstruction as a tragic, misguided "experiment," and reframe the war and its meaning as a fight between (white) brothers. The romanticized images of the Old South that emerged from these discourses, propagated and assiduously maintained by white political and economic elites, would prevail throughout the century as a means of ordering society by containing any fissures among southern whites and ensuring the subservience of blacks and women. Southern society thus drew its identity from a history that required the domination of white men (Goldfield, 2002: 42). The result of this has been that, since the 1880s, collective memories of the "civilized war" became "a space both for sectional reconciliation and for the creation of modern southern whiteness." (Hale, 1998: 67ff, Eyerman, 2001: 5). These memories and identity have been sustained throughout the twentieth century through the use of symbols of the Old South, such as the Confederate battle flag,

monuments, plantation museums, and other discourses. The educational system, mass media, and other "ideological state apparatuses," as Althusser referred to them, were and are also implicated in advancing a narrow, racialized definition of southernness. This project examines the attempts to reverse course.

Even as post-civil rights society has ushered in an era where material images of the "Old South" are contested and erased from a southern landscape attempting to take its place in a national, and increasingly global, community, African Americans' embrace of their southern heritage is still an emergent phenomenon. According to the most recent census bureau figures, 54.8 % of those who designated themselves "black" live in the South; they comprise approximately 19% of the total southern population.[3] This represents a steady increase from the 1980s and 1990s when the percentages were 52%, and 53%, respectively (U.S. Census Bureau, 1990, Barringer, 1990). Nevertheless, the designation "southerner" entails a cultural affinity and sense of belonging that extends well beyond a strictly geographical designation, a cultural citizenship that supersedes geographical boundaries. It is here that black identification with the region has been problematic. The centrality of Civil War history, coupled with the reactionary politics and culture in the construction of white southern identity, has rendered the South a culturally abject region in the minds of both blacks and whites.

The discourses surrounding the black southern identity that is emerging privilege the question of historical agency, both in the sense of representing African Americans as actors in one of the defining eras in U.S. history, and in the sense of constructing history through the process of representation itself. This entails acknowledging the

[3] See the publication, "The Black Population: 2000" census 2000 brief, August, 2001.

cultural trauma of slavery while positioning it not as an era of black victimhood, but rather as a period in which African Americans provided significant contributions to the building of southern and American society, and positioning the war as a war of freedom. Many people I met in the field referred to the Civil War as the first civil rights movement, which is a bit of a misnomer. The Civil War, for black people, was never about civil rights, in spite of the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments. Instead, it was a *freedom* movement, as was the civil rights movement of the twentieth century. Constructing 19th century African American memories through discourses of freedom represents a recovery of what historian David Blight refers to as the emancipationist vision of the war. Presenting slavery and Civil War agency as stories of freedom allows blacks, whose belonging in the national community has always been suspect, to position this identity as one tied to the nation's professed ideal of democracy. It was the experience of slavery, with the forced migration it entailed, that formed the origins of blacks' tenuous membership in the national community; its memories are now invoked to assert that same membership. Thus, ironically, while white southerners have always used their southern memories and identities as means of differentiating themselves from the larger American identity, African Americans have and are using these same memories and identity as a means of asserting their American, as well as southern, identities.

The collective consciousness that has arisen from the African American experience of slavery has provided the grounding for an identity rooted in trauma. Recent scholarship on collective memory has positioned trauma not as a destructive force, but rather as a productive force that allows individuals to see themselves as a

collectivity for whom shared trauma is the solidifying experience (Alexander, et al.,). Sociologist Ron Eyerman (2001:2) has written extensively on the effect of trauma on African American identity. Trauma theory situates trauma as a cultural process, one that is experienced not directly, but as collective memory. Cultural trauma, in this formulation, refers to "a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion" In his elaboration on the constitution of cultural trauma, Neil Smelser (Sztompka in Alexander, *et al*. 2001, Eyerman, 3) offers conditions for the production of cultural trauma from an event. He defines traumatic memory as a memory accepted and publicly given credence by a relevant membership group and evoking a situation or event which is 1). laden with negative affect, 2). represented as indelible, and 3). regarded as threatening a society's existence or violating one or more of its cultural presuppositions. The African American experience of slavery, which defines individuals as members of the "race," fits each of these conditions. As the source of the trauma, the "primal scene," the remembrance of slavery has been central to attempts to forge a collective black identity. However, this identity as constructed by my research subjects involves a usage of traumatic memory that deviates from the connotations ordinarily associated with the definition of trauma. In this formulation, trauma is defined as an experience of survival rather than victimization. Though the pain associated with memories of slavery is acknowledged, it is not used to construct a historically victimized subjectivity. The discursive focus is on the experiencing and overcoming of trauma through narratives of survival.

A crucial aspect of cultural trauma theory involves the role of representation. Mediation and representation are critical to the establishment of an event as the source of trauma. Traumatic cultural memories are not experienced directly; as a cultural process, trauma is mediated through various forms of representation (Eyerman, 1). It is at this level that marginalized groups continue their struggles beyond the site of the primal scene. The shameful history of slavery has always been problematic for Americans—black as well as white—to confront in the representational arena, and when it has been referenced or even privileged, it has always been subject to the narrative and artistic constraints dictated by commercial considerations. While Eyerman elaborates a history of African American representation of this identity, he does not look to alternate, vernacular sites as vehicles of expression. My research fills in this gap.

The work of memory: Representation, the public sphere, and the vernacular

The second thread of theoretical inquiry involves the use of vernacular media, along with the larger questions it raises about representation and the public sphere. Identities are constituted within systems of representation. Questions of identity, according to media theorist Stuart Hall, are largely concerned with the ways in which the resources of history, language, and culture are imbricated in the process of becoming—how we have been represented, and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. It is through processes of representation that the construction of identities becomes most explicitly bound to relations of power. The world does not exist independently of the discourses of representation; they, in fact, constitute a part of the

world in which we live. As Michel Foucault observed, discursive formations, modes of thought, or modes of representation are used by people for conceptualizing the world and their existence in it, as well as the existence of *others*. (Foucault, 1978). Dominant groups produce representations of themselves and of Others that justify the existing racial/spatial order and the subjugation of minority groups (Rahier, 1999, xiv). When social movements transform the social and cultural landscapes, as was the case with the civil rights movement, the new social milieu offers opportunities to subordinated groups to contest the representations of themselves by the dominant group, as well as to create their own representations.

The "public sphere," as theorized by Jurgen Habermas (1989, 1991) is an important concept in communication research because of its focus on the function of public discourse and media in the formulation of public opinion in democratic societies. The public sphere is, essentially, an arena, distinct from the state and the official economy, in which citizens engage in discursive interaction about affairs of public interest. In elaborating on the potential of the public sphere as a mode of social integration, Habermas elevated the influence of communicative action to those of state power and market economics (Calhoun, 1992: 6). His conception is not without its critics, however, and the nature of those criticisms underscore the focus of this study. Critical theorist Nancy Fraser argues that the absence of structural exclusions from Habermas's conception of the public sphere obscures the presence of informal barriers to participatory parity. These inequalities, because of their subtlety, can often prove more insidious than formal impediments. Subordinate groups often cannot find the right voice to express their ideas, and when they do, are often not heard. For this reason,

Fraser takes issue with the Habermasian assumption that a fragmented public sphere in stratified societies undermines democracy, arguing instead that the idea of competing publics strengthens participatory parity. She proposes the notion of *subaltern counterpublics*, parallel discursive arenas "where members of subordinate social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (123). Literary scholar Houston Baker (1995: 1-3) takes up Fraser's critique when he writes of the presence of a black public sphere as a transnational space which provides counternarrative to the exclusionary national narratives of Europe, the U.S., the Caribbean, and Africa. This black public sphere, he argues

> draws its energy from the vernacular practices of street talks and new musics, radio shows and church voices, entrepreneurship and circulation. Its task is not the provision of security for the freedom of conversation among intellectuals, as was the case with the bourgeois public spheres of earlier centuries. Rather, it marks a wider sphere of critical practice and visionary politics, in which intellectuals can join with the energies of the street, the school, the church, and the city to constitute a challenge to the exclusionary violence of much public space in the United States… the vitality of the black public sphere is a necessary condition for the vitality of the dominant public sphere.

It is this conception of the public sphere which informs my study. Other critics have taken issue with Habermas's focus on the bourgeois public sphere to the exclusion of an oppositional plebian public sphere comprised of different institutional forms, with different values, as well as his neglect of the transformative possibilities of public-service models of state intervention within the informational sphere (Garnham, 1992: 360). Civil War reenactments, which utilize a nontraditional institutional form such as ritual performance, and the Smithsonian Institution, a set of museums funded and

maintained by the U.S. government that has constructed a program that allows lay historians to use social networking technology, are sites that engage these critiques. By enabling those who lack access to mainstream forms of representation to present their interpretations of history to various audiences, these sites serve as alternative public spheres.

Additionally, some believe that Habermas's exclusion of the many forms of communicative action not directed toward consensus inaccurately suggests that entertainment forms lack informative content. This narrow conception of the public sphere, they argue, elides the value of public rituals, ceremonies, and other communicative practices and institutions in providing information about which the public can deliberate. This criticism, in particular, has implications for the ways in which we think about the role of mass media in contemporary democracies (Garnham, 360). My alternative media sites, which feature vernacular producers and fall outside of the range of "traditional" mass media, address these issues.

Notes on my use of the term "Vernacular"

The concept of the vernacular carries connotations of the common, the provincial, the folk. Typically used academically in sociolinguistics, it implies usage of nonstandard languages or dialects, or the engagement in informal talk. I am using it here to refer to alternative media forms created, maintained, and employed by amateur workers engaged in a critical historiography that operates outside of traditional academic spheres. Vernacular media forms are vehicles for "common," nontraditional voices utilizing unconventional narrative structures. In contrast to more traditional

media forms, which are formulaic and operate from a top-down organizational structure, vernacular forms allow for innovation in presentation and provide much more democratic access. Furthermore, as my project demonstrates, although they reach smaller audiences, they tend to convey meaning in more intense ways than commercial mass media. The term "amateur" here is apt across all three of my sites--an overwhelming majority of my research subjects, including those founding and running museums, had no formal educational or professional background in history. Regardless of their backgrounds, my subjects are simply connected by a lay interest in Civil War history and memory, as well as the desire to inject representations of neglected interpretations of this history into the public sphere.

The unconventional dynamics of vernacular media help broaden the scope of communication research. In expanding Gramsci's notion of organic intellectuals, literary critic Grant Farred (2003) argues that intellectual activity outside of conventional arenas has as much validity and meaning for audiences as that within traditional spheres. The cultural work of these "vernacular intellectuals," he contends, is particularly useful in the service of challenging social injustice. Similarly, John Bodnar (1992: 13-14) suggests that it is within vernacular cultural arenas, rather than official or commercial ones, that the most compelling beliefs and ideas are circulated. Thus, the vernacular permeates many aspects of this project—vernacular knowledges, vernacular historians, and vernacular media forms and practices.

1.4. Research scope, methods, sites

Scope

My project entails a multi-site analysis that covers a broad range of contemporary communicative practices and institutions, all intended to construct and express black historical agency and belonging. I do not intend to rearticulate histories of African American commemorative culture privileged in other studies (Fabre & O'Meally, 1994; Blight, 2002; Clark, 2005). Furthermore, as African American expressions of memory in the popular cultural arena have been amply studied in other scholarly works (Lipsitz, 1990; Floyd, 1995; Guthrie, 2003; Eyerman, 2005), I am not attempting to re-examine those sites here. I am analyzing the representation of black historical identity within sites in which black agency is traditionally underrepresented. Prior to the civil rights movement, two of these sites, history museums and reenactment, were typically utilized by whites to express their own racialized sense of southern identity and were generally closed to African Americans. The third site, digital media, is a relatively new site to everyone, and still incurs certain access issues when it comes to African Americans. For these reasons, they provide especially provocative means—a sort of reverse appropriation—for the production of black historical agency and belonging. This dissertation presents a continuation of the previous work on black collective memory, as well as the missing link within the abundance of work on (white) southern identity.

Sites

My three sites run the gamut of communicative practices, from ritual performance as a very old medium of communication, to digital media as a new medium. I explore the means by which each mode of communication resonates with producers, consumers, and other societal actors in unique ways, putting them in conversation with each other

in terms of the contribution of each to the general process of identity formation. Most of my research took place within the area defined by the Census Bureau as the South, though not all of the locations were part of the former Confederate States of America.[4] Because black southern identity is not necessarily confined to those living in the region, but rather an identification with the memories constructed within it, many of my subjects hailed from areas of the country outside of the South.

Visual cultural institutions such as museums are important centers of knowledge production. The museums I studied included the U.S. National Slavery Museum, still in the planning and construction stages and to be located in Fredericksburg, Virginia. When completed, it will be the first U.S. museum to privilege the African American experience of slavery. This museum, founded by L. Douglas Wilder, the first African American to be elected governor of a state (Virginia), is an important site not only for this reason, but also because, as a new museum, it offers valuable insight into the genealogy of museum construction, including planning, politics, and construction. The second museum is the African American Civil War Museum and Freedom Foundation, in Washington, D.C. Located in the historic Shaw neighborhood, the museum represents, among other things, the important connection between cultural institutions and their surrounding communities. Its location in an area that was the scene of rioting after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King allows the museum to employ certain

[4] The former Confederate states are South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Texas, Arkansas, North Carolina, Virginia, and Tennessee; Missouri and Kentucky did not secede from the Union, but were later admitted into the CSA. Maryland and Delaware were slave states that did not secede. The Census Bureau includes West Virginia and Oklahoma, as well as Washington, D.C., as part of the "South."

rhetorics of place in connecting the 19th and 20th century freedom movements. The third museum, the American Civil War Center, in Richmond, Virginia, is not an African American history museum *per se*, but is especially notable for its mission to represent the perspectives of all three sides of the war—the North, the South, and the African American, and to do so in the heart of the former Confederacy, no less. The museum's founder has familial ties to the Confederate aristocracy, while its president and major artifact contributor and Chairman of the Board are African Americans. These contradictions make the museum an important study. Finally, its "sister" institution, the Museum of the Confederacy, has made attempts to reinstate slavery and race back into narratives of the Civil War, angering many of its constituents along the way, during its 100-year evolution from a Confederate Museum to a Museum of the Confederacy. The museum's African American employees have been instrumental in this evolution.

Perhaps the greatest benefit to conducting research within living history communities is that talking to "outsiders" about their activities is at the core of what they do. However, there is also some risk in that the public shell they have developed in the course of their work may compromise the integrity of the information they provide. In other words, because their stated goals include advancing their interpretations of history, there is always the possibility that the data gleaned from these interviews is the result of the filtering process typically embedded in public presentations. I made sure to keep this possibility in mind when analyzing the data I gathered in the field.

Additionally, because the number of African Americans (and interested whites) engaged in public history projects related to slavery and the Civil war is relatively small, many of the people with whom I interacted knew each other, and, quite

enthusiastically, provided me with contact information for others. Thus, one interview with a museum curator led to a contact with a reenactor in a nearby city; this particular network was eventually expanded to approximately 40 reenactors over the course of several months. While there have been other research projects which have analyzed Civil War reenactment from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, there have been few that have engaged the African American presence in reenactment. This is a very important distinction, as the African American historical experience before, during, and after the war, and thus the approach to reenactment, is significantly different from that of whites. Therefore, although I interviewed a few white men who portrayed officers in all-black reenactment groups, the majority of my research subjects are African American male and female civilian and military reenactors. Although one was a professionally-trained actor, most of the reenactors I interviewed were people engaged in the hobby because of their sustained interest in African American Civil War/military history. These vernacular historians hold positions as lawyers, judges, police officers, and college students in their other lives. Many of them are current and former military personnel, while some have or had careers with the National Park Service. Although they range in age between 12 and 70, the majority of them are in their 40s and 50s. For most of them, battle reenactment is merely one of the avenues through which they represent this history; Civil War roundtables, library, museum, prison, and school lectures, memorial and wreath-laying ceremonies, parades, and other media provide additional means by which they tell their stories. Some of them engage this era of history directly as means of passing on black historical agency and citizenship to the next generation: one reenactor leads an after-school program in which he trains at-risk

youth for society by using the disciplinary principles of battle reenactment; another one runs a "Civil War Academy," in which he teaches young black males Civil War history, in addition to their other subjects.

In addition to interviewing reenactors either as individuals or groups, I attended reenactments at various locales in different southern states. Although I have (and still do) attend more "traditional" reenactments[5] for comparative purposes, I carefully selected the battles I would attend based upon the participation of United States Colored Troops (USCT) reenactors. I made sure that the reenactments I attended represented a diverse mix of qualities, a decision that further underlines the subjectivity of history--I found that the narratives that were presented on the field, and thus the tenor of the performances and spectatorship, often hinged on factors that were seemingly inconsequential, but actually deeply infused with meaning. Whether the South won or lost that particular battle, whether the battlefield was publicly-maintained (usually by the National Park Service) or privately-owned, and the geographic location (deep South v. upper South, exurban v. rural) of the battlefield were important factors in the narratives represented. For example, although the battle at Ft. Pocahontas in rural Virginia was, in fact, won by the North, the desire of the private owner to turn a profit on the annual reenactment resulted in a presentation in which the South "won" on one

[5] "Traditional" reenactment is defined throughout this project as reenactments featuring primarily white reenactors. Although there are some battles, such as Gettysburg, in which African American reenactors participate in spite of concerns about historical "authenticity," for the most part, black reenactors only participate in reenactments in which black troops actually fought.

of the days the reenactment was held.[6] In contrast, the annual reenactment of the Battle of Olustee is held on a vary large Florida battlefield maintained by the NPS, generates income from a significant number of sutlers (vendors) and a series of weeklong events, and represents a pivotal Confederate victory—thus there was no need for dramatic license as means to attract spectators. Although the African American presence here is substantive, the symposia surrounding the battle, and the battle itself, were less centered on the contributions of USCT.

I also felt it was imperative to visit a number of battlefields outside of the reenactments, talking to park rangers and other employees about the narratives they present on their tours, as well as the responses of tourists. Since the early nineties, there has been a growing movement to expand the interpretations offered at historic sites, and I spoke with employees, some of whom do double-duty as living history reenactors on and off the job, about these efforts. Overall, the African American presence in battlefield narratives generally and reenactments specifically represents a recentering of the war on emancipation and discourses of freedom, and thus is a productive site for analyses of the construction of black southern identity.

Finally, there are dozens of vernacular curators who utilize the anonymity of the internet to produce black history and engage in discourses with others about their activities. Many African Americans acquire historical artifacts such as shackles, beds, and other objects through family lines or yard sales, collecting these items as material reminders of a traumatic but important past. Social networking technology now allows

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[6] Reenactments are typically held over weekends, with either a skirmish held on one day and the full-on battle simulation occurring on the other, or full battles occurring on both days.

them to share these objects with a wider audience. Although older people generally tend to be less tech-savvy, the overwhelming majority of these cultural producers are in their late-30s to retirement age. They represent a grass-roots effort to exercise control over the construction of narratives of slavery, and perform the cultural work of building community and identity in the process. The construction of identity through the production of historical agency is achieved by participating in reenactments as performers and spectators, contributing artifacts to both physical and virtual museums, visiting and working at museums, engaging in conversations about history and representation, and building community—and talking with others about all of this.

Methods

For this dissertation, I drew upon theoretical literature from a diversity of disciplinary perspectives, and employed a variety of research methods. In addition to drawing upon secondary sources from communication, cultural studies, African American studies, performance studies, museum studies, and history, I conducted primary research using ethnography, textual and discourse analyses, and archival research. I will describe each of these methods in further detail.

Interview/Observation

My primary methodology was comprised of a combination of in-depth interviews and participant-observations. As John Van Maanen writes, "because a culture is expressed by the words and actions of its members, it must be interpreted by, not given to, the fieldworker. Culture itself is not visible, but is made visible only through its representation," (1988: 3). Though Van Maanen refers to the immersion

inherent in ethnographic research, his observation is central to the fieldwork upon which I base this project. The portrayal of culture requires the researcher to hear, see, and write about her observations.

Most of the interviews were conducted between August of 2007 and September of 2008 in various parts of the South. I interviewed the founders, presidents, curators, contractors, employees, board members, community members, and visitors of my four subject/museums, worked as a volunteer in one of them, and spent time listening to visitor conversations in all of the existing ones. For comparative purposes, I visited smaller museums in Arlington, Virginia, Greenville, South Carolina, Charles City County and Fredericksburg, Virginia, and Ft. Worth, Texas. I attended Civil War reenactments in Florida, North Carolina, and Virginia, and interviewed both civilian and military reenactors at those sites, as well as in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Lexington, Kentucky, and Washington, D.C. In addition to the reenactors at the events, I also observed and spoke with spectators visiting the encampments and watching in the "stands" during and after the actual battles. I also visited battlefields and spoke with park rangers in Petersburg and Fredericksburg, Virginia, and Chattanooga and Parker's Crossroads, Tennessee.

The interview questions were semi-structured, with open-ended questions designed to move the conversation in certain directions. I planned my interviews this way because I wanted my subjects, who as vernacular historians were quite passionate about their activities, to provide as much information about their backgrounds, experiences, and motivations as possible. Very few people were considered peripheral—the employees in the gift shops of museums and battlefield visitor's centers

provided valuable information on the kinds of conversations that take place at these sites, as well as useful data on the kinds of souvenirs, books, and other artifacts offered, perused, and sold. Even the dead were not insignificant: Confederate cemeteries, with visitors paying homage to heroes past while strolling through gardens of stone with inscriptions signifying who mattered in life (and therefore in death) and who did not, are also rich sources of data.

Critical Textual Analysis and Discourse Analysis

I conducted textual analyses of physical and virtual museum exhibits, as well as newspaper, journal, and magazine articles and commentary about my subject/museums. This involved taking photographs of the buildings and selected objects within the surrounding communities, of the architectural layouts of the museums, and of the exhibits inside. I also took notes on the written descriptions of the exhibits on the placards. One museum reserves a space near the exit in which an entire wall used to invite visitors to write down their answers to questions about what they'd learned from their visit. These responses, written on stick-it notes, are then posted on the wall. Analysis of these responses will also inform my research on the museum. All of these texts, the visual and the written, work in conjunction with each other and with other kinds of representations to convey meaning in a social, cultural, and political project concerned with the democratization of southern heritage. Finally, the unspoken, unseen text in most of these museums, the one that is interrogated by their existence, is the dominant history. One cannot evaluate an image in a black history museum without making at least a mental reference to the ways in which it resonates with the conventional history presented in plantation museums, school textbooks, films, and

other media. This is an essential aspect of the rhetoric of visual display. Thus, my textual analyses will be accompanied by references to their historical contexts. Along these lines, I must also issue the qualifying statement that my own way of seeing these images is not innocent. As is the case with every Civil War reenactor, curious tourist, artifact collector, history buff, concerned citizen, overseas visitor fascinated with the American Civil War, and every other person who visits a physical museum or uploads an artifact into an online one, I bring my own way of seeing into these museums, and thus my analyses.

In addition to my conversations with subjects in the course of my research, I also listened to conversations conducted among visitors at museums and reenactments, as well as those conducted online using social networking technology. Discourse analysis, in this project, refers specifically to the spoken word. My concern is with not only how images look, but also with how they are *looked at*. Thus, it was important to pay attention to the conversations of spectators as they viewed particular exhibits in particular ways. These conversations, not guided by specific questions, were just as significant for what they revealed about people's perceptions of museum exhibits, reenactments, and the history they represented. One particularly striking feature of the African American Civil War Museum, which is one of the museums analyzed in this project, is its reliance on oral presentations as supplemental material to the narratives advanced through the objects. This feature enabled me to analyze the verbal discourse of both the museum personnel and the visitors. As Gaea Leinhardt and Karen Knutson (2004) suggest, conversation among visitors constitutes a social activity that reveals much about the ways in which the meaning-making process operates within museums.

In listening in on and recording visitor and employee conversations, I was able to gather data about the museum's ability to serve as both an educational and a community institution.

Archival Research

Archival research was very useful in contextualizing the history at the center of this project. It would be very difficult to ascertain the importance of Civil War reenactments in the construction of heroic black masculinity and citizenship without an awareness of the importance of these things for the actual soldiers whose experiences are reenacted. I was well aware of the ideological controversies engendered by the idea of black men taking up arms in the 1860s, and garnering first-hand knowledge of the discourses of the day on this matter was an important aspect of my research. Combing through the archives of various historical associations gave me a clear picture of just how important wartime service was to the freedoms African Americans hoped to attain with the Civil War, and helped make looking at the past a much more personal experience.

The archives at the Virginia Historical Society were quite useful in this endeavor. Newspaper articles from the 1860s, in which the service of the USCTs were mentioned, described, and ridiculed were quite instructive, as were lithographs and poems depicting the experience of black troops. The newspapers were also very instructive in highlighting the banality with which southern whites viewed their ownership of other human beings—the "classified ads" sections of the newspapers regularly featured "for sale" advertisements in which humans were offered up for set prices, as well as lengthy

"rewards" sections for escaped slaves placed amid pleas for the return of lost horses and other livestock. On the other hand, there were also letters written by slaves, humanizing them by offering a glimpse into their daily lives. The papers of Robert E. Lee were also very informative, in that they revealed the attitudes held by Confederate leaders regarding the potential use of black troops.

Additionally, the Moorland Spingarn Research Center at Howard University was useful in gathering information about the postwar efforts of prominent African Americans to redeem the reputation of black troops. The rare books and documents I examined there enabled me to see the ways in which the dominant group's efforts to disparage the wartime service of the USCT helped undermine Reconstruction, hasten white sectional reconciliation, and advance propagandistic images of pathological black masculinity. The Library of Congress and the National Archives were also fruitful sources of lithographs, broadsides, prints, and photographs of slaves and black troops.

1.5. Chapter-by-Chapter Compendium

Chapter two, "So That the Dead May Finally Speak: Space, Place, and the Transformational Rhetoric of Black History Museums," will focus on African American history museums as sites of historical knowledge production, identity formation, and community building. The most important function of a museum is that it facilitates a controlled encounter between the visitor and an authentic, three-dimensional object. This media function is particularly vital for history museums, as they serve as bridges between past and present, allowing visitors to experience history in more substantive

ways than could be accomplished by viewing images in a book or on a television or movie screen.

Museums don't just display history, they actively construct it, using not only the artifacts on display themselves, but also the architectural layout, the outside spaces, and the location. All of these factors present a visual rhetorical strategy in which they attempt to persuade visitors to adopt certain attitudes or beliefs. I argue that African American history museums, particularly those which display antebellum and Civil War history, must go beyond visual rhetoric to a kind of transformational rhetoric necessary to destabilize a century's worth of erasure of the narratives of slavery advanced by state institutions, private organizations, and traditional media. Their location within a southern landscape permeated with plantation museums, monuments, street names, and other Confederate icons necessitates the employment of all of these elements in the persuasive process. A transformational rhetoric, similar to the Chomskyan notion of a transformational grammar, employs all of the relational structures of a museum, such as its mission, exhibits, design, staff, and location, in a persuasive process that includes both surface (such as the artifacts themselves, along with their descriptions on the placards) and underlying (such as the museum's location in an historically significant area) meanings. For example, the rhetoric of place is especially important for black history museums asserting the centrality of memories of race and slavery within a southern landscape permeated with Confederate imagery. The African American Civil War Museum and Freedom Foundation in Washington, D.C., located in an area with an illustrious but troubled history, affords the visitor the opportunity to connect the objects in the museum to the more recent civil rights movement, and is part of an overall urban

revitalization project. Similarly, the U.S. National Slavery Museum plans an architectural layout near the entrance that invites visitors to enter one hallway, while their children enter another. This strategy is designed to let the visitor not only read about, but actually experience life as a "slave" whose family has been separated, thereby representing the lives of slaves not just in terms of the labor they performed, but in more human terms of loss of family.

Chapter Three, "Ghosts of Nat Turner: African American Civil War Reenactments and the Performance of Historical Agency, Citizenship, and Masculinity," focuses on African American appropriation of a mode of performance more commonly associated with white southern masculinity as a means of positioning southern black men, many of whom escaped to the North and joined the Union as U.S. Colored Troops, as historical actors in the war at the center of southern identity. These performances lie in stark contrast to traditional depictions of southern black men as "feminized" historical victims, or as hyper-sexualized brutes, by linking blackness and southernness with heroic masculinity and citizenship. As literary critic Riche Richardson (2007, 65) notes, the historical construction of black masculinity is rooted in southern history, particularly in the image of the South's myth of the black rapist. Reenactments as performances of black masculine historical agency reverse our expectations of the status of black men in America and, in so doing, are sites for the contestation of the identities prescribed to them through dominant representations in both news and entertainment media.

In addition to upending dominant constructions of black masculinity as pathological and dangerous, this subjectivity destabilizes the southern orthodoxies

inherent in traditional reenactment--the discursive focus on authenticity and the minutia of battle serves the ideological purpose of divorcing the war from its context of slavery and race. Black participation in reenactment opens back up these "closed" stories. As battle reenactment becomes an increasingly popular spectator phenomenon, these vernacular historians are able to present their narratives to larger, more diverse audiences.

In Chapter Four, "From Old South to New Media: Museum Informatics, Conversation, and the Production of History," I will analyze the use of digital media in the construction of black southern history and identity. Specifically, I will examine the ways in which community and identity are constructed through an online Memory Book sponsored by the National Museum of African American History and Culture. While the museum itself is not scheduled to open until 2015, the site now allows visitors to become part of the curatorial process by contributing their own content to a virtual museum, thereby fostering a participatory engagement with black history. Additionally, a since of community is constructed among these vernacular historians as they engage in a process of technologically-mediated interpersonal communication about the uploaded artifacts.

This chapter discusses the history of the use of both "old" and "new" media in constructing traditional, genteel images of slavery and the Civil War, analyzes the ways in which African Americans have used "old" media to counter these images, and examines the means by which they are now overcoming the digital divide in order to use new media to facilitate the construction of cultural memories through the movement of private artifacts into the public sphere. The web opens up new possibilities for

African Americans to control the representation of 19th century history through the construction of shared histories, shared experiences, and shared identity.

In Chapter Five, "Conclusion," I will summarize the major arguments of the preceding chapters, providing a description of the ways in which they are interrelated, as well as the ways in which each differs from the others. I will also explore the implications for future scholarship in Communication.

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Chapter Two: So That the Dead May Finally Speak: Space, Place, and the Transformational Rhetoric of Black History Museums

I. Introduction: Changes in the Landscape

Fredericksburg, Virginia, is a town of great historical significance, as well as a number of striking symbolic contrasts. Situated along the Rappahannock River, it lies midway between the two most important Civil War-era cities. Approximately fifty miles to the south is Richmond, state capital, former capital of the Confederacy, and home to the infamous Monument Avenue, where white memories of the war stand enshrined in imposing statues of Robert E. Lee and other Confederate heroes. Fifty miles to the north is Washington, D.C., capital of the former Union, and home to numerous memorials, building and street names, and other structures that present a more inclusive approach to historical representation. Interstate 95 runs through Fredericksburg, seemingly cutting the city into two distinct parts highly symbolic of a place that represents a fusion of the genteel past and the progressive present, a marriage of nostalgia and postmodernity. To the west of I-95 lie artifacts of the New South, with its cookie-cutter housing subdivisions, office parks, upscale mini-malls, and ethnic restaurants. To its east lie well-preserved remnants of the Old South, including an array of restored plantations (now museums), a relatively well-preserved slave auction block, and a number of Confederate souvenir shops. There is also a major thoroughfare named for Confederate President Jefferson Davis and, perhaps most significantly, the Fredericksburg battlefield, site of one of the bloodiest Civil War battles.

These contrasts between two Souths, the old and the new, make Fredericksburg a meaningful location for the U.S. National Slavery Museum. As the museum will foreground the slave experience in a town and region saturated with Confederate monuments, shrines, street names, and other artifacts privileging southern white memory, it represents an alternative cultural institution at the intersection of traditional historiography and the new narratives produced through the construction of a more inclusive history. These contrasts make Fredericksburg an ideal location for the museum, as the site was chosen as much for its symbolic significance as its practicality. The city became the museum's home after land deals in both Jamestown and Richmond fell through. Its proximity to the Washington metro area and its easy accessibility from I-95 will enable it to benefit from the Beltway's heavy tourist traffic. Additionally, its short distance from the homes of prominent slaveowners George and Martha Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison, as well as its historical significance as the site of many famous Civil War battles, render it, in the words of its founder, an important "crossroads."

The museum's location is but one aspect of an overall discursive effort aimed at inserting the African American experience of slavery and the Civil War into the public sphere. In addition to the slavery museum, the African American Civil War Museum and Freedom Foundation (AACWM) in Washington, D.C., and the American Civil War Center (ACWC) in Richmond are important actors in this effort. The slavery museum (USNSM), still under construction, has an expressed mission to "vitalize and interpret

more completely the human drama and toll of slavery in America."[7] L. Douglas Wilder, its founder and chairman, was the first African American elected to the governorship of a state since the end of Reconstruction, becoming Governor of Virginia in 1990. Now the mayor of the state capitol of Richmond, Wilder found the inspiration to create the museum while traveling to Goree Island in Dakar, Senegal, in 1993.[8] Upon hearing a highly emotional presentation at the site, Wilder later spoke with a summit of African Americans in Gabon. These experiences lead him to the quest to construct an institution with the goal of establishing a connection between Africans and African Americans relative to slavery. "Slavery made the U.S. founding more prominent," he explained. "Its effects [are] strongest here—though slavery existed everywhere. Many of us are still affected by slavery." The museum will be the first in the nation to focus exclusively on the issue of slavery.

The AACWM is located in the historic Shaw neighborhood in Washington, D.C., often referred to as the U Street Corridor. Included in its physical structure is the building housing the museum itself, and, two blocks away, a monument featuring the names of the more than 209,000 of the men who fought as United States Colored Troops (USCT) and their officers, as well as the black men who served in the U.S. Navy during the war. Its founder and Chairman, Dr. Frank Smith, is a former D.C. city councilman and veteran of the civil rights movement. These experiences, he told me,

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[7] See the museum's promotional brochure, "The U.S. National Slavery Museum: Commemorating, Understanding, Overcoming."

[8] The island is known as the site of an infamous slave-trading station (though there is no historical consensus as to its significance relative to other sites in Senegal and the Gambia). As such, it has become a popular tourist destination for many African Americans interested in exploring the perceived "source" of the transatlantic slave trade.

helped plant the seed in his mind for the museum. After being arrested during a civil rights demonstration in 1960, he became chairman of the Atlanta Student Movement while attending Morehouse College. During a voter registration drive in Holly Springs, Mississippi, in 1962, he met a descendent of a soldier with the United States Colored Troops (USCT). “I didn’t know and was shocked,” he told me. “Even with three years of college.” Afterward, he read John Hope Franklin’s *From Slavery to Freedom,* which included a section on the USCT. Later, in 1968, he moved to Washington, D.C. in the midst of the riots and, two years later, was elected to the city council. It was at this time that his long-term interest in the stories of the USCT began to take the form of concrete plans:

> The city, especially U. Street, went up in flames. We wanted to build something [there] to attract tourists from the Mall. What would be notorious enough to do that? Why not build a monument to the soldiers? They saved the Union and have not gotten their recognition. When we build it, it will be a phenomenon.

Thus, said Smith, his motivation for constructing the museum was twofold: first, to create an institution meant to counter the traditional elision of slavery from Civil War memory while honoring those who fought for its abolition, and secondly, to revitalize the neighborhood. After many years of planning, the monument was erected in 1998; the museum opened to the public in January of 1999. At the present, the museum is the only institution dedicated solely to the display of African American combat in the Civil War.

Of the three museums that comprise this study, the American Civil War Center (ACWC) is the sole institution not founded by an African American, nor is it meant to focus exclusively on the African American experience of slavery and the Civil War. It

is, however, notable as the only Civil War museum in the South dedicated to representing the northern, southern, and African American perspectives on the war. In keeping with this mission, its discursive focus relies heavily on black memories, including those of slavery, in representing the war. The museum is located in downtown Richmond in the historic Tredegar Ironworks building. For this reason, it is alternately referred to as the Tredegar Museum. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the museum is its genealogy: founded by Alex Wise, a descendent of Confederate aristocracy, its chairman is John Motley, an African American business executive. Wise is the great-great grandson of Henry A. Wise, the governor of Virginia when the Civil War broke out. It was this ancestry, he told me, which played a major part, along with his work experiences, in inspiring him to found the museum. Having grown up during the civil rights movement and profoundly affected by it, Wise, a lawyer by training, has spent a significant amount of his post-law career involved in educational initiatives geared toward African Americans. The ACWC was founded as a sister institution to the nearby Museum of the Confederacy (MOC). While serving as Chairman of the Board of the MOC in 1993, Wise was moved by the unanticipated success of *Before Freedom Came*, a temporary, and controversial, exhibit that privileged the significance of slavery to the Confederacy. He was particularly intrigued by the exhibit's ability to draw black visitors to the museum. A year later, while serving as the state's Historic Preservation Officer, Wise decided that a new museum would be the most appropriate forum with which to tell the complete story of slavery:

> My job was to derive the greatest benefit possible from state historical sites. I realized there was no place in the country that has presented the Civil War from three sides--Union, Confederate, and, if you really wanted to understand it,

> [the] black side—a key part of the story that gets lost. You can't understand the story unless you include that.

A common thread among these vernacular historians is the desire to utilize the visual cultural arena to revise dominant historical narratives through the display of a neglected aspect of African American history. In so doing, they have used a very old media form to give shape and presence to this history by constructing the space of a ritual encounter with the past. Though there are many other representational forms through which Wilder, Smith, and Wise may have presented these narratives, the choice of this particular arena was not arbitrary. As anthropologist Ivan Karp contends, museums are repositories of knowledge which "educate, refine, or produce social commitments beyond those that can be produced in ordinary educational and civic institutions" (1992: 6). Thus, the fact that each of these cultural producers has an illustrious civic background is no coincidence. Opening museums to showcase a forgotten or erased history, for them, is part and parcel of their civic duty. The underlying objective of this duty involves enabling more inclusive conceptions of belonging to the South and its cultural memories.

In this chapter, I will examine the ways in which these three museums help construct a sense of African American identification with the South and its memories through what I refer to as a *transformational rhetoric*. Such a set of discourses extends beyond the basics of the visual rhetorics employed in museum displays to encompass revisionist efforts incorporating location, architecture, and frontline and background personnel. I argue that the mobilization of such an extensive effort is necessary to effectively counter the dominant, highly racialized historical narratives resulting from

white southern monopolization of public space over the last one hundred years. In the first section, I will discuss the role of museums as media forms, detailing the ways in which this particular medium helps construct African American southern identity through the relationship among museums, media and identity. In the second section, I will discuss the particular role of African American history museums as counterhegemonic discourse to the Confederate nostalgia that continues to dominate the southern landscape, with special attention focused on the unique challenges such institutions face. In the final section, I will describe, in detail, the ways in which these three museums employ a transformational rhetoric to construct black southern identity through the material display of cultural memory.

2.1. Museums, Media, and Identity

Museums as Media Forms

When most people think of images of slavery and the Civil War, the specific cultural products that immediately come to mind are films and television shows such as *Gone With the Wind, Glory,* and *Roots,* or books such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* Because of their reach across geographical and temporal boundaries, these traditional media forms have had substantially more influence over our beliefs about the time period than any other institution. Thus, most communication research on the Civil War privileges the construction of memory through these technologies of media (Gallagher, 2008; Sachsman, et al., 2007; McPherson, 2003; Chadwick, 2002). Furthermore, these normative assumptions are in keeping with the general disciplinary focus within media studies on print and electronic media in the construction of meaning. Cultural

institutions such as museums are generally not perceived as media forms, and therefore have not typically been positioned as objects of inquiry within media studies. To wit, the material aspect of their communicative messages, combined with the limited nature of their circulation, would seem to render them significantly distinct from more traditional media forms.

However, many major media theorists have cast a wider net, emphasizing media as material means by which people experience the world, a position that has led to the inclusion of many other artifacts in the definition of "media." (Innis, 1951: 83-89; McLuhan, 2002, Henning, 2006 : 72). Furthermore, many scholars have pointed to the distinct features of museums as bases to argue not only that museums are indeed media forms, but also that they are more effective agents of change than more traditional forms. Richard Sandell contends that, unlike more traditional media forms, museums are uniquely positioned to effect social change precisely *because* of the experience of visiting and the perception of them as objective, trustworthy sources. In fact, Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen conducted a study on the popular uses of history in which they found that 80% of those surveyed trusted museums and other historic sites to provide "real" or "true" history. This percentage of respondents was greater than those who trusted high school teachers and college professors to present an accurate accounting of the past (1998: 43). These characteristics position them as particularly influential media forms.

Museums and identity

The primary means by which museums help construct identity is through the building of a sense of community. Museums are the edifices through which

communities of all sizes and types represent themselves, both to themselves and to others (Jones, 2000: 4). They are, essentially, spaces in which various social identities are formed, maintained, and challenged.[9] Flora Kaplan has suggested that the communicative, mediational significance of museums lies primarily in their potential to construct a sense of collective identity through the process of visual stimulation engendered through their exhibits. These "moral communities," she contends, are the result of a Durkheimian collective consciousness created through viewing and assigning meaning to exhibits based upon both cognitive and cultural processes (1995: 37). The imbrication of culture in the viewing process ensures that museums are bound, or at least subject, to a politics of display: as is the case with the construction of identities through other representational systems, issues of power are also embedded within these institutions. Anthropologist Ivan Karp suggests that the sources of power are derived from the cultural capacity of museums, archives, and other institutions to define peoples and societies, to "reproduce structures of belief and experience through which cultural differences are understood" (1992: 1). These institutions, he contends, are crucial aspects of civil society, and, as such, "become places for defining who people are and how they should act and as places for challenging those definitions" (4).

While the sense of community exerted through museums, and the power relations upon which they are co-dependent, apply to many types of institutions, they

[9] Many scholars within museum studies have analyzed various aspects of the museum experience in terms of the construction of identity. Leinhardt & Knutson (2004) have examined identity among visitor groups; Zolberg (1992), and Peers & Brown (2007) have conducted studies of the relationship between museums and their source communities, and Heatherington (2007) has discussed the symbolic and economic interactions between museums and their geographical communities.

are particularly important constructions with respect to history museums. The primary conception upon which communities are constructed is heritage. It is an underlying aspect of the collective consciousness constructed through any type of museum, but becomes a more critical and explicit discourse within history museums. Community, in this sense, may be a referent to the people whose histories have inspired the collections, or it may involve the shared responses of people to the collections and the exhibitions contained within (Cooke, 2007). Individuals may be members of multiple communities, moving into, within, and out of each at various times.

However, this rather innocuous conception of heritage becomes more ideological when issues of representation come to the fore. Museums and other cultural institutions are often ground-zero for battles over historical interpretation, which are really struggles over heritage, with its attendant discourses of family, community, race, and nation. As is the case with other media forms, museums are arenas in which wider social relations are played out. Visitors to museums, or audiences, enter into the site with certain expectations molded by the interactions with and within other social and cultural arenas. The institutions' (lack of) fidelity to these expectations may form the basis for public battles. For example, the ACWC and its sister institution, the Museum of the Confederacy, are nearly constantly engaged in struggles over exhibits with the Sons of Confederate Veterans (SCV), the self-described "Guardians of Confederate History and Heritage." When I spent time at both museums in July of 2008, each was embroiled in a local controversy with the SCV over their representation of history. The board of the ACWC was deciding whether or not to display a statue of Confederate President Jefferson Davis that had been donated in response to the prominence, in the museum, of

a statue of Abraham Lincoln. The MOC, a museum devoted to the display of Confederate history, described their battles with the SCV as an ongoing "headache." Their troubles with the group had begun with the slavery exhibit in 1993, and had continued to the present day. The employees of both institutions suggested their problems with the SCV and other heritage groups involved the more inclusive interpretation of history they presented. Although museums mean many things to many different people, part of their missions involve the promotion of critical analyses of the connections between the past and contemporary concerns. For African Americans, these "contemporary concerns" include the display of an erased past, and the forging of a relationship between this history and its legacy.

2.2. Black History Museums as Counter-hegemonic Discourse

"We can talk about slavery in a few minutes, if y'all *want* to," said the young African American docent in response to a question about the slaves who had done most of the work required to maintain the elegant and stately Shirley Plantation. I had decided to take a tour of the place after seeing markers along I-95 for it and the other plantation-museums along the James River during one of my numerous trips to Washington, D.C., Fredericksburg, and Richmond from my parents' home in southwestern Virginia. I had been told that the subject of slavery was studiously avoided on these tours, and wanted to see, for myself, the rhetorical methods by which this feat was accomplished. I was not disappointed. The guided tour of "America's oldest plantation" had included detailed discussions of the wealthy, elite planters who had lived there, their descendants over the last two centuries, the members of the family

who still occupied the house, even the ghost that supposedly haunted it—but no mention of the "other" residents who had also occupied the grounds in the past. The tour was comprised of thirty minutes of cheery tourist discourse describing how draperies *were sewn*, items *were brought in*, and food *was served*. When the subject turned to the furniture in the room that *was made* by American hands (after all, the docent explained, the Carter family, owners of the plantation, was a patriotic clan that did not believe in importing furniture from England), someone in our small group of fifteen tourists, mindful of the lack of discussion about *who* had actually carried out these duties, had finally asked if slaves had performed the labor necessary to construct the beautiful chairs and tables in the dining room in which we were standing.[10] In a spiel that seemed as though it were designed to be left out of the narrative if he deemed a particular tourist group to be potentially less receptive to such discussions, the docent provided a brief description of the African Americans who comprised a majority of the inhabitants of the grounds, devoting a significant portion of his talk to their treatment. "The slaves here were treated well," he added, "they had ample food and good medical care."

At this plantation/museum, guided tours are relegated to the planters' living quarters. On the remainder of the estate's grounds, including the kitchen and stables where the specter of slavery looms more insistently, visitors are on their own. In these spaces, the placards perform the work of glossing over the realities of slavery and race,

[10] It is important to note that the website for the plantation does indeed include a discussion of the slaves whose labor was critical to its functioning. However, internet tourist descriptions and face-to-face tourist descriptions are distinct discourses—inclusions and exclusions in one have no bearing on those in the other.

often describing the African slaves as “servants,” utilizing the passive voice in descriptions of the performed tasks, and providing detailed information about the whites who had served as indentured servants during the period before Africans were brought to Virginia as slaves.

The linguistic tactics utilized here, including euphemistic references to slaves as “servants,” the positioning of North American slavery as an institution in which whites were victimized, and the use of the passive voice, are all part of a rhetorical strategy designed to minimize or completely obscure, within these tourist narratives, the role of slavery in the antebellum, plantation-based social and economic system. The maintenance of representations of the period which foreground the lifestyle of wealth, privilege, and imagined gentility is contingent upon elision of the role of slavery as the backbone of this way of life, and the rhetorical devices deployed in this project are crucial to its functioning. In their study of “social forgetting” in plantation museums in Louisiana, Jennifer Eisenstedt and Stephen Small contend that these strategic rhetorics “are part of a racialized regime of representation that valorizes the white elite of the pre-emancipation South while generally erasing or minimizing the experiences of enslaved African Americans” (2002: 2). Michael S. Bowman has suggested that these plantation home tours “legitimize an ideology that works to reproduce a hegemonic discourse that goes back to the Old South,” which serves the interests not of the antebellum planters of the past, but rather those of a “class of professionals whose business is the control of information, meanings, values, and images within and across cultural lines” (1998: 148). As such, it provides an illustration of the need for the counter-narratives offered by African American history museums.

2.3. On museums, memory, and race

Spencer R. Crew has suggested that African Americans have unique concerns with preserving, controlling, and recounting their history. He argues that the erasure of the depth and breadth of black accomplishment in America and in Africa, which rationalized and facilitated enslavement and second-class citizenship, has played an important role in defining the status of blacks in America. Thus, the preservation of black history becomes an even more critical project (1996: 80). This contention is supported by the founders of the museums detailed in this study. When I asked Douglas Wilder, founder of the USNSM (Fredericksburg), why this particular historical moment presents the "right" time to focus on slavery, he stated that

> Slavery leads to civil rights. Africans were not slaves—they were enslaved. [They] had culture, civilization, families. People are ignorant of this. The war was fought over slavery. Slavery was not a southern proposition—it was an American one. The North profited from it. Youngsters can't learn from those who don't know; it should be held to empirical knowledge. The Emancipation Proclamation freed some slaves, but not all. The museum is dedicated to that proposition. It puts the facts before them…Slavery made the U.S. founding more prominent. Its effects are strongest here., though it existed everywhere. Many of us are still affected by slavery.

The objectives associated with the display of the African American experience of slavery, Civil War, and Reconstruction (an era of great black accomplishment rarely displayed in history museums in the South) are particularly important. This significance is not just in terms of constructing a sense of agency through black history, but also in terms of providing a fuller accounting of American history in general. The erasure of the black perspective from dominant narratives propagated through the educational system, the entertainment industry, the tourist industry, and other cultural arenas

obscures the complexity of the political, social, and economic realities of colonial and antebellum America. As noted historian Ira Berlin has suggested, "Simply put, American history cannot be understood without slavery. Slavery shaped America's economy, politics, culture, and fundamental principles. For most of the nation's history, American society was one of slaveholders and slaves" (2006). This point—that black history is *American* history—was emphasized throughout my interviews with executives and employees of museums, as many stressed the benefit to all of a more inclusive presentation of American history. As Vonita Foster, Executive Director of the USNSM (Fredericksburg), put it, "How do you talk about the Civil War without talking about the slave aspect? We fill the gap. We will work with the (Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville) battlefield people. At least, you'll have a perspective on how the slaves felt." Many of the visitors to the museums shared these sentiments. Written comments about the exhibits at the ACWC revealed responses such as, "we enjoyed your more balanced telling of the causes and effects of the war," and "finally-- black history fits into American history."

While these museums are innovative in their missions and visual strategies, black history museums are not new phenomena. As early as 1828, African Americans formed organizations devoted to demonstrate their historical and literary achievements. These early efforts were mostly in the forms of publications, such as James W.C. Pennington's *Text Book of the Origin and History of the Colored People* (1841), William C. Nell's *The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution* (1854) , and George Washington William's *History of the Negro Race from 1619 to 1880* (1882). These works were

designed to counter the then-rampant denigration of black historical achievements and preserve black history for future generations (Crew, 80).

Books and journals remained the primary sources of information about black accomplishment during the 19th and early 20th centuries. The civil rights movement, which spurred a newfound interest in black history, along with an acknowledgement of its neglect, ushered in a new era in which museums devoted to black history were constructed. Many of these museums, such as the Museum of Afro-American History in Detroit (1965), the Museum of Afro-American History in Boston (1969), and the Anacostia Museum in Washington, D.C. (1967, now part of the Smithsonian) were all community-based and community-oriented museums (Crew, 83).

In addition to opening up a discursive space in which African American communities could preserve and represent their histories, the movement also led to ideological and structural changes that facilitated the construction of larger cultural institutions. These changes were designed to present visual narratives that included, rather than glossed over, the historical origins of the uneven social relations that continue to characterize American society. Two factors led to the presentation of African American history in these museums. First, a new focus on the historical origins of inequality prompted inquiries into black history. Second, the securing of political power through the civil rights movement enabled blacks to secure funding from elected officials for museums privileging black history. These changes lead to, among others, the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis (1991), the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute (1992), the National Voting Rights Museum in Selma (1992), the Ralph Mark

Gilbert Civil Rights Museum in Savannah (1996), and the Albany (Georgia) Civil Rights Museum (1998) (Brundage, 302).

However, the fact that these museums all display *civil rights* history underscores a significant obstacle: the history of slavery is problematic for both blacks and whites. The fact that the USNSM (Fredericksburg) bills itself as the first museum to focus exclusively on the display of slavery is more than a mere selling point. It is, in fact, a testament to the reality that the subject remains a difficult one in a nation founded on the ideals of freedom, equality, and democracy. According to historian James Oliver Horton, confronting the contradiction between the American ideal and the reality of American history can be "disturbing" (2006, 37). As is the case with any nation, the narratives that make up American identity are the product of a great deal of selective remembering and forgetting. The historical fact of slavery runs counter to the romantic notion of America as the land of the free. As such, it is often excluded from public presentations of history.

Berlin has suggested that it is the mixture of history with the politics of slavery that is at the root of this discomfort. The question of race in the 21st century, he argues, cannot be addressed without recognition of its roots in the slavery of the past (2006). Thus, the representation of this history has implications for not only the past, but the contemporary moment, as well. The visual display of African American history helps transform current discourses on affirmative action, poverty, educational disparities, and crime and punishment. All too often, comprehensive public discussions on such controversial policy issues are difficult.

The display of slavery has been as much or more problematic for African Americans as it has been for the population at large. The historical societies established by blacks immediately after the Civil War eschewed the gathering of materials about slavery in favor of presenting materials about the black influence in Europe (Stewart & Ruffins, 1986; Horton & Crew, 217). The ambivalence with which African Americans have held these memories since then has been reflected in public debates about their utility among political figures such as Frederick Douglass, Alexander Crummell, Booker T. Washington, and W.E.B. DuBois. In spite of the resurgent interest in black history borne of the civil rights movement, the cultural trauma associated with these memories has continued to infuse the collective black psyche even into the modern era. Anthropologist John Michael Vlach has detailed the frustration he and other organizers confronted when they attempted to stage an exhibit on slavery at the Library of Congress in 1995. The exhibit, entitled "Back of the Big House: The Cultural Landscape of the Plantation," was cancelled after a series of complaints about its staging. The pressure to cancel the exhibit, it turned out, came not from a general public uncomfortable with such a display, but rather from the Library's African American employees. The thought of daily confronting the visual images of slavery apparently took too much of a psychic toll (2006). This controversy demonstrates the difficulties associated with the construction of an entire museum foregrounding this history. The USNSM has had to seek private funding to underwrite the construction of the museum, a fact that has led to myriad other problems. Writing on the most recent North American literature on slavery in 2000, George Fredrickson observed that

> One hundred and thirty-five years after its abolition, slavery is still the skeleton in

> the American closet. Among the African-American descendents of its victims there is a difference of opinion about whether the memory of it should be suppressed as unpleasant and dispiriting or commemorated in the ways that Jews remember the Holocaust. These is no national museum of slavery and any attempt to establish one would be controversial (2000: 61).

The solution to these discomforts among blacks and whites, according to Berlin, would come from the cultivation of a greater understanding about exactly what slavery was, including an exploration about who the slaves were and what they experienced. Presenting the history from the perspectives of the enslaved would allow them to finally have a voice, and to be seen not in the narrow terms of the labor they performed, but in more comprehensive terms of the lives they led. This is the mission of the museums detailed in this study. One strategy employed in an effort to overcome these difficulties involves changing the discourse about slavery in such a way as to emphasize black agency. In this regard, museums that focus on other, lesser-known aspects of African American life during the period are particularly instrumental. Frank Smith, founder of the AACWM (Washington), discussed the role his museum plays in facilitating discussions about slavery:

> It's hard to get black people to talk about slavery. You have to get them to talk about freedom. When they see the USCT exhibit, it is easier for them to talk about slavery. It parallels the civil rights movement—black people led the civil rights movement.

John Motley, an avid collector of Civil War memorabilia and the African American Chairman of the ACWC (Richmond), contends that the most positive aspect of the Civil War was the ending of slavery, but sees a disconnect between this perception and the beliefs most blacks hold about the war. "Blacks, by and large, are ashamed of slavery. It's unfortunate, but true," he told me. He then explained the

potential for a cultural shift in the way blacks view these memories and southern identity:

> You don't find many who collect any of these things, or art. Affordability is an issue. The vast majority I compete with [for these artifacts] are whites. When people come to my house or exhibits I curated, they are blown away. [They] had no idea about black agency. [They then have a] positive reaction, more pride and surprise… the Civil War is crucial to black identity. The reluctance of blacks to study the Civil War and visit sites is unfortunate. It should be more central to black history and what we contributed to America. Without the Civil War, there would have been no civil rights movement. Blacks think we did nothing. There is a connection between the Civil War and the Revolutionary War. The Civil War is often referred to as the second revolution.

Christy Coleman, president of the museum, shared this opinion. In discussing the unique challenges she and other African Americans in the museum field confront, she traced these difficulties to black discomfort with these memories:

> We in the museum field have challenges—African American museums face challenges confronting the more difficult parts of our past. The challenge is, one would conclude, the subject matter and audience are seen as the same. [There is] historic amnesia. Our heroes and heroines have been selected for us. We tend not to support even our own institutions because we're marginalized by the field. History museums in the South are even more challenging.

An additional obstacle with which these museums have had to contend concerns the issue of African American interest in and attendance at museums. Motley lamented the fact that the vast majority of those interested in visiting museums, Civil War museums in particular, are white. "We go more towards entertainment than museums," he told me. "One of the challenges of museums is—how do you bring in more [visitors]?" In order to stimulate black interest in the museum, he gave lectures at black churches and at Virginia State University, an historically black college. He suggested that other societal institutions could be useful in bringing in black visitors. African American history museums would benefit, he suggested, "if black history is taught in a

more interesting way in high school. [There is] no quick fix. *Glory* was helpful, [as was] the Ken Burns series for more intellectual types. When more things happen in the pop cultural arena, [it] would be helpful…the black family reunion crowd, more reenactments would further interest."

2.4. "Revisioning" the Landscape

The lack of black engagement with this history is symptomatic of their exclusion from common conceptions of *southernness.* Because southern identity is intrinsically connected to Civil War history, the perception of African Americans as lacking historical agency works to exclude them from belonging within the regional community. A significant aspect of this exclusion is cultivated through geography. Material culture, which includes monuments, museums, landscapes, and other artifacts, has significant meaning ascribed to it, often transforming these objects into sacred artifacts when it serves the needs of a particular group (Shackel, 2003: 16). These "needs" have often been heavily racialized. As architectural scholar Craig Barton has suggested, "as a social construct and concept, race has had a profound influence on the spatial development of the American landscape, creating separate, though sometimes, parallel, overlapping or even superimposed cultural landscapes for black and white Americans" (2001: xiv). Once particular sets of memories are fixed upon a landscape, they become part of the official memory of the community, be it local, regional, or national. Steven Hoelscher has suggested that landscapes of race and memory are at the center of the South's struggle for identity. The contemporary representational battles

between the “Old South” and the “New South” are the result of a complex web of political, economic, and cultural relationships (2006: 42).

The southern landscape is heavily dotted with memorials to the Confederacy, the result of a movement begun shortly after the war’s end. The Civil War, contends art historian Kirk Savage, “provoked the greatest era of monument building ever seen in this country” (1997: 3). A widespread set of projects that begun with the memorializing of the war dead in cemeteries eventually resulted in monuments to generic “honorable” Confederate soldiers in public spaces (Shackel, 39). At the same time, there were attempts, some unsuccessful, to erect monuments to other elements of the Lost Cause master narrative of southern history. These planned “faithful slave” memorials often faced stiff opposition from progressive African Americans appalled at the possible memorialization of a stereotypical and regressive image, as well as from whites dismayed at the lack of loyalty displayed by “unappreciative” former slaves who abandoned their plantations after the war, and later, expected monuments suggestive of social equality (Shackel, 86-94). These activities were also part and parcel of the sectional reconciliation that began during the later years of the 19th century and continued well into the 20th century. Historian Fitzhugh Brundage (2005) details the efforts of white women’s groups during the first decades of the 20th century, such as the United Daughters of the Confederacy, to erect monuments and shrines to the Confederacy as a means of exerting cultural influence over public history. This role was eventually taken over by state agencies, with the Eurocentric narratives embedded within these memorials intact. It was this monopolization of public space, Brundage

argues, that helped define the conception of "southern" as one that excluded the region's African American citizens.

As African Americans exercise the political power earned during the civil rights movement, this is very slowly changing in some arenas. The grounds of the Stonewall Jackson Shrine, located off I-95 in Woodford, Virginia, features placards that discuss the importance of the labor performed by the slaves on the Fairfield Plantation that is part of the grounds. Arlington House, the home of Robert E. Lee located in Arlington Cemetery, offers a guided tour in which a significant amount of the discussion is focused on the slaves who lived there. The narration included descriptions of their courtship and "marriage" rituals, as well as details of their everyday lives. After taking the tour, I remarked to the guide how refreshing it was to hear an acknowledgement of the African Americans--in human terms, no less--who had lived and worked at the estate.[11] Her response to me included the assertion that it would have been inappropriate to ignore the lives of those who comprised the majority of the population of the plantation. The fact that both of these sites are maintained by the National Park Service is not insignificant. Public agencies have made some progress during the last fifteen years in presenting more inclusive historical narratives at historic sites, though much more needs to be accomplished. The more profit-driven private tourist industry, of which most plantation museums are a part, presents greater challenges in this respect.

However, overall, the white southern hegemony is gradually giving way to revisionist, racially and geographically inclusive narratives. Museums that foreground

[11] I put "marriage" in quotation marks here because, as designated "non-citizens," slaves' "marriages" were not considered legitimate by the state.

the black experience of slavery are significant participants in the project to confront these challenges. In revising the landscape, and, by definition, the history, to include black agency, museums are especially instrumental in altering the landscape. The visual cultural field is an especially fruitful site for the production and contestation of meaning. The people involved in the functioning of these museums, from the founders to the source communities, are all part of the process of "revisioning" the landscape through the production and contestation of dominant history. This is accomplished by constructing an African American-centered countermemory through the deployment of what I refer to as a *transformational rhetoric*.

2.5. Towards a Transformational Rhetoric of Museum Display

According to communication scholar Lawrence J. Prelli, the analysis of the persuasive aspects of visual culture presents numerous possibilities for the study of communication:

> The rhetorics of display are so ubiquitous in contemporary communication and culture as to have become the dominant rhetoric of our time…much of what appears to look to us as reality is constituted rhetorically through multiple displays that surround us, compete for our attention, and make claims upon us (2)

I refer to the rhetorics of these history museums as "transformational" both in the sense that they have as their objective the "transformation" of the southern landscape to one that includes the experiences of all southerners, and in a structural sense. These two meanings of a transformational rhetoric of visual display are interrelated. The cultural work of these museums is centered on dramatically changing the landscape through the production of historical counternarratives foregrounding the black historical experience

and acknowledging black historical agency. This includes the role of the museums in more general schemes to transform the immediate areas in which they are located. For example, in the case of the AACWM (Washington), the transformation involves a larger program of urban renewal, while the USNSM (Fredericksburg) is a significant part of the modernization of Fredericksburg that I described in the introduction to this chapter. The *structural* transformations that occur through these museums involve the discourses embedded in the museum displays. In order to affect a dramatic transformation of the landscape, all aspects of the museum experience, from the artifacts to the publicly associated personnel, are implicated in the regime of representation. Thus, in elaborating on a transformational rhetoric, I begin with two key insights. First, as Prelli suggests, the rhetorical study of display "proceeds from the central idea that whatever they make manifest or appear is the culmination of selective processes that constrain the range of possible meanings available to those who encounter them" (2). The exhibits we see in museums are not the result of the arbitrary display of items donated to the institution. They are instead the result of careful deliberation intended to present a specific narrative. All aspects of museum display, including those not immediately visible to visitors, are part of this effort.

Secondly, Victoria Gallagher contends that the rhetorical perspective on cultural display involves examining both the substance of the images themselves and the formal, structural features that audiences use to make meaning (Gallagher, 2006). In other words, visual displays have a grammar. In contrast to a grammar in the linguistic sense, however, a grammar of visual display goes beyond the formal rules of correctness to incorporate various means of representing patterns of experience. It enables humans to

construct a mental picture of reality, to make sense of the world around them and their place in it (Halliday, 1985, van Leeuwen, 1996, 2). Thus, if museum display is considered to be a language, as many scholars have suggested, what kind of grammar might it utilize? A transformational rhetoric considers the relationship among the various elements of museums through the use of both surface and underlying structures. The transformational rhetoric of black history museums begins with the surface structures involved in the visual rhetorics advanced within the exhibits in the museum itself, which include the items on sale in the gift shop and the films shown in the museum. It also involves the mediating language in the artifact descriptions on the placards. The second, deeper level involves visual elements that are explicit, but not immediately perceived as exhibits by museum visitors. These include the architectural layout, the location, and frontline personnel, typically the docents. It also includes the founders, presidents, and other public persons associated with the museum. These are the people whose community profiles present powerful messages about the historical narratives displayed within the museum. Thus, I refer to them as human capital. There is also a third level involving elements that are typically not seen by visitors, but rhetorically powerful nonetheless. These include the artifact and financial donors and lower- to mid-level administrative personnel. Museums communicate at different levels, and attempts to present counterhegemonic discourses must take into account multiple levels of meaning.

Additionally, a transformational rhetoric engages a wider set of recipients. Because the meanings conveyed through revisionist history bear the additional burdens associated with the interrogation, and ultimately, destabilization of hegemonic

narratives, the recipients of a transformational rhetoric extend beyond the immediate audience (i.e. visitors) to larger and more extensive sets of communities. In terms of educating multiple publics about historical narratives that have been essentially erased from the national memory, these museums exist on an uneven playing field, having to compete with mass-distributed popular cultural productions such as films, television miniseries, novels, and other media. Thus, "community" here refers to potential visitors, potential source communities, inhabitants of the museum's surrounding community, African Americans generally, other populations of color, neo-Confederates, and the larger national community. For example, director Foster of the USNSM (Fredericksburg), described to me the stated motivation of a donor who had given a slave doll to the collection of the museum. The woman, a Latina, had claimed the doll had inspired her to become a nurse. She had written a letter to the curators in which she explained that

> Black history is important to those [of us] who struggle, seek freedom, love America, and want to hear about heroes from the past. This tells me this museum is for everyone. Regardless of ethnicity, color, anyone can gain from stories of people who did heroic things. This is about educating people about little-known heroes.

Exhibits

The most significant aspect of the cultural work of museums lies in their exhibits. Flora Kaplan has suggested that because exhibitions encompass processes that are both cognitive and cultural, they may be seen in the Durkheimian sense as social representations of a "collective self" (1995). Thus, the surface features of a transformational rhetoric of museum constructed through its exhibits may be positioned as those which appeal to a society in transition from one in which the "collective self" is

coded as *white* and southern, to one in which is now racially and geographically neutral. In the case of the history museums examined in this project, this entails presenting exhibits that engage the causes and results of the Civil War. Specifically, this includes the articulation of slavery as a cause, the display of its postwar legacy of Reconstruction, and the inclusion of its long-term legacy up to and including the contemporary moment.

The exhibits in the ACWC (Richmond) are centered on the theme of "Union, Home, and Freedom," which are positioned as the "three ideals that defined post-Revolutionary America," and signifies each of the three sides involved in the war. The displays begin with slavery and end with its contemporary legacy. The very first exhibit features the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution, and details the ways in which slavery was enshrined within these founding documents. In offering the explanation that the Declaration was "never intended to be an official challenge to slavery," it reveals the contradictions inherent in the fact that Thomas Jefferson and many of the other founding fathers were slaveowners. This articulation stands in stark contrast to the narratives presented at nearby Monticello, Jefferson's home.

Early on in the visitor experience, the museum rebuts the Neo-Confederate discourse that the war had nothing to do with slavery with an interactive film which explains the causes of the war. The exhibit invites visitors to participate in a quiz in which poses the question, "what caused the Civil War?" The options among which visitors may choose are "disagreement over federal versus state powers," "competing economies and cultures," "westward expansion," and "slavery" (the responses were 33%, 17%, 8%, and 42%, respectively when I took the quiz with other visitors). The

film then makes clear that the first three were all essentially arguments over slavery, by informing viewers that "each of theses causes contributed to the war and each was linked to slavery…take slavery out of the mix and it's hard to believe there would have been a war." This is highly significant in that it functions as an anti-Lost Cause discourse; it is typically variations of these three causes that are articulated as the reasons for the war within dominant historical narratives. Another exhibit, "Choosing War," rebuts the neo-Confederate claim that the South was "forced" into war by an intrusive and tyrannical federal government.

In addition to displays featuring a variety of artifacts representing Union and Confederate combat in the war, the museum also displays the efforts of black men to enlist in the Union army in the face of political opposition. A film on the Emancipation Proclamation is featured, along with the contention that the enlistment of black men into the Union army was its most controversial provision. The construction of these "armies of liberation" in the "Fighting for Freedom" exhibit is chronologically displayed utilizing a combination of photographs, document copies, and objects such as weaponry, epaulets, and cartridge cases donated by John Motley.

The story of the war is displayed in a chronological progression; the narrative ends with two exhibits on the effects of the war. One of the exhibits, "The War for Freedom, 1866-1876," focuses on Reconstruction, detailing black priorities such as education, voting rights for men, representation in government, and employment. The inclusion of the era marks a unique turn for Civil War history museums in the South, which typically begin and end with the execution of the combat. It also represents the display of African American historical agency and citizenship. Coleman characterized the display of this

era in the ACWC (Richmond) as central to its mission. "our museum and exhibits are about causes, which is why we include slavery. But, more importantly, it is about the *legacy* of the war, she said. "Our discussions [are] about social engagement. The Civil War represents the birth of black leadership, Reconstruction." This lies in contrast to the depiction of Reconstruction as a failure in popular portrayals of the era in texts such as *Birth of a Nation*. The museum's final display, entitled "Legacy," describes the results of the war, including the increasing awareness of the forgotten African American role. Included in this exhibit are photographs of the Robert Gould Shaw memorial in Boston, Stone Mountain in Georgia, a ship approaching Ellis Island, the Tuskegee Airmen, the civil rights movement, and an E.R.A. march, as well as a film still from *Gone With the Wind*. The photographs present an image in which the effects of the war represent better opportunities for *everyone*. In so doing, it informs us, in broader and more inclusive terms, of its continuing relevance.

Before exiting the exhibit area, visitors are invited to share their thoughts on the displays in the museum by answering questions centered on its themes and articulating connections between the war and its contemporary legacy. There is a partition near the exit for guests to write their opinions, as well as to indicate where they are from, on stick-it notes to attach to the wall. Visitors come mainly from the South, but also from as far away as China. One of the questions posed prompts visitors to opine as to how America would be different today had the Union not won the war. Interestingly, most of the responses revealed an ability to couch the consequences of the continuation of slavery in terms suggesting harm to all: "we would all be slaves raddling (sic) our chains," "we might all be slaves if we were not rich," and "the U.S. would have

dissolved and been taken over by stronger, more unified powers, or the U.S. would have reconnected later; in a growing world you can't stop progress," were representative responses. On another section of the wall, the Gettysburg Address was invoked to ask visitors if all Americans are "treated equally today." The majority of the responses indicated "no," with one person adding the opinion that "the rich legislate to break down the middle class, keep poor people poor, and fatten their wallets. That's why GREED is a (sic) deadly," and another suggesting that "no, but all Americans should be treated equally no matter the race, gender, or color." These responses, which indicate the ability of visitors to connect slavery and the Civil war to contemporary racism, sexism, and classism, suggests the vital role of these institutions in facilitating the interrogation and revision of dominant historical narratives. It also demonstrates the evolution of the modern museum from an institution facilitating the *othering* of subjugated populations to a more contemporary role as a potential agent of change.

Finally, one should not discount the importance of the gift shop in articulating the relative value of historical narratives. As is the case with visitor's centers, highway markers, and other tourist-oriented, seemingly neutral artifacts, gift shops are heavily imbued with meaning. In addition to the standard fare of books on the major battles and figures of the war, commemorative mugs, caps, and t-shirts, dolls and figurines, there are also books on slavery and black military combat. These volumes include *Black Soldiers in Blue*, by John David Smith, *The Negro's Civil War*, by James McPherson, *The Slave's War*, by Andrew Ward, and *Where Death and Glory Meet*, by Russell Duncan.

As a museum focusing on the display of slavery, the USNSM (Fredericksburg) is inherently distinguishable from typical history museums in the South and the country at large. Thus, the surface features of its transformational rhetoric come both from the display of such memories, and through displays that will resonate with the museum's constituency in emotionally powerful ways. Inside the museum, the plans include ten permanent galleries featuring exhibits which will present a chronological narrative of American slavery, from an exhibit entitled, "Holding pen," which will detail the ways in which Africans arrived in North America in slave ships as human chattel, to one called the "persistence of prejudice," which will describe the past and contemporary legacy of slavery. The objects on display will include stereotypical toys, children's books with titles such as *Coon Book,* and *Ten Little Niggers,* designed to demonstrate, according to Foster, the ways in which people profited economically from racism.

The museum will also serve to construct narratives of slavery in which African Americans are positioned as historical subjects with agency, rather than as historical victims. It will feature exhibits detailing the efforts of little-known blacks who made contributions to the country, such as Clara Brown, Mary Elizabeth Bowser, Bob Lemmons, Andrew Beard, Catherine Ferguson, and others. All of these features, however, are part of the near future. Currently, the only existing exhibitionary feature of the museum is its "Spirit of Freedom" Garden. Beginning with a replica of an auction block, which is described as "one of the most common symbols of American slavery," the garden is constructed in a circular pattern which constructs a genealogy of slavery. At several points, visitors are invited to directly experience the past by placing themselves in 9x7-foot replica of the crawl space in which Harriot Jacobs, a runaway

slave, hid for seven years, or inside of a replica of the box in which Henry "Box" Brown sat in as he mailed himself to freedom. These displays are part of the museum's strategy to enable visitors to "experience" slavery, in as direct ways as possible.

The transformational rhetoric of the exhibits at the AACWM (Washington) is unique from the other two museums, and from most museums in general. Its surface structure lies not in the exhibits themselves, which are comprised mostly (though not completely) of primary source documents, rather than objects, as texts. Instead, through a combination of a visual/spatial aesthetic and a set of verbal lectures provided by museum personnel, its exhibits paint a compelling picture of the obstacles confronted by black men and women before, during, and after the war. In other words, the museum's transformational rhetoric functions through a combination of exhibits, social space, and oration.

The museum contains two rooms. The smaller room is designated for the display of slavery; the other room is called the "soldier's room." The museum is arranged thematically consistent with the evolution of African Americans from slaves to contraband to USCT soldiers. The artifactual display in both rooms includes a bill of sale for an 11-year old female slave, a newspaper ad for a runaway slave, an engraving featuring the "First Reading of the Emancipation Proclamation," photo essays and political cartoons from Harper's Weekly and Frank Leslie's newspaper, sketches of slave pens, paintings of pivotal battles, and photographs of Dred Scott, and of USCT soldiers. Excepting a sword, musket, drum, slave shackles, USCT uniform, and a few other artifacts, there are very few three-dimensional objects in the museum. Hari Jones, the Assistant Director and Curator, explained to me the importance of using primary

documents, rather than objects, in (re)telling the story of black participation in the war. While the lack of traditional artifacts appeared to cause a bit of dissonance with a few visitors, Jones's discussion of the importance of source documents in telling the USCT story typically became part of the museum's rhetorical strategy. After a white woman from California, who had arrived at the AACWM after visiting the Holocaust Museum, remarked on what she perceived to be important similarities between the two, her husband added, "it's sad you have to prove what happened."

The primary discursive power embedded in the museum's exhibits comes from its soldier's room, which I position as its "social space." It is in this area that visitors gather after perusing the artifacts, listen to the presentation, and engage in conversations with each other and the museum employees. Sheldon Ammis (1987, in Kavaniaugh, 3) has elaborated on what he considers the three forms of symbolic space embodied by history museums. One is the "cognitive space," in which the exhibitions are to be explored and enjoyed. Another is the "dream space," which foregrounds the power of museums in prompting visitors to respond in highly personal ways to the images, colors, and textures of the objects on display. The third, which is most important here, is the "social space," which provides for a museum experience in which visitors bond over the sharing of experiences through the exchange of personal and collective memories.

In the social space of the AACWM (Washington), oral presentations are conducted either by Smith or Jones. Occasionally, when neither Smith nor Jones is available, the museum has a small network of volunteers who perform these duties. I was even once asked to give the presentation. While there is a constant flow of individuals or small groups into the interior of the museum, a significant part of its

constituency consists of large groups of 12 or more visitors. These are usually black family reunion participants, tourist groups, summer program participants, or schoolchildren. Visitors are not left to examine the exhibits on their own; rather, they are ushered into a medium-sized room where the oral presentation is delivered. This organization functions to create a shared space for visitors to gather and converse, while simultaneously allowing museum personnel greater agency over directing the visitors' gaze toward the artifacts inside and outside of the room.

As I sat in this social space and observed the presentations to various groups, I noticed the theme of community emerge repeatedly. Although Jones tailored his presentations to the particular audience he was addressing, community was a consistent theme of each. As part of the strategy combining verbal display with social space, Jones stressed the importance of sharing in revising dominant historical narratives. "When the story of the Civil War is told accurately, it is a community story," he said. "There is no reason for you to believe you did nothing. You are your own emancipator. African Americans worked in league with the Constitution and the federal government—a community effort." The discourse of community often entailed discussion of the duties of African Americans to share these revised narratives. On another occasion, an African American woman said to Jones, "we need to sit down with people like you and share what we know and what you know." Additionally, when it comes to discourses of community constructed in opposition to hegemony, sharing relies upon cultural understandings that signify one's membership in the community. In this case, it occurs along the contours of critical historiography. Upon gauging visitor responses to the exhibits and Jones's presentations, I often heard comments such as, "they never give us

credit for [anything]," "they're still short-changing us," or "I don't think I'll be able to look at *Glory* the same way again," to knowing agreement from other members of their groups. I also listened as small groups of visitors engaged in such exchanges with Jones:

Visitor A: The youth can become advocates of these stories.

Visitor B: Why is Lincoln here?

Jones: Lincoln was the great facilitator…

Visitor A: …not the emancipator.

On another occasion, this exchange took place between Jones and two black female visitors:

Visitor A: I'd like to bring my grandkids.

Jones: Good…I'll focus on the drummer boy narrative.

Visitor A: They need to know their history. I try to get them to know their history.

Visitor B: It's nothing like they learn in school. I'll tell you that much.

Visitor A: I just want to give up praise…[This] is needed.

Jones: There hasn't been accurate work since 1963, except McPherson.

The transformational dynamics of space: Architecture and design

The ways in which museum artifacts are organized are instrumental in constructing memory and a sense of the past. In his study of rural cemeteries, Garry Willis (1992) discusses the ways in which displays are rhetorically manifested through arrangements meant to manipulate the attitudes of visitors. His observations are instructive of the strategies involved in museum displays. He writes:

> the material structure of a place's tangible features resonates with symbolic implications generated through selective namings, conventions, styles, narratives, and rituals. Places are thus deposed rhetorically in their physical design so that their arrangement works to dispose the attitudes, feelings, and conduct of those who visit, dwell within, or otherwise encounter them…All constructed and designed places can be considered as material embodiments of preferred attitudes, feelings, and valuings. Thus, an important dimension of the rhetoric manifested in display is the symbolic resonance of material places that inclines those who occupy them to experience social meaning from particular, selectively structured vantage points or perspectives.

Thus, the impact of material culture on memory and identity formation includes their form and location, in addition to their texts. The spacing of museum exhibits is not arbitrary, but rather is designed in such a way as to facilitate not only *what* is to be remembered, but more importantly, *how* this remembering should be conducted (Radley, 1990: 47). In this sense, architectural design becomes a discourse as or more powerful than written or spoken language.

In African American history museums, architectural design becomes an evocative discourse through the external design of the museum, and through the internal design and layout of the artifacts. Because the cultural trauma of slavery can be experienced not directly, but rather through various modes of representation, empathic exhibition design, in which "all material elements of an exhibition and the respective framings (building, specific location within a certain type of architecture, style of announcements) define the ways in which an exhibition becomes meaningful for the individual visitors, connecting the intended message with their specific repertoires of associations and connotations, and the pertinent and relevant social facts" (Krautler, 1995: 64).

I position architecture as an underlying structure, as its persuasive effect lies not in its ability to explicitly articulate a narrative of history, as is the case with the artifacts. Its power, rather, lies in its implicit ability to purposefully direct the gaze of the visitor, as well as in its potential to evoke the emotional reaction necessary to identify with a distant past that can only be experienced through representation. These elements of the underlying structures thus work in combination with the exhibits to construct meaningful historical narratives. The overall persuasive effect, then, is to transform museums, literally, into "structures of feeling," to borrow a phrase from Raymond Williams. I will look at the ways in which these two objectives, direction and affect, are accomplished in the U.S. National Slavery Museum.

While the USNSM (Fredericksburg) is not yet open to the public, its planned, unique architectural features are consistent with its status as the only museum solely dedicated to representing the history of slavery. In a published statement, the architect, C.C. Pei, suggests that the museum's mission is so "compelling" as to warrant an equally powerful physical plant.[12] Its external physical structure will include as its centerpiece a full-size replica slave ship that will be visible from I-95. This feature is described as the "anchor" of the educational program of the museum.[13] The slave ship is an image that has operated powerfully in the African American symbolic universe, functioning in emotionally specific ways as to make the past meaningful to the present. The image of the slave ship has become a carrier of group meaning, signifying the genesis of slavery and the black experience in America. The stated purpose of the

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[12] Quoted in the museum's promotional material, "U.S. National Slavery Museum: Commemorating, Understanding, Overcoming."
[13] See the promotional brochure for the museum.

replica will be to create a sense of living history, enabling visitors to experience a simulation of the Middle Passage, as well as to reflect upon that journey and its contemporary legacy of racism and socioeconomic inequality. Thus, the replica attached to the museum will become what Carel Bertram refers to as the "felt real" (2004: 165).

Vonita Foster, the Executive Director, described the ways in which the museum's unique architectural layout facilitates identification with a neglected and painful past. The exhibit designers, she told me, have created features not seen in typical museums, a uniqueness appropriate to the subject matter. Perhaps the most provocative aspect of the museum's architecture lies in its "Middle Passage" exhibit. The gallery will be designed in such a way that when families enter, parents will be separated from their children. The pain of familial separation was a recurrent theme of the slave narratives published by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in the 1930s. The exhibit designers are planning many displays not found in typical museums, with the expressed purpose of stimulating feelings of "being there" in visitors. The intention of this layout, Foster told me, will be to provide visitors with an emotional sense of the pain involved in the separation of slave families, showing visitors that African Americans "love, bleed, care—like everybody else."

The transformational dynamics of place: Location

Visual rhetorics operate most powerfully when they evoke the history and memory of place. Powerful symbolic places may carry more meaning than words. They evince a sense of home, belonging, and identity. They also operate strategically, manipulating these qualities to advance particular ideological agendas. An important subtext of this agenda often involves race for, as Sociologist Les Back suggests, racism

is, “by nature a spatial and territorial form of power. It aims to secure and claim native/white territory but it also projects associations on to space that in turn invests racial associations and attributes in places” (2005: 19). Master narratives of Civil War memory advanced through memorials, monuments, and other artifacts over the last century have served to mark many places in the region as “whites only.” For instance, the numerous schools, streets, and municipalities named for Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson, or JEB Stuart convey potent propaganda about the importance of these men and, by implication, their deeds, thereby enshrining regional myths for multiple generations. The power embedded in the landscape surpasses that offered by many other media forms.

This power also suggests that alternative stories may be told and, in the process, construct new maps of belonging. This function of the landscape influenced the selection of place with the USNSM (Fredericksburg). Wilder initially wanted to locate the museum at Jamestown, the site of the first permanent English settlement in 1607 and the arrival of the first Africans in 1619, but could not get the land. Richmond was another possibility, but officials in the city were slow to act. “[They] didn’t see the value,” according to Wilder. The site in Fredericksburg was chosen after the land was offered. The site, which he described as “accessible and pristine land,” was specifically designated for the construction of a museum. Although not the first choice, Wilder told me, it was still a historically significant place. Additionally, its potential as a tourist attraction played a role. It sits at a crossroads near the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, which is forty-five minutes away on I-95. The museum’s location there suggests

an attempt to reshape the contours of belonging there by redrawing the map of the city to include the new narratives Wilder and other officials wish to construct.

One of the most striking features of place as a rhetorical trope is the fact that landscapes never stay still. Feelings and engagement with place and landscape are dynamic, shifting as people invest them with new meaning. Craig Barton has suggested that the emergent proliferation of memorials to black achievement is part of a larger movement to redefine the nature of American society by re-viewing and re-imagining the landscape. This project becomes especially transformative, perhaps even subversive, when landscapes considered sacred spaces by the proponents of dominant history are appropriated for the construction of revisionist historical narratives.

This is one of the more rhetorically powerful features of the underlying structure of the ACWC. Located in Richmond, Virginia; the capital of the Confederacy and home of the infamous Monument Avenue, the dynamics of place within the city could not provide a more suitable environment for the transformational rhetoric the museum displays. Monument Avenue, an oak tree-lined residential street located just west of the city's downtown area, was designed and built in the 1890s as the preferred address of the local wealthy. During the same period between 1890 and 1929, when many stately mansions were built on the street, large statues of five Confederate generals; Robert E. Lee, Jefferson Davis, J.E.B. Stuart, Stonewall Jackson, and Matthew Fontaine Maury were erected in the grassy area separating east- and west-bound traffic. The street, constructed at the height of the Lost Cause era, has been described as both a memorial and a "state of mind." Many scholars have situated it as a "prime example of a white racialized landscape" (Lewis, 1979; Savage, 1997; Leib, 2002; Schein, 2006). As the

birthplace of the Lost Cause interpretation of history, for one hundred years after the end of the war, Richmond was "the central site for the production and maintenance of the Confederate version of the causes of the Civil War, the nature of African American enslavement, and the postwar sufferings of the southern people" (Tyler-McGraw, 2006: 153). It was from the city that the dominant meanings of the war and its legacy emerged, and, in keeping with this distinction, Richmond is home to the densest concentration of memorials to the Confederacy (Leib, 2006: 188). Amid all of these icons of white supremacy is a population that, according to the 2000 census, is fifty-seven percent African American. By definition, it is a heavily racialized cityscape in the process of reconciling its past with its present reality. To illustrate this point, Christy Coleman, the President of the ACWC (Richmond), recounted a quote from a prominent white business leader: there are two lies Richmond was built on: blacks were inferior, and tobacco doesn't kill."

It is this history that renders the city an especially meaningful place for the display of revisionist history. Furthermore, in an ironic twist, the divisions sewn by this history played a role in the orientation of the museum. According to founder Wise, at the time the museum was being planned in the mid-nineties, the city was going though an especially rife period of racial antagonism. There was pushback to the idea of the museum from both blacks and whites. African Americans on the city council were concerned about yet another museum comprised of Confederate artifacts, while neo-Confederate groups were intensely opposed to the possibility of museum narratives in which the memory of their "heroes" might be besmirched. "Lets get back to the days where the only discussion was whether Lee was in the New or Old Testament," was the

attitude, according to Wise. “The only way you could have a modern museum about the Confederacy was to share the stage with other constituencies,” he told me. The planners thus concocted a strategy to construct the site with the Confederacy on one side, and the Union on the other. However, for Richmond’s politics, suggested Wise, this arrangement was insufficient. “You had to have the African American legacy, too,” he added.

The museum’s appropriation of place in its transformational rhetorical strategy goes further than its location in the city of Richmond. The site on which it is housed, that of the Tredegar Ironworks building, is an important Confederate icon. The building, located on the James River, was the most important and prolific supplier of ammunition and other weaponry for the Confederacy. This history makes it one of the sacred spaces in the eyes of neo-Confederates, and is one of the reasons the museum’s historical interpretation has incurred the wrath of the SCV. As I visit the museum and interview its president and employees in July of 2008, a local controversy is brewing over the group’s attempt to erect a donated statue of Jefferson Davis on the museum’s grounds. The group’s stated aim is to provide “balance” to the statue of Abraham Lincoln that was erected on the grounds in 2003, three years before the ACWC opened. The museum’s board was set to vote on the donation the following day.[14] I asked Coleman about the attachment of neo-Confederate groups to the site. “Museums have the ability to provide the details. The rest of us will continue to take comfort in myths,” she told me. “People are upset that this is not a shrine…the presence of the museum speaks

[14] The board eventually voted to accept the statue, but retained the right to decide what to do with it. This included the decision as to whether or not it would actually be displayed. As of this writing, the SCV is looking for a new “home” for it.

volumes about the evolution of Richmond. I was amazed, especially at Tredegar, [to see] an honest and accurate statement of [slavery]."

In addition to the symbolic importance of place, location as a rhetorical trope also functions in a way that invokes objectives from both the cultural and economic spheres: attempts to revive blighted and depressed urban centers. Many scholars have written about the role of museums as icons of regeneration in the aftermath of a devastating event. Zukin (1995) has written about the ways in which cultural symbols of a place are combined with capitalist activity in the production of symbolic economies. Hetherington (2007) has described the role of museums in the making of an accessible space through public-private partnerships. By including these functions as part of the underlying structure of the transformational rhetoric of museums, I extend these studies by positioning community revitalization as a part of an overall strategy to revise dominant historical narratives through the use of symbolic space.

Both the ACWC (Richmond) and AACWM (Washington) are illustrative of this function. The ACWC is the result of a public-private partnership among the Richmond Historic Riverfront Foundation, the National Park Service, and a coalition of local businesses and government. The coalition's desire to revitalize its waterfront central business district presented an opportunity to enlarge and reinterpret the Civil War exhibition that had previously been part of the Richmond National Battlefield Park by moving it to the site of the new project (Tyler-McGraw, 151-2).

This function is performed even more dramatically by the AACWM. The museum's location in the historic Shaw neighborhood in northwest Washington, D.C. renders it iconic, simultaneously, of the symbolic abstractions of place and of the

tangible possibilities for museums in broader projects of urban renewal. The area was originally populated as a freed slave encampment and is named for Robert Gould Shaw, the commander of the famous 54th Massachusetts regiment of the USCT. During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it was the center of the city's culture and nightlife, as well as a pre-Harlem "mecca" for prominent black intellectuals, educators, politicians, and activists. The neighborhood is noted as the birthplace of Duke Ellington; a mural with his image remains a prominent landmark in the area. Shaw was also the scene of rioting after the King assassination. The devastation to the area caused by the riots was the beginning of a long, slow decline in both population and development. In a uniquely symbolic way, the neighborhood's illustrious but troubled history represents a link between both of the major civil rights movements for African Americans--the Civil War and the 20th century civil rights movement. This relationship is representative the attempts of many African American vernacular historians to reframe narratives of the Civil War in terms of freedom.

Currently, the area, like much of D.C., is in a process of gentrification, and the AACWM is a part of that process. Located approximately 2.5 miles north of the National Mall, and 2.5 miles west of the famous landmark Union Station, the museum is in an area that only a decade ago stood as a symbol of urban blight. The neighborhood is now enjoying a period of revitalization begun in the late 1990s. The resident population is becoming increasingly ethnically- and racially, and economically mixed. The boarded up buildings that characterized U Street when I was an undergraduate living in the city in the early nineties have been replaced by bookstores, vintage clothing shops, cafes, bars, and clubs. The area is the site of a number of ethnic

restaurants; it is known as the place to go for Ethiopian cuisine. It is also well known as the site of Ben's Chili Bowl, a fifty-year old nationally-famous restaurant that served as an important gathering place for celebrities during the area's tenure as the "black Broadway," as well for political activists in the aftermath of the King assassination.

According to museum founder Smith, both he and the city had a mutual interest in revitalizing the community. The financial support the city provides to the museum enables it to avoid charging entrance fees; visitors are instead requested to make "donations" at a location well inside the entrance of the museum. Smith's connection to the city council and his name in the historic preservation community were instrumental in this effort. He told me that he had two purposes in erecting the monument and, eventually, the museum: to correct an historical wrong, and to draw tourists away from the National Mall to U Street. The fact that the monument has its own stop on the city's Metro train Green line is significant, as it works in much the same way as street and buildings names to mark the site, and the memories enshrined within it, as historically significant. It is the first memorial by an African American sculptor (Ed Hamilton) on federal land in Washington and, in a city marked by historical monuments, is the only site for which a subway stop is named. The monument to USCT is the first site one encounters upon exiting the U Street/African American Civil War Memorial/Cardozo station. Curator Jones calls it an "American memorial to American freedom fighters." Smith was able to get financing from Metro after a construction accident damaged the area for three years. As a city council member, he had suggested a signature park as reparation for the damage. "People were skeptical about a Civil War monument, [believing] Confederates would be coming up here," he told me. "But some saw *Glory*

and knew better…Confederates, sometimes via the UDC [United Daughters of the Confederacy], had stolen the show, and the Civil War was identified with whites. We had to create something equivalent to that for black people."

Additionally, the museum's location off the standard tourist "beaten path" serves as an attraction for many of the visitors. A white woman and her son visiting the city and the museum from Reading, Pennsylvania told me that they wanted to go to places in D.C. that were "nontraditional." A threesome of Latino graduate students from Texas said that they wanted to have a museum experience that was different from that offered by the institutions that make up the Smithsonian. Another visitor, a schoolteacher, told me that he makes it a point to take a week off every year to see "nonstandard" tourist attractions. There were also several tour groups of African Americans who expressed to me their desire to see the "real D.C."

Finally, place functions as a rhetorical trope with respect to the building that houses the museum. The building was financed by the first chartered African American bank, which was later named the Penny Savings Bank of the True Reformers. The True Reformers was an organization founded by William Brown, a USCT veteran. The building was constructed as a means of presenting "the achievement of the race since the War of Rebellion." Every person involved in the construction was African American, and the Boys Club was the first tenant.

The transformational dynamics of face: Human capital

An underdeveloped aspect of the rhetorical power of museums involves the public faces with which they are associated. Most studies of museums focus on the

more explicitly visible aspects of their messages in the form of artifacts; the persons involved in their functioning are rarely positioned as critical aspects of the visual rhetorical strategy. However, when one considers the rhetorical importance of credibility in other social arenas, such as politics, advertising, and education, it is useful to interrogate its potential with respect to history museums. With respect to museums attempting to subvert dominant historical narratives, a rhetorical strategy engaging credibility, primarily through its attendant trope of identification, is an essential resource. As such, it becomes an even more critical aspect of the museum's ability to revise the landscape.

This rhetorical feature is most striking at the ACWC (Richmond). Alex Wise, Christy Coleman, and John Motley combine highly varied and distinguished backgrounds to serve as the public faces of the museum in the roles of founder, president, and Chairman of the Board, respectively. The lineage of Wise would suggest an orientation toward the status quo when it comes to historical narratives. As was the case with Georgia Governor Barnes in his attempt to advocate changing the state flag, Confederate *bona fides* are often necessary when navigating the political terrain surrounding the opening and early years of a transformational museum. Wise's credibility in this regard is quite compelling. It was his great-great grandfather, as governor of Virginia, who determined that John Brown was mentally competent, and could therefore be hanged upon his conviction after his failed raid on Harper's Ferry in 1859. Known for his attempt to incite an armed insurrection of slaves and free blacks, Brown remains an anti-hero in dominant southern mythology. Thus, though there were doubts at the time with respect to Wise's loyalty to the interests of planter elites, his

condemnation of Brown may be positioned as a sort of redemptive act within southern memory. The construction of a museum, by his descendent, that displays all three perspectives on the war may then be positioned as part of a transformational process. Furthermore, Wise's tenure with the Museum of the Confederacy further strengthens his credibility. The MOC, which was founded in 1896 by prominent society matrons, is seen as one of the premier "shrines" to the Confederacy. One of its most prominent attractions is the Confederate White House, the home of Jefferson Davis. [15] The ACWC and the MOC are "sister" institutions; one museum's phone number ends in 1861, the other, in 1865. This aspect of his background, along with his public service and ancestry, provides the identification and credibility necessary for the critique of dominant history offered by the ACWC.

The current President of the ACWC (Richmond) is Christy Coleman, an African American woman. Of all of the museum officials with whom I spoke, she is the sole subject with a professional background in museum practice. Coleman holds an. M.A. in Museum Studies from Hampton University. She also has an extensive background in the practice of public history, having begun her career performing as a "slave" in Colonial Williamsburg. "I was surly," she told me. "Visitors expected me to be happy and dancing around." Coleman welcomes these opportunities to educate the public, having worked in management positions at the Urban Museum in Baltimore, the Charles H. Wright Museum in Detroit, the Peele Museum, and the H.L.Mencken House. "These opportunities to educate the public…you don't get this in school," she said of

[15] The MOC has its own aspects of a transformational rhetoric. One of the docents at the Confederate White House is Ali Abdur Haymes, an African American military veteran.

her experiences. “None of this was part of the learning when I was growing up. We’ve built a bunch of social, historical narratives.” She views her work with the ACWC as an even greater opportunity within a “different kind of museum” which is striving to grow its African American audience. Her background provides her many important points of identification with African Americans wary about the assumed one-sidedness of Civil war museums: “one of the things intriguing about the Center, I have been asked if being a black woman changes the mission of the center—it does not.”

The Chairman of the Board of the ACWC (Richmond) is John Motley, an African American businessman who lives in Connecticut. Motley began collecting Civil War memorabilia after seeing *Roots,* and became involved with the museum after receiving a cold-call from Wise. His interest in collecting grew out of an intellectual fascination with African American military history he developed while serving in Vietnam, and when he received the call from Wise, had built an extensive collection of lithographs, paintings, weapons, canteens, military order, and other objects. The items in his collection, he told me, are extremely rare. They have been identified as having belonged specifically to black soldiers, and have been lost to history because African Americans have not recognized their value. He joined the museum upon visiting Richmond at Wise’s invitation, and, after meeting with black legislators, donated his entire collection. Motley has delivered lectures on blacks in the Civil War at many African American institutions and social groups, and this exposure, along with his military background, has afforded him significant credibility with African Americans wary of Civil war displays.

The founder of the USNSM (Fredericksburg), L. Douglas Wilder, was the first African American to serve as governor since Reconstruction, and the first *elected* black governor, when he was elected Governor of Virginia in 1989. During his historic run, it was often noted that he was the grandson of slaves. This particular discourse, which is still repeated in references to Wilder twenty years later, situates him as an iconic image of the legacy of slavery and civil rights. He subsequently served as the president of Virginia Union University, an historically black school in Richmond and at the time I spoke with him, was the city's mayor. The symbolic significance of the nation's first elected African American governor founding a museum foregrounding the display of slavery is quite striking, rhetorically. His historic achievements, along with his tenure as the president of a university and mayor of the state capital, are consistent with the mission of the museum, which is a combination of education and public policy. For this reason, he is well positioned as the public face of the first museum which foregrounds the black experience of slavery and its legacy.

Frank Smith, the founder of the AACWM (Washington), has had an extensive career in public service in D.C., and is a veteran of the civil rights movement. It is this background, which connects the Civil War to the civil rights movement, which enables him to construct the crucial connection between the two eras. This connection, he emphasized to me, is essential to stimulating black interest in the Civil War. Through his work within both arenas, Smith has attained significant credibility within a community often wary about Civil War memory. A woman from the Shaw-Cardozo Neighborhood Museum visited the museum and expressed her desire to name him a "local hero."

Amongst these vernacular historians, it is Assistant Director Hari Jones's background that is perhaps the most unconventional. A former intelligence officer in the Marine Corps, Jones holds a bachelor's degree in political science, and a master's in national security studies. He told me that, while in the Marine Corps, he was often accused of having an obsession with the cultural terrain. Eager to write about the story of the USCT, he would visit Civil War trails while on leave from the marines. He said it was what he "needed at the time—'brain food.'" His "obsession" led him to become a professional researcher and consultant specializing in African military traditions and their expression in African American culture. Throughout my discussions with Jones, he emphasized the importance of primary source documents in constructing an accurate history. He has considered it his mission to correct historical inaccuracies both within and outside of the academy, detailing the distortions he has found in neo-Confederate discourse, Hollywood film, professional history, and ethnic studies. "Much of the literature in critical race studies assumes black men's manhood was taken away. The Civil War refutes this," he said. Jones told me he has encountered many "indignant" responses, many involving name-calling. "I've been called "boy," naïve," "intellectual fool," unschooled in the military arts," he told me. "I have [dreadlocks]; they see me as a weed-smokin' rasta boy who has stolen their story." Jones is often called upon to serve as a consultant or panelist at colleges, museums, symposia, and other forums, and has appeared on the History Channel.

Other underlying structures

As I mentioned earlier, there is a third level of meaning in a transformational rhetoric involving these museums. These are the aspects of the persuasive process that

are less visible, but easily accessible pieces of information that carry powerful meaning. Additionally, these aspects, such as financial and source community donors, and others involved in the actual construction of the museums, are significant actors in their capacities as producers of history.

The USNSM (Fredericksburg) has waged a campaign to secure private funding. Using the symbolism invoked by the number 8, which represents slave shackles turned sideways, museum officials launched a campaign to raise funds by asking the public to donate $8 toward its construction. High profile African Americans, such as entertainer Bill Cosby, were part of the fundraising effort. “The money poured in until [Hurricane] Katrina,” Foster told me. “A charter school in Wisconsin [gave] $800; [there was] $888 from another school—[there were] interesting variations of 8.” One major disappointment, according to Foster, was that the corporations that benefited from slavery did not contribute.

Its source community is comprised of a wide diversity of donors who own or have collected artifacts from slavery and the Jim Crow era. Laura Peers and Allison K. Brown (2007: 520) have suggested that the relationships between museums and their source communities have become more two-sided, with donors having become identified as authorities on their own heritage. This, they contend, involves “the sharing of knowledge and power to meet the needs of both parties.” Individual reasons for giving have been varied. However, most of the motivations pointed to a desire to contribute these artifacts for display as a means of actively pushing their interpretation of history. According to Foster, a group of white Episcopalian missionaries in Liberia donated maps and instruments; a couple from Fredericksburg donated racist toys and

cookie jars, an African American woman donated 4000 items collected from flea markets. In making the donation, she stated that she had gotten hooked buying things, spent time talking to students about them, and ultimately decided they were "better off in a museum." One of the more interesting anecdotes Foster recounted concerned the donation of a signed application from the mid-twentieth century for membership in the Ku Klux Klan. The family of the applicant had decided to donate it to the museum upon her death. In accepting the item, museum officials had offered to take the woman's name off of the application, which is a standard practice. The family insisted that the woman's name remain visible on the document, stating that she had been a "mean old lady."

The ACWC (Richmond) has an extensive donor list on display near its exit that includes both individual and institutional benefactors. Coleman indicated to me that many of the foundations museum officials approach for financial support indicate a weariness of Civil War history. The selling point, she suggested, was an emphasis on critical discussions of the war, rather than repetitive displays of the same history featured at the MOC and the countless other Civil War museums in the South. "I say [to them] you're not tired of it, just the same old story," she told me. "This is a new day, a new discussion, a new way of looking at the legacies of the war." Coleman contended that both financial donors and source communities are appreciative of what the museum is attempting to accomplish: "they appreciate what we're doing—what they see as valuable in this social context. Civil War buffs donate because of frustration with [political] rhetoric and say, 'thank you, God, for being more inclusive…I learned so many new things. Thank you.'"

The funding for the AACWM (Washington) was the result of a mixture of public and private funds. One million dollars was provided from Metro, the city's public transportation authority, $800,000 from federal highway funds, and approximately $400,000 from private funds. Of these funds, about $200,000 came from 100 churches, according to Smith. "I always talk about the churches; they're the people you can count on. They will contribute to something they believe in." The remaining $200,000 was raised by the board from individual and corporate sponsors, and local organizations (Fannie Mae, one-time grant). "Some was guilt over leaving out this history."

2.6. Conclusion

In his discussion of the cultural and political need to recover hidden histories through the "speaking of a past which had previously no language, Stuart Hall calls for "a struggle of the margins to come into presentation" (1991). This is the goal of the museums in this study. African American history museums operate as oppositional discourses within well- established racialized regimes of representation embedded in the southern landscape. This position necessitates a set of visual rhetorics extending beyond the exhibits to engage rhetorical strategies common to other forms of discourse, such as speech. For the museums in this study, these rhetorical practices have taken the form of transformational dynamics of space, place, and face. While relative youth of these museums ensures that the success of this strategy remains to be seen, the responses they have evoked thus far suggests that they provide a critical set of first steps in altering the southern landscape to one that is truly representative of the numerous constructions of regional identi

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Chapter Three: Ghosts of Nat Turner: African American Civil War Reenactments and the Performance of Historical Agency, Citizenship, and Masculinity

> [Performance] ruptures and rattles and revises history; it challenges the easy composure of history under the sign of objectivity. It discomposes history as myth, making of it a scene awaiting intervention by the performing subject.
> –Della Pollock, "Making History Go," In *Exceptional Spaces: Essays in Performance and History*, p. 27

3.1 Introduction: An unconventional gathering

The 11th annual reenactment of the battle of Ft. Pocahontas, held in Charles City County, Virginia, displayed most of the elements of a traditional Civil War reenactment: a large, well-maintained battlefield, a sealed-off area under a tent for spectators to gather, converse, and watch the battle, and a small number of vendors selling food, books, t-shirts, and other memorabilia from the event. The scene conveyed a mix of the old and the new that was quite striking, as men, women, and children dressed in antebellum period attire talked on cell phones and sported digital cameras and camcorders. There was a short path leading visitors away from the battlefield toward a small plantation/museum, where a docent casually announced the guided tours taking place every 30 minutes. There was also a long trail leading into the woods beyond the battlefield to the encampment area—the living space where the reenactors congregated before and after the battle, eating hard tack, singing songs, cleaning muskets, and engaging in other acts deemed authentic simulacra of the daily existence of a Civil War soldier.

This reenactment, however, also contained some decidedly *nontraditional* elements. Down the hill from the encampment area, on the north bank of the James River, was a prayer circle made up of approximately 30 African American men and women, all descendants of many of the men who had fought in the battle soon to be

reenacted. Some of them wore t-shirts bearing the names and regiments of their ancestors. To the melodic beat of an African drummer, an elderly black woman, evangelist Wanza Mae Snead, led the prayer:

> We need to get this history into our souls so we can tell our children that these people died for them. That's why they have it so easy. There is blood in this ground. We as a people, we [are] a rock. We need to tell our children. How can we tell our children if we don't know? This is the truth, this is history…we need to know we are a *somebody* because our forefathers fought for us to be somebody. We have lost our heritage, but praise God it's coming back…we can commend our forefathers for what they did for us. They had to take the banner and honor the flag. How come we can't take this heritage and pass it to our children? What happened here…was the beginning of freedom.

These types of activities may seem out of place at an event popularly presumed to be the sole province of conservative white males. More than a century's worth of discourses in novels, journals, film, and television have presented a dominant picture of the Civil War as a battle between northern and southern white men. Until the film *Glory* was released in 1989, most people were not even aware of the fact that black men fought in the Civil War, much less of the existence of a small but growing reenactment community, mainly inspired by the film, dedicated to representing the experiences of the mostly-forgotten 216,000 black men who fought for the Union.[16] Nevertheless, this community is indicative of the changing dynamics of Civil War reenactment as African American men "suit up" and participate in battles as United States Colored Troops (USCT) reenactors.

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[16] See the website of the National Archives It is also estimated that between 60,000 and 93,000 served in the Confederacy, though not in combat roles (a conclusion that remains a source of controversy within the reenactment community).

Black reenactment is a relatively new phenomenon that is emerging among increasing numbers of men and women motivated by a desire to (re)claim memories of slavery and the Civil War; a set of memories perceived by many to be anathema to contemporary African American political, social, and cultural interests.[17] The reenactors see it as their duty to engage these concerns by refocusing discourses of the war onto the struggle for emancipation, thereby repositioning it as the first pivotal battle in the ongoing social, political, and economic struggles of African Americans. Along the same lines, they envision the image of the heroic Civil War soldier as a rebuttal to the stereotypical representations of blacks promulgated by past and contemporary commercial mass media. In working toward these goals, reenactors and their supporters have asserted the relevance of the war in the lives of modern African American subjects through a set of alternative meaning-making practices.

For this reason, the identity work involved in these cultural performances is markedly different from that of white reenactors. Identity work, according to Barbara Ponse (1978: 208), involves the "processes and procedures engaged in by groups designed to effect change in the meanings of particular identities." For African Americans engaged in the work of constructing an identity through Civil War memories, the battle is complicated by the perception of the 19th century past as one in which blacks were victims or objects, rather than subjects with agency over their own lives. In *"Possessed by the Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History,"*

[17] There is a smaller number of women who participate in commemorative activities as civilian reenactors. In fact, a group of women have their own organization, Female Reenactors of Distinction (FREED), which participates in fundraising, museum events, reenactment symposia, and other activities.

heritage studies scholar David Lowenthal (1998) argues that claims of historical identity are largely heritage claims supported by a celebratory memorialism that constructs group identity through the idealization of the past. Identity work for black reenactors, then, involves constructing historical narratives in which a traumatic past is reconstituted as a set of memories perceived as more productive to contemporary circumstances. Black southern subjectivity, particularly that constituted, empowered, and enacted through the construction of Civil War memory, represents a rejection of essentialized notions of black identity, instead constructing a more complicated, decentered, fragmented subjectivity. Essentially, black reenactors see their work as challenging hegemonic assumptions about blackness and destabilizing racialized orthodoxies about the nation's past. To this end, participating in battle reenactments is only part of the work these men perform. In addition to the appearances at parades, roundtables, memorials, and schools that are part and parcel of the cultural activities of reenactors generally, black reenactors also speak at various civic organizations, churches, and prisons. They are highly sought-after lecturers at events during Black History month. One unit in Frankfort, Kentucky, after years of dormancy, was reactivated as both a reenactment and an educational unit (of the Camp Nelson Foundation). Their principal concern, they told me, was in telling the story of the USCT and refuting common myths about the war propagated by white professional historians. As one of the reenactors from this unit declared,

> Most reenactors exist for battle. Our concern is telling the story of the USCT. We resist 'reenactor' and prefer 'living historians.' This is about being a black male and our image. This story is something to be proud of and needs to be told correctly. Getting out on weekends and rolling around in the dirt…is more for whites. Our mission goes beyond that. Some folks

out there don't know. That's what we're here for.

There has been a substantial volume of scholarly literature on Civil War reenactment, typically in the context of larger discussions of southern identity and culture (Kaufman, 2006; Dunning, 2002; Shanks, 2000; Cullen, 1994), patriotism (O'Leary, 1999; Bodnar, 1992), or gender (Young, 1999). In most of these cases, there is an assumed normative white male subject; much less attention has focused on the presence and activities of black men. The new battlefield narratives that have emerged as a result of their participation have afforded opportunities to reassess the cultural work performed by reenactments in general: the valorization of the Confederate soldier both on and off the battlefield invites us to suspend all of our skepticism about the Confederate cause as irrelevant. Likewise, the discursive focus on values such as valor and gallantry, along with the preoccupation with authenticity and the minutiae of battle have shifted the focus away from the issue of slavery and emancipation as causes and results of the war. As the example of the prayer circle at Ft. Pocahontas demonstrates, black men's presence in reenactment has brought race back to the fore.

The enacting of racial identity underscores the complexities of racial/cultural identification. As is the case with reenactments comprised primarily of white men, African American reenactments are simultaneously performances of race, masculinity, citizenship, and historical agency. Detailing the cultural work involved in crafting regional and gender identities from a marginal history and mode of representation teaches us something intriguing about the processes, conditions, and meanings critical to late modern subjectivities more broadly. To this end, I pose the following questions: What cultural work is performed when black men don the (mostly) blue and the gray

and reenact the Civil War? How are discourses of reconciliation, enacted at the end of each battle simulation in the form of salutes to each side and to the mostly white spectators, upended by the presence of black men? How does black engagement with vernacular performances such as battle reenactments construct memory and identity in ways more traditional media forms do not?

In this chapter, my objective is to examine the ways in which African American Civil War reenactors construct southern identity through the performance of masculine historical agency and citizenship. These categories, to which black men's claims have been historically problematic, are intertwined. Cultural citizenship, or belonging, has been discursively constructed through perceptions of group contribution to the ideals of freedom and democracy that form the foundation of notions of "America." Masculine historical agency, in turn, has been constructed through the idealization of the heroic citizen-soldier. I argue that masculine historical agency and citizenship are constructed in black reenactments in two ways. First, through the performance of narratives of black heroism and valor during the war, these men are able to present the forgotten stories of the black men who served the Union cause into the public sphere, utilizing the well-regarded martial frame as a means of constructing an historical black subjectivity. Secondly, by using the masculine body as the site for the making (rather than conveying) of history, they achieve agency through the mode of representation itself. As performances take place between performers, texts, environment, and audience (Schechner, 1985: 113), I examine the interplay of all of these variables in African American reenactment.

I begin with a discussion of the potential for cultural performance as vernacular media through which these men can assert, simultaneously, an identification with Civil War history and a refutation of the dominant images of black masculinity in mainstream media. Secondly, I will describe the changes that have taken place in terms of the narratives presented on the nation's historical battlefields. Texts must be examined within the contexts in which they are used, and the "hallowed ground" upon which reenactments take place are an integral part of each performance. These sacred spaces are hardly neutral territories; they are, rather ideological battlefields upon which memories are constituted, contested, and reified. These new narratives, which present a more inclusive history, provide discursive spaces for African American memories to be performed. Finally, I will discuss, in greater detail, the ways in which the dynamics of these performances are played out in three very different reenactments.

3.2 Cultural Performance as a Technology of Representation and Expression

As is the case with all cultural performances, Civil War reenactment both reflects and negotiates society's social struggles. It has the capacity to link various forms of symbolic action into coherent forms of expression through the invocation of a common affective style, ideological intention, or social function. The intensity of performance has the potential to evoke the most complex human motives in the service of establishing a community and an environment in which the fullest range of motives may simultaneously be enacted and challenged. Thus, far from being mere reflections of "real life" circumstances, performances constitute dynamic moments when social relationships are negotiated and renegotiated, often with significant consequences for

the cultures that produce them (Stanton & Belyea, 2001; Geertz, 2000; MacAloon, 1984; Abrahams, 1977; Turner, 1969).

These dynamics of cultural performance render its expression integral to studies of relations of power. This is especially the case with regard to vernacular expressive practices, which are often performed as means of critically interrogating, and, ultimately, subverting the status quo. Political philosopher Antonio Gramsci suggested that folk rituals possess the capacity to "bring about the birth of a new culture," and therefore "must not be considered an eccentricity, an oddity or a picturesque element, but as something which is very serious and is to be taken seriously" (1999: 362). In discussing the power of ritual to temporarily upend hierarchies of power and reclassify the individual's relationship to society, Anthropologist Victor Turner argued that performances "incite participants to action as well as thought" (1977: 129). Anthropologist/folklorist Richard Bauman (1977) has suggested that it is the potential of performance, as an intense form of language use, to transform social structures that confines performers to the margins of society. This inherent power, he argues, "opens the way to a range of additional considerations concerning the role of the performer in society." In his theoretical examination of the carnivalesque, literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1984) elaborated on the possibilities of carnival, with its liberatory potential, to upend social relations and strengthen forces for change in the non-carnival world. In this formulation, anti-authoritarian impulses emerge as traditions and authority figures are mocked.

The performance of history, in particular, is powerful because it represents an embrace of different ways of knowing, a radical critique of the ways in which

knowledge is organized inside the academy (Conquergood, 2002: 145-6). Stuart Hall (1984: 15) has observed that the past has no meaning in and of itself; only that which is imposed on it by language, by narrative, by discourse. The meaning of the past that is produced thus becomes a matter of representation, which, in turn, must operate within a framework of power. These dynamics render representation itself a form of action. Living history performance is a mode of representation that presents cultural memories in embodied form, entertaining spectators while subverting traditional historical narratives. By shifting the focus to representation, it articulates narratives of social- and power-relations that actually seem to eclipse the history itself.

The history of reenactment suggests it occupies this liminal space between traditional, academic historical production and public history, with more explicit ideological agendas at work. Shortly after the end of Reconstruction, members of the Grand Army of the Republic, an influential Union veterans' lobbying group, staged small reunions and reenactments using National Guard units as Confederates. These rituals, from which African American veterans were largely excluded, were part of a wave of reconciliationist sentiment and heightened ambivalence about race relations. After the turn of the century, amid the changing social milieu spurred by increasing immigration and industrialization, reenactment became an expression of nativist sentiment, as well as an even more significant part of a sectional reconciliation based upon the erasure of race and slavery from memories of the war. Interest in reenactment later declined as concerns about world wars and depression superseded interest in the pageantry associated with reenactments. Contemporary Civil War reenactment emerged in the 1960s as both a celebration of the war's centennial and a response to the social

upheavals then taking place. They have since grown in popularity, with estimates of the number of participants ranging from 20,000 to 40,000 (Cullen, 1995; Stanton & Belyea, 2001). Additionally, contrary to mass-mediated images of reenactments consisting of a bunch of scattered individuals engaging in loosely organized gunplay on the weekends, they are highly hierarchical and organized affairs, with formal chains of command, rules of engagement, and safety regulations. In fact, weapons inspections and artillery drills are often open to the public before battles. Though there may be some exceptions, most reenactors belong to organized units with designated officers, chaplains, and other roles.

As vernacular historians, Civil War reenactors have always operated on the margins of society. Shortly after the first contemporary reenactments were staged during the war's Centennial celebration, Alan Nevins, the second chairman of the Civil War Centennial Commission, dismissed reenactments as "trashily theatrical," and declared that they would proceed further over his dead body. Shortly thereafter, National Park Service director Conrad Wirth sought a reduced role for reenactments in the celebrations, preferring instead to leave history in the hands of trained interpreters who would construct " a dignified and impressive commemoration beyond reproach" (Cullen, 184). These concerns reflect the tensions between professional and amateur history, a tension many reenactors are more than happy to exploit.
Additionally, the festivities often accompanying reenactments, such as parades, balls, and other pageantry, deride the more conservative representations associated with academic history.

These tensions are magnified in black reenactments, as they represent an alternative practice within an alternative practice. Unlike white reenactments, which are

essentially vernacular performances of mainstream history, black reenactments represent critical interrogations of mainstream history. In black reenactment culture, history as a profession is mocked for its erasures of black agency during the war. As one reenactor explained to me, "a lot of noted historians fail to talk about blacks. Shelby Foote and Edwin Bearss [are] very detailed, but won't talk about blacks." Black reenactments thus have the potential to contest "official" history, and, in so doing, inspire thought about the contemporary social, political, and economic circumstances of African Americans.

Lest We Forget: Representation, Subjectivity, and Enactment

On an unseasonably warm December afternoon in downtown Philadelphia, James Beatty, a National Park Service ranger and Civil War reenactor, discussed the content of the presentations he and his fellow reenactors from the 3rd USCT give to school, museum, and prison audiences. "The first thing I tell them," he said, "is don't get your history from Hollywood. [The Hollywood mantra is] when faced with a choice between truth and legend, print the legend." This admonition, borrowed from the John Ford western, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, exemplifies the sentiments of many of the reenactors with whom I spoke and is at the heart of their criticisms of commercial mass media. More importantly, it indexes the sense of identity and agency constructed through the performance of history.

As critical media scholars have noted, commercial mass media are more than mere entertainment; they are sites in which culture and politics are played out on a daily basis. Herman Gray contends that dominant commercial institutions of representation,

such as television, produce and represent the racial order "through complex organization, narration, circulation, and exhibition" (1995: 2). According to bell hooks (1992), the institutionalization of narrow mass media images of blackness is a significant and critical part of a white supremacist agenda heavily invested in the subordination of African Americans. Although African Americans, over the last century, have made notable attempts to construct their own representations through the commercial mass media, structural impediments to access remain a problem (Gandy, 1998). The field of representation is an ongoing source of struggle, with disenfranchised populations subject to racial stereotyping or under-representation. As hooks has observed, one of the ways oppressed people resist these representations is by identifying themselves as subjects, constructing their own identities and history (1989: 43).

Vernacular performance is one of the few media through which black men and women may exercise control over their own representation. Identities are in a constant state of negotiation and renegotiation, and self-representation and self-definition are essential aspects of a group's ability to resist oppression in the social, economic, and political arenas. Expanding Victor Turner's theory of cultural reflexivity, performance theorist E. Patrick Johnson (2001: 11) suggests that the performative sphere represents opportunities for African Americans to activate a politics of agency and subjectivity. He argues that the performance of self represents not merely the construction of identity, but

> It is also a performance of self for the self in a moment of self-reflexivity that has the potential to transform one's view of self in relation to the world. People have a need to exercise control over the production of their images so that they feel empowered. For the disenfranchised, the recognition, construction, and maintenance of self-image and cultural identity

> function to sustain, even when social systems fail to do so. Granted, formations/performances of identity may simply reify oppressive systems, but they may also contest and subvert dominant meaning systems.

Embodied performances have always played a central role in consolidating identities centered on memory, reaffirming a sense of collective identity based on a shared history (Taylor, 2007). Black Civil War reenactments present a particularly provocative mode for the performance of identity because of still-rigid notions regarding ownership of Civil War history: the war itself, the identities and expressive practices it inspires, and the sacred spaces upon which it was waged, are all considered part of the culture of the southern white *Other*. Through reenactment, these forgotten narratives gain fluidity, moving inside and outside black communities. When asked why reenactments offered a more productive venue for the representation of 19th century African American history, many reenactors expressed opinions that pointed to the advantages for both performers and spectators of live performance over traditional mass media. Ricky Davis of the 3rd USCT unit said, "History for most folks is a hard sell. Reenactments are flesh and blood—smacks them in the head…it's fun to see people charged up, saying 'I didn't know that.'" James Carney summed up the objective of his reenactment regiment by quoting Confucius: "'What you hear, you will forget. What you see, you will remember. What you experience, you will understand.' This quote personifies us. We invite audience participation." The men made clear that the availability of the film *Glory* serves as a critical informative and recruiting tool, and that the dominant media are often useful in publicizing their performances. The synergy between commercial media and performance affirms Philip Auslander's (2000) claim

that the televisual shapes the conditions under which performance is perceived. However, it is the features of live enactment that render these activities performances of masculine historical agency and citizenship.

Historical, Performative, and Visual Agency

In his 1928 book, *Meet General Grant,* historian W.E. Woodward asserted that, "the American Negroes are the only people in the history of the world…that ever became free without any effort of their own" (Seraile, 2001: 89). In the nearly two generations that had passed since Lee's surrender at Appomattox, the crucial role of black men in the war had been handily forgotten. The perpetuation of the notion that Africans had contributed nothing to civilization, or to the cultural and democratic ideals upon which it is based, played a critical role in post-Reconstruction white reconciliation, and was/is a critical part of an ideological project heavily invested in marginalizing black men and women from the national community.

Black reenactors see it as their duty to challenge this ideology by highlighting the sacrifices made by black men (and women, as nurses and spies) to the country. Whether the direct motivation in engaging in the hobby was a fascination with the movie *Glory*, the discovery of a USCT ancestor, or the influence of a friend, the men emphasized their desire to tell forgotten stories that would accord all African Americans a sense of historical agency. One reenactor described his interest in the hobby as developing in high school, where he noticed his teachers expressed shock at the notion that blacks had fought in the war. As the only black in his school, he felt it his duty to fell in the missing pieces. "Somebody else wrote our history; we were left out," he said. "That's

why we get the questions we get at reenactments…the ancestors of slaves get to tell their own story. All history is revisionist. We must pay attention to oral history…they've discounted the black soldiers who were there. We need to put our own spin on it." Another reenactor said that, [This is a] story that needs to be told. To me, it's not a hobby, it's a mission to get the story told to as many faces as possible."

Although they see it as their duty to convey these narratives to the general population, they felt more heavily invested in teaching other African Americans about their history. After relaying a story to me about a conversation with an African American historian who had expressed surprise at the revelation that black men had fought in the Civil War, one reenactor told me that the experience "made me realize I needed to keep doing this. You'd be surprised how many of us don't [even] know about *Glory*." Many of the men stressed the importance of a sense of historical agency to present attitudes and behaviors, linking black service and citizenship in the war to contemporary feelings of belonging. As one man at a reenactment in Virginia put it, "young men need to know history. [They] will behave in different ways once they know history. Once you know your ancestors did something, you'll walk a little straighter. You know Lincoln didn't just free us—we were more than just slaves."

Despite many white reenactors' (primarily Confederate) insistence that race plays no part in their activities and, indeed, played no (or an insignificant) part in the Civil War, racial politics are located squarely within the performances, if expressed only through their attempted erasure. I met many white Confederate reenactors who were quite happy to tell me their version of the events that precipitated the war. Though I was encouraged to find that the reconciliationist code phrase "defense of home," and its

inherent suggestion of southern victimhood, was not among their answers, I also noticed a reluctance to place slavery at the center of the conflict. Slavery was *a cause,* but not *the cause,* was the typical response given before the launch into the stock explanations of states' rights and taxation. The greater the black presence at reenactments, the scarcer these explanations became.

In addition to reminding spectators of blacks' historical contributions, the sense of agency extends to the mode of storytelling itself, as performance allows these men to position the body as the site for the performance of historical agency. In *Performing Remains* (2001), Rebecca Schneider takes issue with the tendency of some scholars to assume that historical enactment is transitory, that memory cannot reside in the body and remain there. The motivation of performers such as reenactors, she argues, lies in the preference for bodily enactment cultivated by a distrust of documented, scholarly treatment of history. The body becomes an archive for forgotten histories, a counter-memory.

Through the history they embody, black men have now become the agents of memory in three ways. First, by assuming control over the ways in which these forgotten stories are remembered, they seize performance as one of the few avenues of self-representation. As I have mentioned elsewhere, the film *Glory* was instrumental in presenting the story of the 54th Massachusetts to wide audiences, and was/is the stimulus in bringing many black men into the hobby. However, the desire of the movie's producers to earn maximum profits resulted in several examples of dramatic license with which many reenactors took issue, such as positioning the narrative from the point of view of the unit's white commander, Robert Gould Shaw, altering the

background and privileging the experiences of one black regiment, the 54th Massachusetts, while degrading that of another, the 1st South Carolina, and ending the story with the death of Shaw, when in reality, the unit continued to fight after his demise. Reenactment allows black men to tell their stories on their own terms. A unit in Kentucky made clear to me that, regardless of concerns about historical accuracy, they would not allow white men to join their group as officers. For these men, performance allows them to tell their story on their own terms. Members of another unit explained to me that their activities consisted solely of giving lectures at schools, libraries, museums, and other institutions because they were less interested in ceding any part of the story to white reenactors on the battlefield than they were in getting it out to audiences who needed to hear it. This sentiment was also expressed in the opposition of one man who became interested in reenactment during the war's centennial celebration in the sixties, when it was revived as an expressive practice. He told me that, though he wanted to take part in the commemorative practice then, he had to wait more than twenty years, after *Glory* was released, to find other interested black men to form their own group.

Secondly, a sense of agency derives from black men's uniformed presence on the battlefield, which brings slavery and race to the forefront of Civil War narratives in the eyes of other reenactors and spectators of all races. The presence of USCTs at these events refutes mythological, Lost-Cause narratives about blacks' contentment and passivity in slavery, as well as the widespread perception that blacks fought for the Confederacy, a significant point of contention with black reenactors. Many of the white reenactors with whom I spoke, particularly those who are rebel reenactors, cling steadfastly to the notion that black men did indeed take up arms for the Confederate

cause. Only the rare black Confederate reenactors, who were generally treated as pariahs by the other men, were willing to give this belief any credibility. The rest were, understandably, quite hostile to the notion, and occasionally engaged in friendly verbal skirmishes with Confederate reenactors and spectators over this point. I soon learned that this was an ongoing source of tension at some of the larger reenactments. Before the day's official skirmish began at Olustee, one of the men told me that part of his motivation in participating in reenactments is to question the Confederates about this claim. After the battle, I observed many whites approach the men to ask them about black service to the Confederacy. A common phrase among the black reenactors in response to any question regarding possible black service to the South is "show me the records," meaning that as long as there are no pension records proving black men were paid for their services to the Confederacy, they were laborers rather than soldiers. I watched with interest as the men methodically informed the questioners about the facts of forced black labor during the war, and wondered how differently these questions might have been addressed had the black reenactors not been there.

Finally, black men's uniformed presence presents a unique image of black men off the battlefield. The cultural veneration of the warrior-hero transfers all of the myths, symbols, and ideals of society onto the bodies of men (and a small number of women), both living and dead. Military uniforms connote an image of protection and salvation, which, in the national imaginary, is rarely occupied by black men. Black reenactors perform the cultural work of placing black men into an archetypical category historically reserved for white men. This practice is especially powerful when performed in contexts strikingly anomalous. George Reid of the 127th Ohio Volunteers

(5th USCT) described to me, just before going into "battle" in Wilmington, North Carolina, his habit of venturing into Civil War souvenir shops near the sites of many of the reenactments in full uniform. In discussing the ways in which his appearance presents a rather stark and interesting contrast to the reams of Confederate memorabilia inside the shops, he said that, "We like dispelling [myths] by our own presence. We put on our uniforms and that is the statement—we don't have to *say* anything. I like doing that. I even do it at work." In this case, the form itself has a content. Thus, the subversive potential inherent in embodiment is highly fluid, extending beyond the battlefield into other areas of social life in ways that are useful.

The subjectivity that results from live performance extends to spectators, as well. One of the primary differences between live performance and other forms of representation is the relationship between performers and audiences. Reenactments are structured in such a way that there are no hierarchies between performers and audiences; spectators are invited and encouraged to engage in one-on-one conversations with reenactors both before and after battle simulations. The performer works with an audience that has the same repertory images that he has, and this provides the necessary common experience (Scheub, 1977: 54). Jill Dolan (2005) asserts that performances represent more than just an intersubjective experience between performers and spectators; the very act of viewing a performance can stimulate among audience members as sense of civic participation and belonging. Theater, she says, is a vital part of the public sphere in that it offers a scene for public forum and debate. Performative reenactment is thus a component of critical civic engagement, a "public practice

through which radical democracy might rehearse" (90). Thus, the spectators are also accorded agency in the production of history.

The importance of the audience at reenactments presents a unique challenge for black men, as the spectatorship remains overwhelmingly (98% in the estimation of some reenactors) white. Because attendance at reenactments is generally seen as an educational experience for the men, women, and children who attend them, most spectators, who had no idea blacks participated in the Civil War, don't expect to see them there. The men described the reactions of white spectators as generally positive, with a little bit of surprise and skepticism mixed in. "Glad to see you," "let's talk," "we didn't know," and "you guys didn't do this," were typical responses, according to the men. The reenactors see the events as their chance to educate. The reactions of the white reenactors are similar. At a battle recreation in Florida, a woman describing herself as a "third-generation reenactor," approached the men and told them that because of their presence at these events, she made a trip to the principal's office at her teenage son's school in order to "correct" a history teacher who had told his class that no black men fought in any Civil War battles in Florida. A white male Union reenactor simply told the men, "I didn't see any black guys here last year…happy to see you here. You guys saved our bacon." When I asked a group of black men about the reactions of Confederate reenactors, they replied that they are the most likely group to be unaware of black men's agency in the war: "The 'beer and pretzels group' [of southern whites] most likely to make claims of 'heritage' are the least likely to know about blacks in the Civil War," a Philadelphia reenactor told me.

For black reenactors, the greatest obstacle is engaging potential African American audiences in the performance of memories perceived as traumatic and white-centered, a perception that makes it less likely other blacks will see Civil War battle as a common experience. They offered explanations as to why they felt that to be the case, pointing to the continuing wariness with which African Americans hold these memories. Kendall Reynolds and Fred Moore, both members of the 5th USCT (originally the 127th Ohio Volunteers) lamented the lack of African American interest in their battles. "We ask, 'why are our middle-aged brothers not rallying to this history?' Blacks have issues with Civil War history. We haven't come to terms with slavery," said Reynolds. "Civil War history brings a bad taste to us," added Moore. "When you ask for heroes, they can name jump shots, ipods, etc. But not this."

Most African Americans who do attend reenactments, according to the men, are historians and *Glory* fans, with a few curiosity-seekers mixed in. Aside from these groups, the numbers of interested blacks is very small. While two of the reenactments I attended were centered on black history and therefore drew significant numbers of black visitors, this is not typically the case. Among thousands of attendees at the other reenactments, only a handful of spectators were identifiably African American. A middle-aged black man with dreadlocks attending the Olustee reenactment in Florida told me that he attended the event simply out of curiosity, and, afterwards, was glad he came. "Most people don't know," he said. He added that he had some questions about African Americans' place in Civil War memories: "Where are we? Where do we fit in? I come because I don't know these aspects of history…not much pertaining to us. This is black history month." A reenactor in Kentucky explained that his unit views

increasing black interest in battle simulations as their primary duty, tying increased knowledge of this history to a better contemporary reality. Describing their mission as a "cultural shift," he said that, "blacks have seen reenactments as a negative thing, rather than an educational opportunity…it should be seen as an opportunity for blacks. There are negatives, but blacks should see how these negatives affect the present and keep us at a disadvantage. We should arm ourselves against current policies."

Lack of interest, however, is not the case when it comes to events away from the battlefields.The units are frequently invited to give lectures at schools, juvenile detention centers, museums, and other institutions, and make appearances at Black History Month events and Juneteenth celebrations.[18] Though they did note that they typically encounter wariness about viewing and touching artifacts such as the slave shackles and chains they bring to their presentations, is at these events, they made clear, that they are able to best perform the cultural work of educating black people about one of the most important eras of their history.

We Will Prove Ourselves Men: Black Masculinity and Reenactment

For both blacks and whites, reenactments reflect an understanding of history that is inherently masculine. In this sense, there are many similarities between black and white reenactors. When I inquired about their motivations for engaging in the hobby, many of the responses pointed to such racially neutral attractions as masculine

[18] Juneteenth, also known as Emancipation day, marks the June 19, 1865 date on which the slaves were freed in Texas. Although it originated there, it is formally recognized in 29 states and the District of Columbia, and is typically commemorated with festivals, picnics, symposia, and other events.

camaraderie, playing with guns, and generally participating in a fraternity-like activity. After discussing the advantages in getting kids involved in reenactment as a means of preserving the built environment, a reenactor in Florida put his other motivation for engaging in the hobby in blunt terms: “Let’s face it…I love this shit. I love playing with guns. I love shooting at rebels. It’s a guy thing…it’s male bonding.”

The observation that battle reenactments in general, and Civil War reenactments in particular, are performances of masculine identity has been the subject of much scholarly attention over the last decade. White men who reenact the Civil War on both sides do so for a variety of reasons, but, as research suggests, it is the Confederate side that is more tied to regional identity (Kaufman, 2006; Shanks, 2000; Cullen, 1995). Historians Craig Thompson Friend and Lorri Glover (2004) have argued that hegemonic assumptions of white southern manhood were rooted in ideals of honor, civic identity, and, especially, masterly authority. In short, white southern masculinity is rooted in the Civil War--a new masculine ideal was forged on the battlefields of the Civil War, an ideal predicated, in large part, on the subordination of women and blacks. As Stanton & Belyea (2001) have argued, part of the attraction for white men to reenactment lies in the desire to recover this diminished ideal.

For black reenactors, the practice represents an ideal of masculinity that has been denied them. The discursive construction of Black masculinity is also rooted in slavery and the Civil War, except, of course, as the polar *opposite* of that of white men. Characterizations of black men as docile servants, comical coons, and bestial bucks that were mainstays in southern literature gained widespread currency with the advent of film. In many of the earliest films, variations of the Uncle Tom character depicted black

men as emasculated, submissive victims during slavery (Bogle, 2001; Rocchio, 2000; Guerrero, 1993; Cripps, 1993). In these representations, these men were positioned as objects rather than subjects with agency over their own lives: their primary roles in the war involved serving as Confederate spies, or, more often, in taking care of hearth and home while the "real men" were away fighting the war. While this depiction of black masculinity is subtle and less often utilized today, it is another plantation character that forms a dominant image of contemporary black manhood: that of the bestial black buck. The ongoing representation of black masculinity as hyper-sexual, hyper-violent, and hyper-athletic is rooted in the stereotypical myth of the brutal black rapist that was a common trope in southern mythology, and given widespread currency in the numerous plantation and Civil War films that characterized American cinematic history from its infancy until the 1960s. Indeed, the most notorious of such films, *Birth of a Nation* (1915), in addition to creating the most infamous incarnation of the vicious would-be rapist in the figure of Gus, features a scene in which marauding black soldiers from the 1st South Carolina wreak havoc on the fictional Piedmont and its white citizens.

While these images are rooted in antebellum southern lore and are attributed to black men generally, as literary theorist Riche Richardson (2007) contends, the heart of the pathologies assigned to contemporary black masculinity may be attributed to their association with the South. Extending Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytical theory of abjection, she argues that the framing of the South as the nation's "abjected regional other" has a significant bearing on the formation of gender and racial discourses constructed by both blacks and whites. She discusses the ways in which mass mediated productions such as Spike Lee films and the "dirty South" genre of hip hop have

constructed dominant notions of authentic blackness and masculinity that marginalize the South as a productive location for black subjectivity. In this configuration, southern history presents an emasculating burden on black men.

The performative narratives of black reenactment represent a rejection of these discourses, allowing black men to enter representation occupying one of society's most vaunted identities, that of the valorous citizen-soldier. As is the case with white reenactors, the enactment activities of black men are also tied to southern history and identity; however, ironically, this is constructed through their service to the Union. Rather than the sexual predators from whom white women need to be protected, they are represented as heroic warriors fighting to save for the freedom of their women and children, as well as for the salvation of the Union. The ability to lay claim to then-prevailing notions of manhood was a significant motivation for black men to join the war effort, as the regimental flag of the 127th USCT contained the inscription, "We Will Prove Ourselves Men." Through the performance of masculinity--which is, in and of itself a performance—contemporary reenactors present narratives in which black men evolve from being slaves to being *men*.

Many of the men referenced this possibility when discussing their enthusiasm for taking a weekend away from their families and friends and driving, often for hundreds of miles, to a reenactment. Luther, a self-described entrepreneur and member of a 54th Massachusetts regiment in Chicago, put it this way while relaxing at his campsite in Florida before going into "battle:"

> To me, the Civil War symbolizes the evolving endurance of African American people.When it was all over, they fought and fought valiantly. They were able to take a bullet and die like the white guys. What the Civil War

> symbolizes to me is paying homage to those who did what they didn't have to do. The Civil War would not have been won without the black men. The 54th stood their ground in this battle. Some said, 'I'd rather die fighting and free than live a slave'…the bonding part is not the issue. For two days, you get to leave all the problems of the world behind and give homage to someone else…not letting what they did be in vain.

Moreover, some reenactors expressed the importance of passing the hobby on to the next generation in order to improve their future prospects, in addition to preserving the memories. These sentiments are based upon the perception that a sense of historical agency, along with awareness of the principles associated with heroic masculinity, leads to greater self-esteem and a higher sense of purpose among youth. One reenactor expressed this in blunt terms: "Not having a history and not knowing your place in things creates a psychological vacuum and self-hatred. This leads to gangsterism." Demonstrating exactly what African Americans have accomplished subverts discourses that imply that "you're nothing, you're not a man…[it] rids us of the 'I'm worthless and you're worthless' black-on-black killing. It is our job to set up the next generation. If you listen to clear Channel, Fox, you're not getting it."

This goal has led to several outreach efforts. The 3rd USCT reenactment unit, based in the Philadelphia/Trenton area, travels to schools and community organizations, sponsoring young men in the late-teens and early-twenties by providing funds to purchase uniforms. Some of the men have taken this outreach a bit further, institutionalizing their reenactment activities in the form of after-school youth programs. I saw at least one of these groups at each reenactment I attended. Rob Goldman of the 14th Rhode Island Heavy Artillery (Colored) runs a youth internship program in Providence. I first met him and his cadets at Olustee and encountered them

again at Ft. Pocahontas. The kids, one of whom is female, attend school three days of the week and spend the other two in their internships. The program's focus is on history and historical preservation. Goldman suggested the importance of getting younger men involved in preserving history, reminding me that the average reenactor is 48-55 years old. He also admits that his motivation in this vein is far reaching: "If you don't know your history, you're doomed to repeat it…if we don't get kids involved in preservation, we're gonna lose it. Otherwise, they move into the suburbs, get a car, etc. [This is] my way to get back at America—change society." Art Liggens, whose great-great grandfather fought with the 22nd USCT, and whose teenage son is the drummer in his unit, said that immersion in the hobby, for youth, helps alleviate the peer pressure that typifies the experiences of those in his son's age group. He surmised that, although his son might at some point yield to other youthful temptations, he would eventually get back into reenacting, "like other wholesome things." Liggens, a former marine, leads a reenactment unit of teenage boys who travel to various reenactments and battlefields during the year. At the close of the battle in Virginia where I meet them, they are planning to tour Petersburg Battlefield a short distance away before heading back to New Jersey, where the kids have to return to school the next day.

Dexter Akinsheye of the 54th Massachusetts, Co. B unit in Washington, D.C. founded, along with two other men from his unit, the Marie Reed Cadet Academy in the city. I first met Akinsheye and his young cadets at the Forks Road reenactment in Wilmington, North Carolina, and again at the African American Civil War Museum in Washington. I watched as the highly disciplined boys participated in drills and inspections. In addition to their other scholastic duties, with its emphasis on history, the

primarily black and Latino youths learn leadership, responsibility, and character-building. When I asked Akinsheye to elaborate on what he saw as the connection between these qualities and battle reenactment, he replied that, "I've given them internal ranks'… they say to their peers who are doing something wrong, 'a cadet's not supposed to do this.'"

While most reenactors are middle-aged, there are a few young men engaged in the hobby, often as the result of the influence of an older, influential male figure. There were several father-son dyads among the groups. Adrian Procter, whom I met in North Carolina, told me that he entered the hobby at the suggestion of his mother's boyfriend as a means of staying out of trouble. When I asked the 19-year old what his friends had to say about his activities, he said that they initially found it strange, telling him that he should be doing something more fun, like breaking into houses. He also told me that, eventually, some of them came around and expressed interest in reenacting, but refused to wear the clothes.

The younger reenactors also seemed more willing to galvanize, or cross over, which in reenactment parlance is switching over to the other side. This does not suggest ambivalence about the role of race in the war or its contemporary enactment, but rather a more flexible set of values that often characterize youthfulness in other areas of social life. As one 20-something reenactor told me in Florida, "I have no problem playing Confederates. I have a Confederate uniform." Another young reenactor in Kentucky shared the sentiment:

> There's another side to the Confederate black reenactment side. The 4th Kentucky has asked me to help them out occasionally. So if you see this [black Confederate reenactors] it could be blacks dressing out with them. Some say

> 'I wouldn't do that." "There shouldn't be a negative stigma to [crossing over]. Crossing depends on why you do the reenactment.

We had to fight for the right to fight: Citizenship through performance

The 1944 war propaganda film, *The Negro Soldier*, was produced with the goal of urging World War II-era African American audiences to support the war, suggesting the importance of their particular stake in democracy. It was eventually decided to accord the film wide release, as its nationalistic narrative was thought to offer a productive message to the general public. Through a combination of dramatization and file footage, the film details the history of black participation in wartime battles, from Crispus Attucks in the Revolutionary War, to the multitude of brave soldiers then fighting overseas. Conspicuously absent from the narrative is any complex rendering of the Civil War. While it is mentioned, the film simply cuts to an obligatory shot of the Lincoln Memorial for a few seconds before moving on the Spanish-American War. Given the fact that the central argument of the film is that freedom for blacks was their "reward" for their history of wartime service against the British, Spanish, and Germans, this erasure is particularly striking.[19] Whether the motivation for this erasure may be attributed to sensitivities about featuring civil war in the midst of a campaign directed toward national unity, or some other factor, its effect, in the middle of African

[19] It is also interesting to note that a similar film in the series, *The American Soldier*, features clips showcasing the bravery of "American" soldiers from all of the nation's previous wars. All of the soldiers in this film are white, thereby implying that "Negro" and "American" are mutually-exclusive identities.

Americans' "Double V" campaign, obscures the role of the Civil War in notions of black belonging, inclusion, and obligation.

Black men's presence in reenactment reminds us of the contributions of African Americans to the country's professed ideals of freedom in democracy. As many reenactors reminded me, these men fought not only for the emancipation of the enslaved, but also to save the Union. One of the greatest ironies inherent in these performances for African Americans is their use of southern history to assert citizenship of both the South and the nation: while whites use the performance of southern identity to mark difference from national identity, blacks use the same performances to lay claim to a national identity. Military duty confers upon the historical subject an added degree of civic virtue. As the threatened boycott of the Ken Burns' *The War* in 2007 by a coalition of Latino veterans groups and community leaders demonstrates, media productions which minimize the societal contributions of marginalized groups represent dominant discourses against which social action may take place.

For the black men who fought in the Civil War, many of whom were former slaves, heroism and valor in battle presented their best chance of becoming—becoming men, citizens, and eventually, historical actors through idealized citizenship and masculinity. During the war, Frederick Douglass, whose two sons later served with the 54th Massachusetts, understood the importance of service to the republic. In a March 3, 1863 editorial, "Men of Color, to Arms," he urged black men to enlist, conflating service with emancipation and full citizenship rights: "Once let the black man get upon his person the brass letters, U.S., let him get an eagle on his button, and a musket on his

shoulder, and bullets in his pockets, and there is no power on Earth which can deny that he has earned the right to citizenship in the U.S."[20]

Initially, there was tremendous resistance in the South to the idea of conscripting the substantial population of free black men and slaves. Southern whites were terrified at the prospect of armed black men, not least because it conjured up images of the infamous slave insurrectionist Nat Turner. A more important objection was raised on the grounds that the idea of black men fighting in the war undermined the ideological justification for slavery. As Howell Cobb, the former governor of Georgia remarked, "The day we make soldiers of them is the beginning of the end of the revolution. If slaves make good soldiers, our whole theory of slavery is wrong."[21] In opposing a bill repealing restrictions on the bearing of arms by black men, Senator Robert M. Hunter of North Carolina argued that the bill was an admission that slavery had been wrong from the beginning, and could lead to an unimaginable slippery slope: "If we could make them soldiers, the condition of the soldier being socially equal to any other in society, we could make them officers, perhaps, to command white men" (Jordan, 1995: 237). Moreover, it was thought that black men were simply incapable of courageous war combat, as *inferior* beings made *inferior* soldiers (Levine, 2006: 2001). By 1864, the Confederacy, in dire straits, began to seriously consider the conscription of black men. However, by that time, during the spring of 1865, the war was about to come to its fateful close.

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[20] See the National Archives at http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/blacks_civil_war
[21] See the "We Will Prove Ourselves Men" lithograph at the Library of Congress, and at the American Civil War Center in Richmond, Virginia.

The situation in the North was not much better. It was the desperation of the federal forces, after it had sustained heavy losses, which finally prompted the Union to formally allow black men to serve, in 1863. Black men had been serving informally since 1862, beginning as contraband, and there was tremendous resistance in the North, as well. The USCT initially received lower pay than their white counterparts, and the other rewards for meritorious service extended to black men were fraught with conditions, if not denied outright. For example, in 1864, Union General Benjamin F. Butler was so impressed with the service of the 300 black troops under his command at the battles of Ft. Harrison and Ft. Gilmer that he awarded them the U.S. Civil War Colored Troops Medal, a special medal commissioned for them. However, the medal had no official status, and the recipients were not allowed to wear them on their uniforms.[22] After the war, many black veterans returned to the South, working with the Freedman's Bureau and other agencies to implement the rights their service had helped secure.

Contemporary reenactment offers opportunities to highlight this history. As was the case with their 19th century forebears, black reenactors are fighting to be seen as belonging in a society that has often, with the help of dominant media institutions, represented them as societal problems. The mimetic nature of reenactment fosters a deeper appreciation for what the USCT accomplished. Additionally, they are using their bodies to exhibit what Kirk Fuoss (1998: 106) refers to as demonstrative performances, which operate in the fashion of the "how-to" and the exemplary. Through the

[22] See "U.S. Civil War Colored Troops Medal" description at the National Museum of American History at www.americanhistory.si.edu/collections/object.cfm?key=35&objkey=184.

occupation and performance of the idealized citizen-soldier, reenactors undermine discourses positioning black masculinity as outside of an in opposition to that associated with ideal citizenship. At one of their group meetings in Kentucky, reenactors suggested to me that the enthusiastic acceptance they receive at battle simulations is due, in part, to their mastery of the artillery process. “We are held up often as the example of how it should be done,” one told me. “People are willing to be educated” In explaining his attraction to the hobby, a reenactor in Florida put it this was: “It’s about doing something others can’t do. I can load and fire an 1861 Springfield [rifle]”

3.3 Hallowed ground: The National Park Service and new battlefield narratives

America’s battlefields are simultaneously sacred spaces and places. They are sacred spaces in the sense that they are the scenes of great violence, sacrifice, death, and destruction; a patient and determined search can still yield shell casings, bullets, and bone fragments from wars waged more than a century ago.[23] After battles were fought, makeshift funerals were often conducted right on the spot where the dead had fallen—many Civil War battlefields contain small or large cemeteries with stone records of those who gave their lives. They are also sacred places in the sense that they signify the history that constitutes a significant part of group identities, and, to an even greater extent, national identity and heritage.

[23] There is a rather significant community of individual collectors of these items; they can also be seen on display in museums and for sale in gift shops, with prices determined by, among other things, which side used them, whether or not they were spent, the type of gun from which they were fired, and their present condition.

David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal (1995: 6) cite Levi-Strauss's contention that the value of the sacred is itself empty of meaning and therefore susceptible to the reception of any meaning whatsoever, in suggesting that consecration is "part of the cultural work of sacralizing space, time, persons, and social relations." Geographer David Harvey has referred to this practice as the "aestheticization of politics…in which appeal to the mythology of place and person has a strong role to play" (Harvey, 1989: 209, quoted in Chidester & Linenthal, 7). This highly subjective process of imparting meaning to geography renders the nation's battlefields places and spaces upon which social relations are played out.

The construction of discursive relationships among place, time, and persons as it is played out on Civil War battlefields began even before the war's end, with Lincoln's address at Gettysburg on November 19, 1863. Declaring that the sanctification of the field had been completed by the heroic actions of the soldiers, Lincoln suggested that the living could not further "consecrate" nor "hallow" the ground, as "the brave men, living and dead, who struggled here have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract" (Linenthal, 1993: 89). This declaration of the ground as hallowed, and later, the valorization of the heroic Civil War soldier that was a part of the culture of reconciliation, laid the foundation for the designation of battlefields as sacred spaces. At the same time the discursive construction of these historic landscapes as hallowed was taking place, another critical development, battlefield preservation, was initiated. The project of constructing Civil War memory through battlefield preservation began during the war, with the erections of monuments on the fields at Manassas, Stones River, and Vicksburg. Later, in 1864, the battlefield at Gettysburg was designated as federal land

by the Department of the Interior, of which the National Park Service is a part. Today, a slight majority of battlefields are maintained by the National Park Service, supplemented by state agencies, private interests, or a combination of all three (53%), with the rest controlled exclusively by private interests.[24] Both of these factors--the perception of battlefields as sacred spaces, and the control of historic sites by state and federal agencies, are implicated in the construction of the new battlefield narratives reenactors perform.

There are very few sacred spaces so closed as to disallow the potential for what Chidester and Linenthal refer to as "counter-maneuvers of resistance and recovery" (26). What one sees and hears on the battlefield during a reenactment, or learns during on-site tours of the grounds and the visitors centers, is the result of a process of negotiation, as individuals and groups seek to present complex events visually (Linenthal, 2006: 69). For the nation's Civil War battlefields, such a process was set in motion with an act of Congress in 1989. Through legislation affecting park boundaries at Fredericksburg and Spotslyvania County battlefields, Congress inserted language specifically instructing the Secretary of the Interior to interpret the parks "in the larger context of the Civil War and American history, including the causes and the consequences of the Civil War and including the effects of the war on all the American people, especially on the American South" (Pitcaithley, 2006: 172). This was followed by similar legislation regarding the interpretations at Gettysburg and Vicksburg. The move had followed decades of work by Confederate heritage groups, such as the Sons

[24] Please see the website of the National Park Service at http://www.nps.gov/history/hps/abpp/battles/tvii.htm#sites.

of Confederate Veterans, and, especially, the Daughters of the Confederacy, to inscribe Lost Cause-type monuments to the Old South, with their elision of slavery and race, on public lands across the southern landscape. The result of this act, which was vehemently opposed by these groups, was the inclusion of African Americans memories within these sacred spaces. The expansion of historical interpretation allows us to consider the production of *communitas* on the battlefield, and to propose alternative frameworks through which we may view the new narratives.

Communitas on the battlefield

One of the more significant aspects of battle reenactment is the notion that the performances are staged, in part, to pay homage to the men, black as well as white, who died on the battlefield. Victor Turner (1969: 96) has proposed the idea of communitas in rituals as a "moment in and out of time" of a "social bond, in and outside of the secular social structure" which reveals "the recognition of a generalized social bond." As Terence Turner put it, "the basic principle of the effectiveness of ritual action…is its quality as a model of embodiment of the hierarchical relationship between a conflicted or ambiguous set of relations and some higher-level principle that serves, at least for ritual purposes, as its generative mechanism or transcendental ground." (Turner, 1977; MacAloon, 1984). The "transcendental ground," in this case, is the notion that "our" ancestors gave their lives for the cause of freedom. The comradeship evinced by the idea of fighting for a "cause" occurs between black men and white men, as well as amongst black and white men. Differences based on race, geography, socioeconomic status, and religious affiliation are all subsumed under the sense of communal identity.

As the sacred space upon which this sacrifice was made, the battlefield provides fertile terrain for social solidarity.

In addition to the masculine camaraderie witnessed on and off the battlefield, this solidarity can be seen in the reverence given the ground upon which the battles take place. Given the racial discourses underlying the history embedded in the public memories of the Civil War, one is tempted to believe that the presence of black men in reenactment renders such pronouncements of "hallowed ground" as regressive and antiquated. On the contrary, it has opened up a discursive space for black men to articulate those very same claims. Many reenactors with whom I spoke appropriated the language of "hallowed ground" when discussing their love of the hobby. As one reenactor in Virginia told me, "I love being on the hallowed ground where your ancestors were." Another told me that part of his attraction to reenacting involved an interest in the paranormal. The spirits of the dead on the battlefield, he told me, draw him to the hobby. Additionally, the prayer circle at Ft. Pocahontas suggests spectators are drawn for the same reason. One visitor there, who has written a book on blacks in the Civil War, told me he sees Ft. Pocahontas and other sites as the "hallowed ground upon which freedom was won."

The veneration of battlefields is also reflected in the preservation activities of both black and white reenactors. As centuries-old sacred spaces in the midst of an increasingly modernizing and globalizing South, battlefields also represent cultural clashes between the old and the new. The 1960s ushered in increasing pressures for the conversion of these lands to "higher density uses" such as parking lots and housing complexes. African American men have answered calls to work to help keep these

places free from encroaching modernization. Several months after first meeting him at the Forks Road reenactment in North Carolina, I contacted George Reid of the 54th Massachusetts, in Washington, D.C. He informed me that he, along with other members from his unit, were preparing to travel to Morris Island, South Carolina to attend the annual memorial to the fallen USCTs and to protest the proposed residential development of the site at Battery Wagner.[25] "This is something we have to do," he told me. "Our ancestors shed their blood there. It is hallowed ground. It is our job to honor their sacrifice by protecting the land."

Alternative frameworks

The changing narratives now presented on the nation's Civil war battlefields allow us to propose alternative frameworks through which we may analyze battle reenactments. All aspects of battlefields are saturated with meaning, even those not directly visible. The expanded history presented allows us to more clearly see the ways in which the entire tourist experience, from guided tours to gift shops on battlefield sites, constructs the way we remember the war. For example, the visitors centers on these sites are saturated with meaning; they inform us as to what aspects of history are considered important, as well as which aspects are considered unimportant. One can get a clear picture of this by perusing the gift shops and watching the short films describing the battle that are typically shown inside the small theaters located in the centers.

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[25] The assault at Battery Wagner, which was led by the 54th Massachusetts on July 11, 1863, is considered by many reenactors to have been one of the crucial battles in which USCT had to prove their mettle. It is also the battle in which Robert Gould Shaw, the commander of the 54th, was killed.

We can also take into account the ways in location and ownership, as well as history, influence the narratives presented during reenactments. The Petersburg National Battlefield presents a typical example. The site is located in Petersburg, Virginia, a town that is part of the Richmond Metropolitan area, is home of the historically-black Virginia State University, and has a local population that is nearly 80% African American. The Siege of Petersburg was a decisive and pivotal Union victory. The battlefield is maintained by the National Park Service, and thus falls within the purview of the legislation directing the presentation of an expanded history. The gift shop features books, toys, and other souvenirs detailing the Confederate, Union, and African American perspective on the war. *Battle Cry of Freedom*, by James McPherson, and *Uncommon Valor*, by Melvin Claxton and Mark Puls, as well as *Life on a Plantation*, a children's book about slavery, are some notable examples. The film shown inside the media room prominently featured the contributions of the USCT in the battle—what was most striking here was their representation as "typical" Union soldiers.

Nathaniel Walker has been a ranger here for seven years. Originally from Petersburg, he has just completed his B.A. in historic preservation at Mary Washington College, and will begin an M.A. program in Public History at the University of North Carolina-Greensboro in the fall. In discussing the changes that have taken place in battlefield interpretation during the last few years, he tells me that there is currently an even greater push within localities, states, and the NPS to preserve battlefields that present a wider history. Most of the people who visit the park are middle-aged whites; the few blacks who tour the site are soldiers from nearby Ft. Lee. The management at

the battlefield hopes to change that. Because the black presence in the Battle of the Crater, as the conflict is often called, was so significant, he says the management plan provides for the eventual inclusion of narratives detailing the work of African American civilian and supply efforts. Walker, who is a USCT reenactor at Petersburg, as well as civilian reenactor at other battles (often playing a "contraband" and/or "slave"), tells me that he often hears blacks complain that, "That's not my history, that's *their* history." Yet, he says, "blacks considered themselves American—this is American history…to be more inclusive, we present the history to everyone…there's no way this can just be on segment of the population and history."

The national battlefield park at Lookout Mountain provides a striking contrast. The surrounding area of Chattanooga, Tennessee, is larger than Petersburg, and has a much smaller—though not insubstantial at 36%--black population. Though the battle there represented a Union victory, there were no USCT troops involved. While this would seem to justify the lack of narratives about black service in the Civil War, the absence of slavery as a cause is also missing. The engaging guided presentation of the battle focused solely on the mechanics of the armed conflict. Upon entering the visitor's center, I was confronted with a deluge of Confederate memorabilia, from bumper stickers and mugs to hats, license plates, paper dolls, and coloring books. There were no artifacts suggesting any kind of Union presence to be found. This site appeared to represent more of the traditional representation of Civil War history.

These are but two examples of the contrasts between the traditional and expanded presentations at the battlefield parks. I found many of these dynamics present at reenactments, with two significant factors determining the narratives, as well as the

tenor of the celebrations. The first factor involves the historic significance of the battle. The Park Service has an elaborate classification scheme that ranks each battle in terms of its significance. "Class A and B" battles represent the "principal strategic operations of the war," while "Class C & D" battles were of "limited tactical objectives of enforcement and obligation"[26] With a few exceptions, most battles involving USCT were "Class C or D." These battlefields were most likely to be owned by private interests, and to stage reenactments less geared toward pageantry and more geared toward education. These features resulted in presentations more likely to highlight black military and civilian involvement in the war.

The second factor involves the history of the battle, specifically that concerned with victory or defeat. Civil War reenactments are, above all, tourist attractions, and, as in the case of organized sports, most spectators want to be on the "winning team." This is particularly the case in rural pockets of the Deep South, where a regional identity heavily invested in Confederate nostalgia is very strong. I first noticed this tendency while attending the reenactment at Olustee, a "Class B" battle which represented a crucial Confederate victory. The battle simulation capped an entire week of celebratory festivities, and was generally marked by a sporting event-like atmosphere, with the audience in stands, on their favored sides, cheering as "their" team "scored a victory." I couldn't help but feel that I was, once again, an undergraduate during homecoming week. Forks Road and Ft. Pocahontas, as representations of "Class D" Union victories on Confederate soil, were much more low-key affairs. Perhaps most interestingly, although Ft. Pocahontas represented a decisive Union victory, the desire of the private

[26] See the Civil War Sites Advisory Commission Report on the Nation's Civil War battlefields.

owner to turn a profit on the annual reenactment resulted in a presentation in which the South "won" on Saturday, while the Union won on Sunday. In the final section, I will explore how these dynamics played out in these reenactments.

3.4 Hardtack, hoopskirts, and hybridity at Olustee, Forks Road, and Ft. Pocahontas

After a long, productive weekend of watching battles, perusing sutlers' wares, and speaking with reenactors, vendors, and spectators, at the 30th annual festival/reenactment of the Battle of Olustee, I returned to my car to find a flyer on the windshield. After noticing the same flyer placed under the windshield wipers of every car parked along the rural road across the street from the battlefield, I picked it up, relieved that it wasn't a parking ticket. It was from the League of the South.[27] Besides stating the group's primary aim to "advance the cultural, social, economic, and political well-being and independence of the Southern people by all honorable means," the flyer lists the irrelevance of the U.S. Constitution, the need to control both legal and illegal immigration, and the devolution of states' rights as reasons why "*Home Rule for Florida and the South is Necessary.*" The assumptions underlying the language in the flyer, along with its distribution, underscore the tensions between the new historical narratives presented on the battlefield and the dominant history presented through more traditional media, including film, art, monuments, and other artifacts. More importantly,

[27] The League of the South, founded in 1994 by Michael Hill, a former college professor, is a self-proclaimed "southern nationalist" organization. Leaders of the organization have produced written material and made numerous public pronouncements attempting to erase slavery as a cause of the war. It is listed by the Southern Poverty Law Center as a neo-Confederate hate group.

it served as a reminder of the tensions that arise when narratives of the "Old" South and the "New" South come together on the battlefield.

The juxtaposition of the differing perspectives on display at Olustee was quite striking. Every February, a week of festivities in the nearby town of Lake City, including craft shows, dances, parades, and a Miss Olustee pageant, culminates in weekend combat on the battlefield, which is managed jointly by the Florida Park Service and the U.S.D.A. Forest Service. There is an overriding concern with "authenticity," as I learned when I pull out my laptop in order to recharge the battery in my digital camera. "Young lady, what's that contraption you got there?" a Union reenactor, walking through the woods about 30 yards away, asked me. The signature event, besides the battle, was an all-white ball on held Saturday night. At first glance, the scene appeared to conform to media-fed stereotypes of Civil War reenactments. However**,** because three black regiments, the 8th and 35th USCT, and the 54th Massachusetts, fought in the battle, the otherwise traditional tenor of the festival has been disrupted.

Mary Fears is a retired educator, filmmaker, and civilian reenactor. Every year, she, her husband, and their two sons drive their RV from Orlando to Olustee to spend the weekend educating other reenactors and spectators about the African American presence in the war. She and her group are allotted an hour's worth of space in the program to discuss the history of black involvement in the war as contrabands,[28]

[28] The term "contraband" is used to designate the slaves and freedmen who fled to the Union to escape slavery and impressment. Union General Benjamin Butler, in refusing to return them to the South, declared them "contrabands of war," coined the term. Some contrabands eventually became USCT.

soldiers, servants, and spies. I watched as her group finished their presentation, left the stage, and then mingled with a steady stream of visitors eager to learn more about black service in the war. Her older son, perhaps the most recognizable figure at the festival as "Frederick Douglass," appeared to be a crowd favorite. Her display tent, which featured her books on black reenacting, a poster describing little-known facts about slavery, and various slave objects, wass one of the more popular attractions. I watched as a constant flow of visitors stopped by to peruse the artifacts and ask questions. "Many of the black men have stopped coming to Olustee," she told me. "For the last few years, they have gone to Wilson's Wharf (Ft. Pocahontas) instead." When I asked why, she told me that the environment here had gotten a bit less welcoming over the years. Several yards away, in the sutler's area, items of a different stripe were on display: whips, miniature Confederate battle flags, pro-Confederate books, and other artifacts more reminiscent of the idealized Old South were being sold.

The demographics of the spectatorship reflected these dynamics. The standing-room only crowd was herded onto a set of bleachers, which overflowed long before the battle began. Though the Union maintained a heavy presence among the fans, it was clearly outnumbered. A group of pre-teen boys seated behind me all registered agreement as one remarked, "I don't really care about this North-South stuff. I just want to see people die." They appeared to be in the minority, as the cheers and shouts from the crowd, and the ubiquitous presence of the Confederate battle flag, signaled a deeper investment in the outcome for many. As the battle is waged, a chorus of whoops and hollers issues from the stands when the rebels, after twenty minutes or so of pummeling by the Union forces, regroup and start advancing. "Here come the Johnnies," exclaimed

the woman sitting next to me, as the Confederate reenactors drove the Union men across the filed. At the close of the battle, both sides saluted each other and the audience in a discourse of reconciliation typically performed at reenactments. There were only a handful of African Americans in the stand. I appeared to be somewhat of a curiosity, as people inquired, in polite and tactful ways, as to why I was there. After explaining that no, I was not a schoolteacher, I realized that what they were really asking was: what could *you* possibly be getting out of all this?

The answer to the question was more apparent in the hybridity at the Forks Road Reenactment. The battle of Forks Road, along with Ft. Fisher, involved the participation of approximately 1600 men from 5 USCT units.[29] This reenactment, alternately referred to as the battle of Wilmington, is a much more low-key affair, with a battlefield that is now part of the grounds of the Cameron Art Museum. As a simulation of a "Class D" battle, it draws a much smaller number of reenactors and spectators, which is in keeping with its mission to be more of a cultural heritage conference than a staged tourist event. There is no sutler's area, nor are there any vendors selling food. There was no huge tent for taking black-and-white pictures in period clothing. There was no area for couples to renew their wedding vows while wearing period attire. Compared to the crowd-centered theatrics at Olustee, this battle was more focused on education, as the reenactment is part of a USCT Symposium and Living History Weekend. In fact, the state of North Carolina awards teachers continuing education credits for attending the symposia throughout the weekend.

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[29] See "The Stonewall of Forks Road" article on the Cape Fear Historical Society website at www.cfhi.net/TheBattleofForksRoad.php.

Upon arriving at Forks Road, the weekend after the spectacle at Olustee, I am surprised to see not a battlefield, but a modern museum surrounded by bare trees and newly-paved roads. As I pulled into the parking lot, I noticed a group of USCT reenactors standing at the edge. I recognized some of them from Olustee, as well as from interviews I had conducted in Kentucky the month before. When I inquired as to exactly *where* the battlefield was, one of the men pointed to a grove of trees just beyond where we are standing. Noticing my incredulous look, he said, "yeah…that's it." Aside from the relatively fewer encampments, there was nothing about this scene that suggested a battle was about to take place. I realized then that this was a reenactment of a much different sort.

The theme of this year's event is *Earning the Right to Citizenship IV.* Although a slight majority of the reenactors were white, the weekend was focused mostly on the contributions of the USCT. As is the case with conventional reenactments, there were children's activities, battleground tours, and a period dance. Concerns about authenticity were supplanted by educational objectives, as many of the reenactors spent the night in a local hotel booked for them for the event, rather than camp outside in the cold February rain. Before the battles on Saturday and Sunday, we were treated to academic symposia entitled, *The Underground Railroad and Frederick Douglass, The Black Spy Network* (featuring a reenactor as "Harriet Tubman"), and *Name Changing and USCT Genealogy Research*. On Sunday morning, there were church services for reenactors and spectators, and, afterward, William B. Gould IV, author of *Diary of a Contraband*, discussed the book about his ancestor who escaped slavery to join the Navy. In another workshop, *Marketing African American History and Culture*, a

moderator discussed the challenges in promoting this era of African American history. Later, I learned that past reenactments included a panel discussion on the controversies over the notion of "Black Confederates," with scholars explaining the differences between "man-servants" and "weapon-equipped soldiers." I couldn't help but think about how useful such a formal discussion would have been at Olustee.

In contrast to Olustee, there was a much smaller crowd, with a substantial number of African American visitors at the symposia and, especially, the battle reenactment. Many of the attendees were children from area schools accompanied by their parents. Event organizers were working in conjunction with the State Board of Education to provide the state's teachers with continuing education units for attending the symposia; the teachers, in turn, had encouraged their students to attend, as well. Of all the reenactments I attended, the Forks Road experience, with its focus on educating the public about the little-known service of the USCT, best illustrated the potential for hybridity at these events to transform these performances from racialized spectacle to pedagogical event.

The reenactment of the battle of Ft. Pocahontas, also known as Wilson's Wharf, was a hybrid of Olustee and Forks Road. It was more focused on the actual battle simulation, as Olustee had been, yet it was centered on the USCT troops, as Forks Road had been. Located in Charles City County, Virginia, the battlefield is owned by Harrison Tyler, the grandson of John Tyler, the 10th U.S. President. Tyler, who lives nearby in Sherwood Forest Plantation, bought and developed the land in 1996; this reenactment represented the tenth year the battle has been staged. He was stationed at the entrance, under a tent, and, along with his son and daughter-in-law, collected the

admission fee and issued programs of the day's events. When I told them I was there to collect data for my dissertation, they were excited at the prospect of someone conducting scholarly research on black service in the Civil War.

USCT soldiers who, on the site in May of 1864, later engaged in their first major clash with Lee's Army of Northern Virginia, built the earthen fort that is part of the battlefield. Prior to this battle, it was thought that black soldiers would retreat, or otherwise prove ineffective in combat. Thus, Ft. Pocahontas proved to be one of the battles in which the colored troops were called upon to prove their mettle. With the help of the colored troops, the Confederate army was defeated. For this reason, it represents an important battle for black reenactors. This event represents the battle to which the largest numbers of black reenactors from the east coast travel, including a unit I had met at Olustee a few months earlier. It is regularly hosted by the 38th USCT, a local unit from Richmond.

The most distinctive feature of this reenactment was the audience. A slight majority of the spectators at Ft. Pocahontas are African American. In addition to the men, women, and children from the nearby cities of Richmond and Williamsburg, there was a group bused in from Norfolk, approximately 90 miles away. They are the Bells Mill Historical Research and Restoration Society, a group of USCT descendants. All of them were wearing t-shirts inscribed with the words, *We Are the Proud Descendants and Relatives of Afro-Virginian Union Army Civil War Patriot Heroes Who Fought at the Battles of…* Many of the shirts bore the names of their ancestors who fought at Ft. Pocahontas. The head curator of the society, Dr. E. Curtis Alexander, delivered a lecture on the first day of the reenactment weekend. Afterward, he told me that this battle is

marginalized in history for "obvious reasons," and that "America" truly began with Lee's surrender at Appomattox. "This is marginal history," he said. "We [African Americans] are history."

After the completion of the prayer circle, I asked several visitors about their motivation for attending the reenactment. One middle-aged man told me that he had become interested in the Buffalo Soldiers while serving in the military.[30] This interest led him to find out more about the USCT. One man became interested after he noticed the graves of thirteen USCT in the cemetery of the church of which he is the pastor, and decided to learn more about their lives, as well as the lives and experiences of other colored troops. A married couple said that they were here as part of a larger genealogical project in which they were seeking any USCT ancestors they may have. These responses reveal the potential for reenactments to become stimuli for blacks to rediscover not only a marginalized African American history, but to connect with their own personal histories. At the end of the battle, before the customary salute each side pays to each other and the spectators, an African American woman from the Contraband Society sang "Amazing Grace."

3.5 Conclusion

African American Civil War reenactment are, simultaneously, performances of masculinity, citizenship, and historical agency. As such, they serve the primary purpose of broadening the public sphere by educating spectators about the little-known facts of

[30] The Buffalo Soldiers were an army unit of USCT veterans, freedmen, and former slaves who served in the west during the peacetime period after the Civil War. Many would later serve in the Spanish-American war.

black agency in the nation's most divisive and defining conflict. They intervene in the reproduction of "official" history, as well as the "unofficial" history constructed through film, novels, and other popular cultural productions, while reminding us that history is not composed of a set of objective facts, but rather multiple interpretations of subjective "truths." The presence of black men on the battlefield offers opportunities for the performative reconstitution of dominant memories of the war from a conflict over "states' rights" to a battle for emancipation. Moreover, the appropriation of a mode of performance more commonly associated with conservative white masculinity enables black men to express their sense of historical agency within, rather than outside of, dominant notions of masculinity.

As the sesquicentennial of the Civil War approaches, the new, more balanced narratives offered through reenactment will be constructed on and off the battlefields. In contrast to the centennial festivities in the 1960s, the battle simulations that will occur will not be forms of resistance to societal transformations, but rather a result of those changes. The commemorative activities will feature discourses about history that go beyond military strategy to include the causes, and, perhaps more importantly, the legacy of the war.

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Chapter Four: From Old South to New Media: Museum Informatics, Narrative, and the Production of History

4.1 Introduction: A Memoryscape in Cyberspace

The narrative begins with a photograph of six people standing in a beautifully decorated parlor at Mount Vernon on December 14, 1999. The occasion, according to the storyteller, was the ritual commemoration of the evening of the death of George Washington. Present at the ceremony were descendents of Washington and his wife Martha, a nephew of Tobias Lear; Washington's personal secretary, and a medical researcher who had written an account of Washington's illness and death. The narrator herself is included in the picture, as one of her ancestors also had a close personal connection to the Washingtons. Identifying as "zsunlight," she is the descendant of Caroline Branham, the personal maid to Martha Washington. Writing about the event ten years later, on January 19, 2009, she shares her personal experience of that night on a website in which vernacular historians construct and preserve little-known historical narratives. She writes of her "grandmother to the 7th generation":

> My Caroline would have been at her post on December 14, 1799 standing behind MarthaWashington or near the door. I stood where she had stood and as I did, my knowledge of the intercultural relationships evidenced by those in attendance danced around the room…In 1799, there were the enslaved, the masters, and those who knew them well. Behind the shadows clinging to chilled window panes in the dimly lit room, were the true stories that history had hidden from full view. They say my Caroline practiced resistance, a common practice among slaves to keep Masters aware that the things they enjoyed, their way of life, was dependent on the labor of enslaved people… I want to remember that night. It was a night of dawnings. I knew who I was but did others know…That night, as I stood in my grandmother's place, I became a witness to 100 years of history…The American experience was born anew in me that night. I dedicated my life to the preservation of intercultural histories in America and around the world. I love sharing my family history with children and watching them 'catch the spirit of healing with history.' The memory of holding the lamp on true history that night in 1999 will be with me all my life. The stories I continue to spin will be gifts to my

> children and grandchildren and will become my legacy to them…That night still haunts me and gives me hope that one day, all of the stories will finally be told at every historic site. Our children need to know.

"Zsunlight" is a member of an online community organized around Memory Book, a website sponsored by the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC). The museum, which will be part of the Smithsonian Institution, is not scheduled to open until 2015. The site now allows visitors to utilize social networking technology as a means of becoming virtual curators, uploading personal historical artifacts onto the website in order to share the objects and the stories behind them with other members. Through these activities, participants are involved in the social action of building communities of memory, while engaging in the more political project of exercising greater control over the representation of American history.

Thus, I refer to the posters on the Memory Book site as *history entrepreneurs*. The entrepreneurial spirit engages two major aspects of the community's activities. The first aspect involves using the site as an avenue to potentially contribute artifacts to a traditional, world-class museum. Of the many artifacts that are donated to museums, not every item is accepted for display. Therefore, the digital arena enables source communities to display and describe personal objects that would not be displayed in traditional museums. This affords members opportunities to engage in a bottom-up curatorial process that allows contributors to become vernacular historians. Additionally, the Smithsonian often mines the site for artifacts that may be suitable for display in the museum when it opens. According to Dr. Lonnie Bunch, director of the NMAAHC, "this Memory Book is one way in. People upload artifacts and videos. If

we want it, we contact them directly. Ninety percent are enthusiastic. Our biggest challenge is to get what we need; otherwise, they go back to the local community. That's one of our goals." Thus, in a larger sense, these cyber-activities enable these history entrepreneurs greater agency in the movement of private artifacts into the more traditional, dominant public sphere offered by the Smithsonian. In so doing, they have a more prominent voice in discourses over considerations of "legitimate" history.

The second aspect involves the ability to critique dominant historical narratives through the presentation of personal narratives which foreground previously subjugated interpretations of history. Through the display of these private objects, community members are able to revise the racialized memories that have dominated conventional historical discourse. It is this function of the Memory Book community that will be the concern of this chapter. The Memory Book community is but one example of the possibilities digital media offer for the construction and sharing of alternative histories. These interpretations are often constructed in opposition to the historical narratives presented through dominant media, such as film, television, and books. The high costs of entry and limited accessibility to these more traditional forms render them unavailable as means through which to present revised histories. The democratizing influence of digital media enables marginalized communities to interrogate hegemonic discourses through a reordering of the public sphere.

In this specific case study, I will foreground the role of digital museums in constructing African American southern identity through the virtual presentation of familial Civil War memories. These new museums are enabled through the interaction of technology, information, and people, a set of relationships and issues referred to as

museum informatics. Advances in information science and technology have changed the nature of museums. These infrastructural changes have become interrelated with profound cultural changes. While the use of technology inside of museums has enhanced the visitor experience, the ways in which new media technologies have brought the museum experience to multiple publics engages broader discussions about the uses of these technologies in society. One such discussion, which will be taken up here, concerns the potential of these technologies in the production of a fragmented and decentered African American identity through electronically mediated public discourse about 19th century memory.

An analysis of the Memory Book site presents an especially productive case for the study of Communication. The sharing, community, and identity constructed and enabled through new media technologies, all essential aspects of the discipline, characterize the contours of a new type of museum for the 21st century. The activities facilitated by the site expand access to archival institutions in terms of both contribution and consumption. In so doing, they help construct the modern museum as both an information center and a subaltern public sphere. In order to address these features, the remainder of this chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, I will provide a discussion on the possibilities for the construction of racial identity through the assertion of historical agency within a "new" media form, the Internet. The second section will be concerned with the transformative role of museum informatics in diversifying the publics served by museums. The third section will connect all of these themes together using the Memory Book site as a case study. As a social space for the sharing of personal memories in cyberspace, the site, under the sponsorship of the

federal government, has reordered the traditional source and visitor constituencies of museums. In so doing, it has opened up a new discursive space for the construction of black southern identity centered on collective memory.

4. 2 Race, Identity, and Memory in Cyberspace

Racial identity and new media

New media provide myriad opportunities for the construction of nonwhite identities. The barriers to entry and commercial and cultural imperatives that characterize film and television productions, while not completely irrelevant, are considerably less formidable in cyberspace. This feature of new media allows vernacular media producers to have a voice in shaping cultural memories. Thus the usage of the Internet helps reconfigure the power relations inherent in the representation of Civil War memory and identity in dominant media. The Memory Book community, which enables technologically-mediated conversations about the past that have been absent from mainstream historical narratives constructed through traditional media forms, is but one of many ways in which African Americans utilize new media to build identity and community.

There is much debate within studies of new media on the subject of racial identity. Some scholars contend that the anonymity of cyberspace, the absence of visual and aural markers of race, renders racial identities irrelevant. The underlying assumption in these studies is that users shed their offline identities upon the commencement of online interactions (Turkle, 1995). Such studies have not explicitly argued that race ceases to exist once one longs in online, they have simply positioned the disembodied subject as a

starting point for their studies. On the other hand, many scholars contend that race does indeed "matter" in cyberspace because our online activities are very much shaped by the knowledge, experiences, and values we bring to our interactions from an offline world in which race matters very much (Kolko, et. al, 2000: 5, boyd, 2001). Many of these studies focus on contexts that extend beyond a cyberspace environment where race merely "matters," instead focusing on various sites in which racial identity is actively constructed, reinforced, and deployed. In her studies of three of the most popular social networking sites for African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans, Dara Byrne (2008: 15) suggests that "the dissolution of racial identification in cyberspace is neither possible nor *desirable."* In providing access to representations of ethnicities difficult to locate in other media, these sites become technologies of resistance.

The Internet has transformed the ways in which we build, maintain, question, and change our identities. Online communities are often virtual spaces for individuals with disparate identities along other planes to coalesce over one or two common interests. Unlike the closed confines of the movie theater or living room, cyberspace offers sets of social spaces in which users can build community centers within which to engage in conversations. Additionally, unlike the one-sided nature of traditional media venues, consumers can engage in interactive discussions with media producers about content. In this regard, the Memory Book community is like the millions of other online communities. As is the case with other social arenas, however, the introduction of racial identities further complicates analyses of cyber-communities. Access remains an issue within studies of new media, albeit on a different plane from those centered on

traditional media. Specifically, the digital divide is an important part of any conversation about nonwhite racial identities, as is a discussion of the Internet as a potential alternative public sphere.

The digital divide

An analysis of African American identity construction through cyber-communities must take into account the notion of a "digital divide." The concept refers to the disparities in access to information technologies along lines of race, ethnicity, economics, geography, and other variables. The idea of a substantial gap in access to information technology first developed with the 1995 publication of a report complied by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) entitled *Falling Through the Net: A Survey of the 'Have Nots' in Rural and Urban America.* As a response to the conclusions articulated in the report, the Telecommunications Act of 1996 was expanded beyond the traditional concerns with telephone service to include new digital media (Mossberger, et al, 2003). Both the report and the policy prescriptives embedded in the Telecommunications Act, along with the news media attention focused on both, established the digital divide as a problem of *access* to these technologies.[31] According to the most recent Census Bureau data from 2003, 44.6 percent of black households in the U.S. have at least one computer, with 36 percent having Internet

[31] It is also worth mentioning policy differentials with respect to the notion of a digital divide. The Telecommunications Act of 1996 and remedial policy initiatives, such as the "e-rate" and Technologies Opportunities Program (TOP) were the result of the FCC under President Clinton. These programs were dismantled in 2002 under George W. Bush.

service. This figure, along with those for Latino households, represents a level of connectivity significantly below that of white and Asian American households.

Thus, much of the scholarly analysis of the digital divide has proceeded from the assumption that it is mostly an issue of access. Legal scholar Raneta Lawson Mack (2001) has suggested the existence of a technological divide as one of the myriad social, economic, and educational legacies of slavery. She argues that the technology gap is metonymically situated as a stand-in for the societal divisions endemic to the nation since the antebellum era. Much of the same social factors that resulted in African Americans' latent acquisition of other media technologies, such as the telephone, have also resulted in lagging adoption of computers and Internet and broadband services. Jonathan Sterne (2000) has contended that the structural inequalities of the larger society are reproduced in the context of online culture. He specifically identifies the educational system as a social arena heavily imbricated in the fact that the Internet has remained a largely white space. Communication scholar Bosah Ebo has compared the digital divide to a "cyberghetto," suggesting remedial measures akin to those resulting from the civil rights movement (1998, quoted in Kattan & Peters, 2003: 8).

However, many scholars have contended that the concept of the digital divide needs to be redefined beyond the confines of access. These studies have proposed the idea that the acquisition and usage of new media technologies is a complex process that operates not as an "either/or" proposition, but rather on a continuum. Mossberger, et al, (2003) suggest that a more comprehensive definition of the digital divide must include technological literacy, as well. They argue that access to computers and the Internet are useless without the skills necessary to exploit their potential, particularly those

necessary to locate and evaluate information on the web. Servon & Pinkett (2004: 323) suggest an even broader definition, one that incorporates content, as well as access and literacy. They contend that this expanded definition of the digital divide is necessary to evaluate the needs and demands of disenfranchised groups to exercise agency with respect to content. The continued Eurocentric dominance of cyberspace necessitates the ability of these groups to create the content that is more relevant to their lives, communities, and culture. Banks (2006: 40) has suggested that the standard definition of access is incompatible with the unique needs of African Americans. The transformative ideals that unify black rhetorical traditions, he argues, necessitate a conception of technological access that includes the "systems of knowledge [required] to use any particular tool and the networks of information, economics, and power relations that enables that tool's use." Communication scholar Lisa Nakamura (2008: 172) also contends that traditional discussions of the digital divide confined to access and consumption are limited in their applicability to analyses of the ways in which women and racial and ethnic minorities create visual cultures on the Internet. A more accurate measure of Internet usage, she suggests, would include cultural production, or interactivity. More inclusive inquiries would utilize surveys designed to extend beyond the issue of access, questioning users about their level of participation in online visual cultures that "speak to and against existing graphical environments and interfaces online." These more comprehensive measurements would include activities such as participation in free-response sites such as bulletin boards and petitions, and the creation of web sites. Indeed, studies by Byrne (2007) Wilson et al., (2006), Harris (2005), Brady (2005), and Detlefsen (2004) suggest that the level of black online

participation and usage is substantially influenced by the by the availability of race and/or community-centered content.

These studies suggest the existence of a "digital difference" rather than a digital divide. They thus present a more comprehensive approach to the study of African American behavior online. Media Studies theorist Anna Everett also argues that lingering assumptions about a black digital divide are based not upon reality, but are rather new incarnations of traditional stereotypical assumptions. For Everett, the dramatic upsurge, in 1995, of black Internet participation shattered the presumption of what she refers to as a "black technophobia" rooted in the recursiveness of theories of black intellectual inferiority. Further, in tracing the online behavior of African Americans, she identifies grassroots mobilization and alternative journalism, as well as social and cultural expression, as planes upon which a black consciousness emerged online.

It is this usage of the Internet, as elaborated by these scholars, which may be applied to the Memory Book community. Institutional actors such as the Smithsonian have utilized the resources of the federal government, often in public-private partnerships with corporations, to enable disenfranchised groups to shape content on the Web. When I posed the question of a digital divide to NMAAHC director Bunch, he suggested that that there is indeed a "shrinking" divide, but that it occurs along the lines of class, rather than race. He detailed the efforts of the Smithsonian to remedy the disparity. The museum sponsors a "Save Our Treasures" program in the Anacostia neighborhood of southeast Washington. The program allows children to be part of the process of identifying artifacts in their homes and discussing them with others. "If you

can begin where the kids are you can get them to see history as more about today and tomorrow than it is about yesterday," he told me. According to Bunch, the typical Memory Book member is in his or her late-thirties, though a "fair" number of them are school-age kids and older retirees. "Most," he suggests, "are interested in connecting with history, want to learn more, and better understand who they are."

4.2. Cyberspace as subaltern public sphere

After several cancelled appointments over a period of nearly a year, I had finally secured an interview with Dr. Bunch at the Smithsonian in early August of 2008. I had spent the past few weeks in Washington, D.C., spending time at the African American Civil War Museum, and saw my visit with Dr. Bunch not only as a valuable research opportunity, but also as a welcome change of scenery during a particularly slow period of visitor traffic to the AACWM. I boarded the Metro train to take the short trip on the Green Line south to L'Enfant Plaza, where Bunch's office is located. On the short train ride between the two buildings, I thought about the differences between the museum I was leaving, which is a traditional museum, and the one to which I was traveling, which represents the future of museums. Both museums represent diverse mediascapes for the representation of nontraditional memories. Both also provide a social space for those interested in neglected aspects of American history to engage in conversations with each other about the history itself, as well as about its erasure. The similarities end there. A major distinguishing feature between the two museums lies in the fact that one is housed in a traditional edifice, while the other exists in cyberspace. This distinction represents an important feature of museums in the 21st century, particularly those

foregrounding narratives of the past that subvert dominant myths with respect to the nation's ideals and idealized. Bunch confirmed the advantages of online museums in presenting African American history during our interview. "Because we're the Smithsonian, we're able to introduce this culture to those who can't be reached through other institutions," he said. "We want to cross racial lines. Technology sometimes brings out the worst, but this allows a non-threatening, 'safe' community." The safety of the community to which Bunch referred reveals the greater potentialities of cyber-museums to serve both as information centers and subaltern public spheres.

Literary theorist Houston Baker has contended that African American critical memory, by definition, sets in motion a critique of the very notion of the bourgeois public sphere. The fact of Africans' arrival in America as the *property* of the bourgeoisie, legally enjoined from acquiring literacy and assumed to be incapable of rational thought, he argues, refutes the notion of a universal marketplace of ideas exchanged between citizens regardless of race, creed, income, or property-ownership. In so doing, he joins other critiques of the Habermasian model (Garnham, 1992; Fraser, 1992). Baker instead proposes the notion of a subaltern, black American counterpublic resulting from a "relaxed, decentered pluralism" (1995: 14). The southern jail, the church, the streets and barbershops, and other popular sites, in Baker's model, have all historically constituted alternative venues for the construction of an African American public engaged in resistance to economic and political oppression, as well as white cultural hegemony. Other theorists have analyzed various vernacular arenas in which African Americans have negotiated a public space and a public voice. Cultural theorists Todd Boyd (1992), Reebee Garofalo (1992), and Mark Anthony Neal (1999) have

examined popular music as productive arenas for black counterpublics. Elizabeth Maguire (1992) has analyzed university presses, while Catherine R. Squires (2004) has discussed black talk radio in terms of contributions to an ever- expanding black public sphere.

Cyberspace constitutes an additional, very productive site for various sets of black counter-publics. Anna Everett (2009: 19) contends that, lingering fears of the digital divide notwithstanding, the "electronic frontier" is pivotal in its democratizing potential with respect to African Americans. It is the emancipatory potential of the Internet in widely disseminating African American counterhegemonic interpretations of local and global events that enables a transcendence of the limitations of the Habermasian model. "It appears that computer-mediated communication (CMC) is refashioning the concept and utility of a viable black public sphere in the new millennium," according to Everett (2002: 130).

The presentation of revisionist historical narratives constitutes one set of contributions to the black public cyber-sphere. Many of the Civil War reenactors and visitors I met during my fieldwork directed me to their own organizational websites dedicated to providing information about black agency in the war. These sites are intended to provide access to this history for those who are unable to attend reenactments, symposia, roundtable discussions, and other public presentations, and for those who seek more information before or after attending a reenactment. The *Lest We Forget* website, at www.lwfaah.net, is one of the more popular sites. Dedicated to representing "the untold history of America," the site provides information on African American military history, including information on the topic of black service to the

Confederacy. It also provides inks to various other websites that allow visitors to access different aspects of black history without leaving their homes. These sites include the slave narratives housed in the Library of Congress and the controversial photographic exhibit on lynching, “Without Sanctuary” Similarly, the USCT Living History Association, features profiles of many public historians I met in the field. The purpose of the site is to inform visitors of the history of black participation in the war by featuring profiles of individual soldiers, and providing announcements of various African American reenactment events. Justin and Gwen Ragsdale of Philadelphia have founded a traveling museum that features exhibits composed of authentic artifacts from the Middle Passage to the Jim Crow Era. Because their collection is not housed in a traditional museum, they rely heavily (though not primarily) on the Internet to build their constituency of visitors at black family reunions, churches, schools, community organizations, and other sites. These are just a few of the many African American-controlled sites dedicated to enabling greater access to neglected historical information. Although these sites are informative, they lack the benefit of interactivity among site visitors.

The Memory Book community combines this historical consciousness with social networking. As a computer-mediated public sphere, the site engages history through the facilitation of online dialogue among the community members. Thus, digital media become a new site for the continuation of a long tradition in the African American community of using social networking as a form of critical civic engagement. According to media studies theorist Dara Byrne, civic engagement and social action have long been central activities within traditional black social networks, and this is

especially the case for black social networking sites on the Internet (Davis, 1996; Byrne, 2007). Previous studies have demonstrated a positive impact of networks and other associations on cultural identity (Marcia, 1989, quoted in Byrne, 2007). Though there has been relatively little research to date on the social networking habits of African Americans specifically, Eglash & Bleecker (2001) have analyzed the ways in which web networks geared toward African Americans have contributed to a black online public sphere through strengthening ties among various demographics within the black community (Byrne, 5).

Social networking technology allows for a more egalitarian relationship between producers and consumers, providing both with opportunities to influence and be heard. This is in stark contrast to the one-to-many communication style found in traditional websites and media forms. For oppressed groups, this is an important feature for giving voice to the otherwise voiceless. One of the more popular sites, Blackplanet.com, which was launched in September of 1999, is billed as the largest black community online, and the fourth-largest social networking site. According to the press kit of its African American co-founder and public face, Omar Wasow, it reaches over 3 million users a month. In an interview with the *New York Times* in 2001, Wasow contended that digital discussion groups promote ethnic bonds among Internet users. [32] The popularity of the site represents the potential for digital media in the construction of black identity through the formation of alternative public spheres.

[32] Please see http://www.nytimes.com/2001/05/13/business/private-sector-silicon-alley-s-philosopher-prince.html?n=Top/News/Business/Companies/Google%20Inc.

Although the Memory Book community is targeted to a narrower group of like-minded members, it utilizes social networking technology as a means of exploiting the communitarian potential of sites like *Blackplanet*. Unlike those on *Blackplanet*, however, the members of Memory Book have fostered an identity that goes beyond the organizing feature of blackness to encompass a concern with critical historiography. In this case, the mediating agent is the Smithsonian, one of the most respected museums in the world. In the next section, I will outline a brief history of the fusion of museums with the Internet, a practice that is fundamental to museum informatics. By fusing all of the above scholarly concerns regarding the World Wide Web's expansion of the black public sphere through social networks with those concerns related to museum informatics, I extend the scholarship in all areas in new directions.

4.3 Museum Informatics

The opportunities enabled by new media technologies for the construction of racial identity through the Memory Book community would be unavailable without the museum access facilitated through these same technologies. The objects of memory at the heart of the community dialogue have assumed a degree of mobility through the ability of museums and other knowledge communities to transition from strictly physical institutions with limited constituencies to virtual institutions with vastly expanded visitor bases. Information technologies have become crucial aspects of what many museum studies scholars perceive as the decades-long transition of museums from repositories of objects to repositories of knowledge (Marty, 2008; White, 2004l Cannon-Brookes, 1992; Hooper-Greenhill, 1992).

Anthropologist and museum technology/information specialist Katherine Burton Jones (2007) locates the beginning of the transformation of museum information to electronic formats to 1963, when the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History (NMNH) and the Institute for Computer Research in the Humanities (ICRH) developed systems that led to the introduction of data processing systems in museums. The two systems, which came to be called Self Generating Master (SELGEM) and General Retrieval and Information Processor for Humanities-Oriented Studies (GRIPHOS) respectively, were among the first database management systems used in museums. A few years later in 1966, a network of "pioneer" museums in New York successfully sought funding for the installation of a Museum Computer Network (MCN) for the creation of a trail databank. By the early 1970s, this system had begun to be used in museums outside of this network. The development of professional standing committees during the 1970s, according to Jones, was instrumental in the technical transformation of museums. This development, enabled through the creation of the American Association of Museums (AAM), facilitated the ability of each aspect of the division of labor in the display process to seek innovation. Through the efforts of the AAM, the area of registration, which provides the information on the objects in the exhibits, first made efforts toward digitization of museum collections. Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, there was increased use of technologies in the exhibits, from slide projectors to digital images (Jones, 9-17).

It was during this time period, from the late 1980s to the early 1990s, that museum professionals began to explore the possibilities offered by the then-emerging Internet. Beginning with the use of email and listservs, museum professionals quickly saw the

potential in the World Wide Web to transform the ways in which museums operate. From 1994-1998, a few pioneering museums began to take steps toward establishing their presence online. These early sites, according to Jones, were essentially "short Informational flyers" (ibid., 21). Later advances during this time included the Smithsonian National Museum of American Art HELIOS American photography site, which allowed visitors opportunities to email comments about the photographs they viewed. By the late 1990s, new media had become ubiquitous in the museum community. Jones pinpoints the year 1999 as the "Slope of Enlightenment" for the use of Internet technologies by museums (ibid. 22).

The benefits the technologies bring to museums are both pragmatic and cultural. Bunch suggested to me that, because they are inexpensive to use, monitor, and change, museum technologies supply financial benefits to museums in various stages of change and stability. "These technologies really allow a good museum with a good critical eye to compete with other museums, he said." The cultural transformations advanced through virtual museums are even more profound. These technologies have enabled museums to tell the stories embedded within their artifacts to larger and different audiences. This has served as a democratizing function within the museum source and visitor communities. As such, it has transformed the cultural work performed by archival institutions. I interviewed Jones about the ways in which the utilization of new media technologies is redefining the museum audience experience. While she used the concerns of the Museum of African American History in Boston as a caution against technological determinism, she spoke enthusiastically about the advantages and disadvantages of cyber-museums. While the drawbacks appeared to be confined to the

logistics of managing continuous access to information, the benefits were more widespread. “Museums have evolved,” she suggested, “from being organizations that focused on the objects to being those that focused on audiences and experiences, with the collections still in the forefront but made more approachable.” When I inquired as to interactivity, such as that at the heart of the Memory Book community, she discussed the additional benefits of enabling dialogue between and among individuals, and between individuals and museum personnel. “[Technology] customizes, the museum experience,” she said. “Involving the community represents a great leap forward for museums. It optimizes the stories they can tell.” She also suggested that the unlimited “gallery space” within cyber-museums allows a greater number and diversity of stories to be told in potentially transformative ways. Jones brought up the example of holocaust museums as a means of demonstrating how the interactivity enabled through social networking technology often expands the very definition of the subjects of museums. She suggested that the physical space of the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., allows relatively limited narratives, and thus definitions, of *holocaust,* while the museum’s website, which includes stories of the current genocide in Darfur, enables not only recollections of the event, but also provides an implicit critique of popular conceptions of the term *holocaust* itself.

As this example illustrates, the influence of cyber-museums is not limited to those individuals who contribute to or visit the websites. The cultural work performed by these institutions operates on a societal level, as well. In *Thriving in the Knowledge Age* (2006: 67) John Falk and Beverly Sheppard discuss the importance of museums in constructing community, and emphasize the role of technology in constituting museums

as agents in the building and maintenance of community. They suggest the idea of museums as the "third place," a sphere where members of a community, regardless of class, income, and other divisions, interact with others and come to know the ties they have in common. In this configuration, museums will join the home and the workplace as places in which people gather to share stories and pass along traditions. However, this conception of museums undermines their rhetorical power in selecting and displaying artifacts. "Third places" are typically characterized by the exchange of narratives and ideas on a wide variety of subjects. Because of the free choice in the subjects of talk, the discussion of any particular topic may be diluted by the introduction of other information or topics, which may or may not be germane to the particular discussion. Museums, on the other hand, are relatively confined spaces in which the range of discussion is intrinsically limited to the objects on display. The discursive power of history museums, including those online, lies in their ability to stimulate critical discussions among visitors about the dominant or oppositional history displayed without the intrusion of extraneous information. The Memory Book site, which grants the visitors themselves (subject to some filtering by the Smithsonian staff) the agency to display their own artifacts, and, by definition, control their own discussions, represents a strengthening of this power. The site even contains a feature designed to remove advertisements and other information deemed off topic.

Beyond articulating a role for digital museums as public spheres, Falk & Sheppard also suggest an even more extensive potential for influence, contending that bringing new voices into the museum means accepting multiple kinds of authenticity and affirming and acknowledging the community's sense of self and expertise. This

represents a fundamental shift not only in museum thinking, but also carries implications for the politics of historical knowledge production: because museums play a important role as "custodians of the past," this expansion has important ideological implications. Cultural knowledge spaces, such as those of museums, are constructed with information shaped and influenced by sociopolitical factors. As I have already discussed in greater detail in chapter two, values and notions of citizenship, heritage, nation, and publics are all imbricated in the material objects selected and displayed in museums. These factors are reconfigured in a virtual cultural information sharing and knowledge-enabling environment (Mason, 2007). Revising dominant historical narratives and myths to reflect a multiplicity of perspectives is itself an inherently ideological project. Online, participatory museums are able to cultivate ideological identification through representational strategies allowing vernacular curators to control the process of constructing history. According to director Bunch, these technologies are a way to provide new data enabling people to understand their past and get validation from their peers. "They see their history as legitimate, worthy or preservation, and validated," he told me. "When experiences are put online, there is a response from others sharing theirs, a cache enabled by technology."

The Memory Book project has implications for the importance of alternative knowledge systems in the preservation of objects of heritage for subjugated populations. Within the community, artifact contributors exercise representational agency not only through the transfer of private artifacts into the public sphere, but also through writing descriptive narratives meant to guide site visitors toward the desired interpretation of the object. Because history and memory are intertwined with identity, this becomes as

much an act of self-definition as an act of alternative historical representation. For disenfranchised populations accustomed to having their history and identity ascribed to them, this ability is transformative. According to Bunch, a much broader community responds to virtual museums, which enriches their sense of cohesiveness. Moreover, the importance of the sponsorship of the Smithsonian cannot be overstated. Its cultural, intellectual, and financial resources enable a group of private citizens to represent their narratives in a mediated environment free of the commercial constraints of Hollywood. Perhaps more importantly, as a world-renowned educational and cultural institution, its sponsorship of Memory Book confers cultural authority upon a set of personal stories involved in a unique transition from the private sphere to the public sphere.

4.4 Memory Book

A virtual community evolves

The Memory Book community has been constructed as a bridge to the actual physical structure of the NMAAHC, which is still in the planning stages. The future museum traces its history back to 1915, when African American Union veterans marched on Washington to agitate for a space on the National Mall for the display of black accomplishments. Fourteen years later, in 1929, legislation authorizing the construction of a National Memorial Building to serve as a museum and "a tribute to the Negro's contributions to the achievements of America" was passed. There was no other movement on the legislation, however, until December of 2001, when Representative John Lewis (D-GA) established a Plan for Action Presidential Commission to create a blueprint for the implementation of the museum. On December 16, 2003, President

George W. Bush signed into law H.R. 3491, the NMAAHC Act, which authorized creation of the museum. Dr. Lonnie Bunch was named Founding Director in March of 2005, and, in January of 2006, the building's future site on the National Mall, near the Washington Monument, was selected. Construction on the museum is scheduled to start in July of 2012, with an estimated completion date in December of 2015.

Memory Book is the virtual precursor to the opening of the physical museum. With a $1 million grant of technology and expertise from IBM, the Smithsonian is the first museum to use Web 2.0 computing technology. While the site allows for technological monitoring of the content for racist and obscene language, as well as inaccuracies, the visitors assume nearly complete agency over the presentation of information. Contributors upload photographs (which may be of contributed objects, or the photos themselves may be the artifact), narratives, or audio recordings into the website, and create their own "tags," or keywords, describing their entry. A navigable online map at the top of the site shows how the memories are linked to each other and to the content of the future museum. The objects uploaded into the website are those that may not be found through traditional avenues. Often, they are artifacts stored in people's attics and basements. Some of the entries will eventually become part of the museum's oral history collection, affording visitors a role in shaping the stories that will become part of the museum's presentation of African American, and American, history.

As of this writing, approximately seventy entries had been posted to the site from its debut on 26 September 2007. In addition to Bunch, well-known African Americans, such as former San Francisco mayor Willie Brown, who presented a narrative of his childhood in segregated Mineola, Texas, and his education in California, and United

Negro College Fund President Michael Lomax, who described his life in Alabama, have uploaded narratives to the site. While a fairly significant number of the entries reflect memories of slavery, the majority are memories of the jim crow eras and the civil rights movement. When I asked Bunch about the disparity of entries between the two eras, he offered his observations with respect to African Americans' greater enthusiasm about memories of slavery:

> Sure, I have noticed differences—big differences in the way people perceive the two histories. [The] civil rights movement is seen as concrete, positive, accomplished, intimate, and immediate…For many, [slavery] was a defeat, something to be ashamed of. [I] met a guy who criticized me for wanting to interpret slavery in a national museum; [he] felt it devalued African kings and queens. I want to use this technology to help people reclaim their slave past.

Thus**,** the narratives of slavery posted to the site represent a restructuring of dominant memories not only within the general American public, but also within the African American community. There are more than 6000 extant works labeled slave narratives (Foster, 1976). Personal stories, or autobiographies, hold a position of priority among the narrative traditions of African Americans. The social impact of these stories is of great import to a number of constituencies, with their tropes of triumph over adversity serving as a mobilizing device for both blacks and whites, as well as a mode of selfhood and identification for blacks (Andrews, 1993). Although the tradition of constructing slave narratives dates back to the antebellum period, it is the WPA project from the 1930s that is the most popularly known. Historian Paul D. Escott (1979) has described the trepidation displayed by many former slaves during the collection of these stories, in keeping with the racial etiquette and economic practicalities of the time. The fear of economic retribution negatively impacted the candor with which the subjects

expressed their feelings about their experiences as slaves. Additionally, as Escott reminds us, the primarily white interviewers often held their own prejudices that affected their mediation of these stories. However, he contends, these people wanted their stories to be told, and for future generations to know what slavery was like. This mirrors James Scott's (1990) contention that oppressed groups follow a public transcript, in which they enact social rituals which reify existing power relations, while simultaneously deploying a hidden transcript within their own communities, in which they critique these same power relations. For decades up to an including their experiences with the WPA, former slaves and their descendants adhered to this schema. New media technologies now enable personal narratives passed down privately to become part of the public sphere. In so doing, they serve as a counter-discourse to the numerous neo-Confederate and other white supremacist websites that adhere to a Lost Cause interpretation of slavery. More importantly, they disrupt the integrity of the dominant discourse of American cultural history that attempts to erase memories of slavery and refuse any acknowledgment of its contemporary legacy.

This includes recognition of the sense of shame felt by African Americans. The contributors are able to navigate this delicate terrain by using the uploaded objects and photographs to construct narratives emphasizing triumph over adversity. By using a more positive frame in which to construct the 19th century past, the memories begin to resemble the more triumphal civil rights movement narratives on the site. This discursive strategy mirrors those of the traditional museum personnel and Civil War reenactors I met elsewhere in the field. The importance of subverting dominant media images of blacks as victims, *mammies*, or *toms* is an important aspect of the emergent

black identity centered on these memories, and is replicated by these vernacular curators. In these cases, the discourse of triumph over adversity is more personalized, as contributors tell stories of their individual ancestors' actions in overcoming extreme hardship and suffering. They are essentially testaments of the capacity of African Americans to overcome the trauma of slavery and thus represent discourses of citizenship and belonging to both regional and national communities. This particular discourse underlay the narrative of Roots, as well as *Glory* and *Amistad*, but is completely absent from more conventional mass-mediated Civil War productions. In contrast to traditional media depictions of the era, in this cyber-community, the individual African Americans are the historical agents, the "heroes."

Virtual slave narratives

The posting dated June 4, 2007 is one of the few entries in which the contributor, Kevin B. Fowler, used his full name. The entry, entitled, "Traveling South to freedom," features a drawing of a young girl sitting on her grandfather's lap, imagining him as a boy slave. In the imaginary image, the sparsely dressed boy is tearing himself loose from his shackles as escapes his plantation. Thus begins the narrative. The girl in the picture is Fowler's grandmother, Rosetta Riddick, who, according to the author, often told the stories of slavery passed down to her during her childhood in segregated Norfolk, Virginia. Her grandfather, Lewis Foster, was the original source of the narratives, having lived the early years of his life as a slave in King and Queen County, Virginia. Fowler offers a vivid description of his great-great grandfather's journey:

> Papa Foster remembers seeing the humiliating sight of his mother, brother and sister sold on the auction block in King and Queen. It is not known who his father was or the name of his mother or sister…The details aren't given, but Papa Foster escaped

> slavery as a teenager prior to the end of the Civil War. As an escaped slave, Papa Foster talked about seeing his brother still in bondage. He desperately wanted to talk to him, but he never did for fear of being recaptured…Papa Foster proceeded to leave the King and Queen County area. He would sleep during the day in the woods. He traveled during the night, smartly avoiding the Confederate and Union soldiers. Papa traveled several months in the southern direction to his eventual freedom…Papa Foster settled in the Titustown section of Norfolk,Virginia across the railroad tracks from Brownstown. Titustown is one of the few black towns in [the] United States. Starting in the early 1900s a white farmer parceled his land and sold the lots only to black families. The stipulation was that the houses couldn't be built until the land was paid for in full. My parents bought one of those lots too. As many escaped slaves traveled north to freedom, traveling south provide to have been a very beneficial route for my family.

For Fowler, his ancestor's story provides a cathartic moment in which he can share a family narrative with others. More importantly, it enables a critique of many common assumptions with regard to slavery, such as the notion that the North was seen as the land of salvation for all escaped slaves, and that post-Reconstruction southern blacks were, by definition, completely dispossessed. It is also a story of black self-determination in the presence of overwhelming obstacles. Another poster calling himself "Andre_46817" shares a similar story, accompanied by a photograph of "Cousin Emma." A young African American woman dressed in dark clothing and staring unemotionally into the camera, was a distant cousin of the contributor who lived to the age of 109. In his narrative, he recounts his childhood fascination with the woman's age, and with the stories of her youth in the South Carolina. He describes his amazement at hearing tales of her girlhood as a slave, including her horror at seeing her mother tied to a tree and whipped. "My time with Cousin Emma, almost 40 years ago, has been a lasting memory," he writes. "Remembering how "Mother' took care of Cousin Emma reminds me of the love and commitment to family that filled our home at 902 Anderson Road. Reflecting on Cousin Emma's life experiences along with the

peace and serenity she embodied is a reminder of just how strong, resilient, and enduring we can truly be." A personal family story uploaded on 22 October 2008 by "marchfish" details the Bronston family history, as it has been "verbally passed down through the generations." The writer begins his narrative with a description of his family origins as having originated in the east African island nation of Madagascar, and ends with his great grandfather's heroic tale of escape from Kentucky to Ohio. The great grandfather, Lafayette Bronston, according to family lore, feared for his life after murdering a slave master who had attempted to sell his wife to another plantation owner. Marchfish describes the narrative as the subject of conversation at reunions, funerals, and other family events. The story is a typical story of black sacrifice, resilience and agency, rather than victimhood, amid the trauma of slavery. Each of the narratives advances a sense of African Americans as historical subjects, rather than objects.

Another theme among the narratives involves the attempt to re-insert black agency into national stories and culture in a similar vein as that of the story I described at the beginning of this chapter. On 19 January 2009, "ekramer" posted a narrative on black participation in the Revolutionary War. In addition to briefly describing the relatively well-known story of Crispus Attucks, the author details the efforts of Peter Salem, a freed slave who served in the battles of Lexington and Concord. He also describes the conflicts that arose over the question of conscription of both free and enslaved blacks. An entry entitled, "Black Ice," by "RonLevi," uses the story of his sons' interest in ice hockey to reveal the history of black participation in what is commonly regarded as "white" sport. He references "oral and written family history" to describe the life of his

ancestor, John Wesley Levi, who was born in Virginia in 1915 and who, he wonders, may have fled to Canada from Virginia in the aftermath of Nat Turner's rebellion. "I remember the day I learned that there was a long history of participation in the sport of ice hockey by people of African heritage who were, to my amazement, the sons and grandsons of American slaves who arrived in Nova Scotia via the Underground Railroad," he wrote.

Many of the personal narratives are presented as explicit prescriptives for the importance of preserving African American cultural memories. In a post dated 10 October 2007 an entitled, "An ordinary life," "beandeary" recounts "over 120 years" of his Texas Family's history. The poster describes himself as having inherited many treasured family possessions, beginning in 1981, and expresses a desire to share the narrative of the page from the family album he has uploaded to the website:

> My great-great grandfather, King Bean, was born in 1850. On July 11, 1859, he was listed, along with other chattel, in his slave owner's will. His owner listed his worth as $700. My great-grandfather, Wesley Bean, was born free in 1869. And my grandfather, Tom Bean, was born at the turn of the century in 1899. My grandfather died in 1981. Because of my grandfather, I have my family's collective memories. Memories told through possessions. My grandfather, great-grandfather, and great-great-grandfather were ordinary men who lived ordinary lives in a rural Texas community on the Fayette-Bastrop county line. They were stoic Texas men who never talked much about the past because it never occurred to them that the past or themselves (sic) could be of much consequence. But yet, these tough Texas stoic men managed to leave behind their life stories, not in words, but in possessions. These possessions have allowed me to take walks through history, any time I please, to get a glimpse into their lives.

Here the contributor fuses several discourses concerning race, gender, and memory. He suggests the importance of keeping these memories alive for future generations, and foregrounds the significance of material culture as a means of doing so. The reference to his great-great grandfather as "chattel," along with the price his life

and labor were worth, is striking in that it personalizes the banality with which human beings offered other humans up for sale. The display of bills of sale for slaves is common in the traditional museums I visited while in the field. However, its inclusion in online personal narratives invokes an even greater appeal to modern sensibilities about the intrinsic worth of human lives. Additionally, "beandeary" engages gendered discourses by implicitly invoking the popular conception of women as keepers of memory, particularly with respect to the scrapbook-like entry he has uploaded. The references to "Texas stoicism" recovers the masculinity of his ancestors by assigning an iconic image previously reserved for white men to the black men who are in ancestors. Its emphasis on the stoicism of the men deploys the "triumph over adversity" theme common in slave narratives, while engaging an underlying discourse of African American masculine toughness. The poster uses his personal story to present a stark contrast to the emasculated coons and Toms of southern mythology.

Many of the posters utilize cherished family artifacts to tell their stories. Another poster, "23jayhawk," has used an iconic artifact to talk about the importance of remembering African American history. She has uploaded a photograph of a quilt, and discusses the role of quilting in preserving memory. In her entry, she recounts the story of a quilter in Kansas who made her quilts based on stories from slavery passed down from her great-grandmother. She urges visitors to see quilting and other artistic activities as means of capturing the "pride, spirit, pain, and joy of the African American experience" and to honor ancestral heroes for the "great sacrifices they made for us all." Similarly, "jandersonsoli," has uploaded a photograph of pieces of pottery, describing the objects' place in "Texas' first black-owned business." Though the relationship of

the contributor to the subjects is unclear from the text, one presumes they are ancestors who have become a source of family pride. The provided description of the objects' significance informs site visitors that the creation of these objects was an anomaly in an era in which cotton was the standard commodity. Thus, after emancipation, the former slaves' ability to produce the pottery resulted in a very early example of successful black entrepreneurship. As such, it provides a classic example of black people's perceived ability to turn adversity into art or opportunity. The objects themselves are beautiful, but unremarkable in an objective sense. Their symbolic power thus comes not from their presentation, but rather their signification as objects foregrounding the historical endurance of African Americans. Neil Cummings and Marysia Lewandowska contend that we use artifacts as means to negotiate a relationship between a transitory and contradictory present and a profound, continuous, and stable individual and collective past. One assumes that these urns have, over the years, been objects of great pride in this particular family, and the poster has decided to share them with the Memory Book community.

Another entry, posted by "sherillfamily," provides an iconic image easily recognizable to anyone who has seen a pre-civil rights Hollywood film set in the Old South. The photograph is one of an elderly black man holding a young white child. The child, a girl of about 6 years of age, touches the man's beard, perhaps in youthful fascination of its woolly texture. It is described simply as a "photograph dated 1890 [that] has been in the family for years," and poses the question, "what was slavery Uncle Tom?" The image addresses the contemporary tensions within the African American community over loyalty and community embodied within the image.

Sherillfamily thus uses the image of his/her ancestor to invite visitors to ponder its meaning.

A final theme that emerged combines the trope of black resilience with a romantic view of Africa. The following excerpted audio file, posted by Rajnii, described as "a tribute to our ancestors for all those who lost their lives and those that survived," references the Middle Passage:

> There should be oceans of tears (sung twice); this ink is not my blood; what right have I to speak; what right have it to speak…mother's one perfect tear for her children; there were children; in that small cramped space; giving birth in fetal position; to still born cosmos tiny infinities with mayhem as midwife; below deck below death; below breath was hope hidden in heart beat rhythm; now I see our children are below deck; crammed into small cramped space; but the wooden planks are blocks, and stoops, and streets; but our heart beating hope tells me, we don't have to live that metaphor; for we are the lineage of stars and suns; look at the sky and see your reflection; forgetfulness would have us think the oceans dreamt them, but galaxies do little the seafloor; no one can ever take away our *before;* they sunk *so that we soar;* the (sic) hung *so that we soar;* they sung and sung with tears in their lings (sic) lungs *so that we soar*

The entry directly confronts the erasure of black history, references the idea of a glorious African past, and highlights the sacrifices made by ancestors who survived slavery and jim crow. In invoking these discourses, Pajnii brings to the site intellectual conversations over black cultural memory that have taken place over more than a century. These stories are reminiscent of the slave narratives of the past. However, the fact of self-mediation in an online public sphere dramatically changes the narratives.

4.5 Conclusion

Memory Book is a transformative site because it provides a space for representations of history not found in other arenas. Through a combination of

technology, visual culture in the form of photographs and objects, and personal narratives, the contributors are able to become historical producers as well as consumers. This, in turn, enables African Americans to attain a greater sense of historical agency. Upon uploading an artifact onto the site and constructing a narrative to explain its personal and cultural significance, each of the contributors makes an implicit critique of dominant history by asserting the cultural authority of her personal narrative. This leads to new possibilities for the role of 19th century cultural memories in the shaping of black identification with and belonging to the South.

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Chapter Five: Conclusions

As the public commemorations celebrating the 150th anniversary of the Civil War commence in 2011, how will the war itself, as well as the eras preceding and following battle, be remembered? Will the racially exclusive memories dominant in regional and national discourses, such as those constructed and articulated during the centennial celebrations in 1965, be reified through the activities, or will a more balanced history be presented? Which version(s) of history, and, by definition, conceptions of southern identity, will be validated? These questions, which are provocative in their own right, serve as synecdoche for a much larger question: in societies in which the production of historical knowledge is a crucial aspect of systems of domination, how do disenfranchised groups make sense of their past and present?

In the previous chapters of this dissertation, I have provided analyses of three vernacular media sites for the construction and articulation of an emergent African American identification with the South through its traumatic past. In so doing, I have engaged and combined two separate theoretical threads. The first concerns the concept of an African American identity centered on collective memory of slavery and the Civil War. With this particular thread, I have taken up the poststructuralist assumption that identities are not rigid and constant, but are rather fragmented and decentered, and, often conflicting. I have used the case of an emergent African American construction of an identity commonly coded as "white" to illustrate the instability of both the concept of "southerner" and the concept of "African American." From the Reconstruction period to the contemporary moment, the utility of memories of slavery and the Civil War has

always been the source of conflict within black social and political thought. Additionally, African Americans have been excluded from popular conceptions of the idea of "southerners," mostly because Civil War memory has, for more than 100 years, been rewritten to exclude their perspectives. Thus, the producers discussed in this project construct and articulate historical narratives that subvert common assumptions within both the African American community, and the nation at large. Additionally, their attempts at demonstrating the multiplicity of identities constituted under the rubric of "blackness" undermines popular assumptions that have long prescribed a set of norms for what blackness is or should be. In articulating 19th century memories as an essential aspect of African American identity, they are engaging in oppositional acts of self-definition.

The second thread I engage in this project involves the means by which this identity is constructed and represented. Communication scholars John Nerone and Ellen Wartella have suggested that contest is positioned at the heart of all communicative practice invested in retelling the past. The oppositional discourses embedded in revising the past are meant to encompass the present, as well. The representation of previously erased narratives of slavery engenders a reckoning with its contemporary legacy. Although the practices I have detailed in this project utilize highly differentiated means of interrogating dominant popular historical narratives, they all are, essentially, practices of resistance.

Because African Americans and other disenfranchised groups have not had access to more traditional forms of media production, they have had to utilize alternative media forms through which to share their memories. Thus, they have constructed these

historical narratives through media ranging from ritual performance, a very old form, to digital media, a very new form. In each case, I have attempted to emphasize the importance of the particular mode of communication in constructing and articulating the message. As the writings of Marshall McLuhan (1964), Ron Eyerman (2001), and others have suggested, the medium itself carries meaning separate from the message that is being communicated. Thus, in chapters, two, three, and four, I have demonstrated the specific ways in which performance, museum display, and digital media/museum informatics have resonated with producers and consumers. Performance is one of the primary means through which cultures find their most intense expression. Civil War reenactments represent embodied performances of black historical agency, masculinity, and citizenship, and are instrumental in bringing discourses of slavery and race back onto the sacred space of the battlefield. Museums are, among other things, places of empowerment and recognition (Kratz & Karp, 2006). The U.S. National Slavery Museum, the African American Civil War Museum and Freedom Foundation, and the American Civil War Center all utilize the rhetorical power of visual culture to subvert dominant history through the recognition of the black historical experience. Participatory digital media help democratize the public sphere. The Memory Book community presents an excellent example the potential of information technologies to expand access to archival institutions and to help construct communities of black vernacular historians. The sites detailed in this project were selected both because of their distance from traditional media forms and because of the ways in which they co-opt the very same unconventional modes of representation that have been used, in the past and the present, to construct southern memory and identity as white. As I learned

during my interviews with various cultural producers, each of these media forms works to produce audiences for the others.

The construction of southern identity and Civil War memory through these sites is not new. For decades, southern whites have used performance and museums, along with the more traditional media forms of books and film, to construct their versions of history. However, the production of *African American* identity and Civil war memory through these sites is a relatively new phenomenon, enabled by a post-civil rights expansion of the public sphere. Analyzing expressions of this identity as a set of transformative practices opens up multiple possibilities for examining the ways in which the critiques inherent in the re-presentation of history are perhaps enhanced (or neutralized) through the appropriation of traditional avenues of expression. Specifically, articulations of black southern identity utilizing the appropriation of cultural forms typically associated with white southern identity positions this identity within, rather than outside of, dominant structures of power, a potentially more transformative vantage point from which to launch radical critiques of master narratives of history.

The experiences of subjugated groups, including African Americans, has long formed the basis for critiques of the Habermasian bourgeoisie public sphere. There is more scholarly work yet to be done on the formation of alternative publics, and on the role of various media forms in serving those publics. This project represents one such form. Each of these sites constitutes an implicit reordering and strengthening of the dominant public sphere. As many of my interview subjects pointed out, the memories they have constructed through their activities don't merely constitute black history, but *American* history. All of the Civil War reenactments I attended, and all of the museums

I studied engaged audiences of all races. The Memory Book community, whose contributors are mostly anonymous, is open to contributions from anyone who has a relevant story to tell, and its sponsoring institution, the Smithsonian, is an internationally recognized museum. In short, the attention to multiple perspectives on dominant history benefits everyone. Thus, the construction of these memories in alternative public spheres ultimately enhances the dominant public sphere.

This dissertation shows modern communication to proceed through interaction amongst commemorative reenactments, digital media, public history, mainstream Hollywood film, educators, and grassroots activists. Through all of these sites, it raises new questions within communication research with respect to the multiplicity of identities. First, it offers a new way of assessing the role of cultural memory in the formation of identities. Most studies of collective memory assume a relatively stable subject position that demonstrates little evolution over time. The African American experience, I believe, demonstrates the potential for marginalized populations to construct historical agency through the revision of popular historical narratives that have worked to position them as historical objects. The fact that these new narratives are produced through a variety of communicative practices and institutions co-opted from the dominant group makes them even more transformative. Secondly, this discussion focuses on alternative representational sites, thereby further expanding the scope of inquiry within both media studies and African American studies. In discussions of issues of media representation, both disciplines place primary emphasis on traditional forms to the exclusion of practices and institutions not commonly perceived of as media. This entails an analytical positioning which foregrounds

discussion of marginalized groups in terms of representations imposed upon them, thereby foregoing serious consideration of analyses of the ways in which they organize to represent themselves. This positioning unintentionally reifies the power relations it purports to critique by proceeding from the assumption that the disenfranchised have no representational agency. Although, as John Beverly argues, the space in which the production of culture as systemic criticism has always been limited, it has never been completely closed. Thus, scholarship that engages both authoritative and non-authoritative representational forms increases understanding of the various means of resistance.

Thus, an expansion of the common conception of "media" opens up scholarship to much wider, richer sites of African American vernacular expression. My project joins a relatively small but growing body of scholarship that positions nontraditional forms as representational vehicles for groups who lack access to dominant forms of cultural production. Additionally, I have attempted to emphasize the potency of these forms by examining them in one project, a positioning that encourages thinking about the ways they contrast, complement, and reinforce each other. As I have mentioned elsewhere in the dissertation, my inquiries into ritual performance and museums are not the first such investigations which position these sites as media forms. However, the scholarship that emerges when these sites, along with digital media, are put into conversation with each other as a means of building a fragmented black identity reveals potential new areas of research. Third, this study looks at nontraditional forms of civic engagement. All of the sites I examined contained appeals to African Americans' civic duty to work toward greater inclusion within regional and national narratives. Some of the appeals were

explicit, as was the case with the U.S. National Slavery Museum, which lists policy formulation as part of its mission. Some were implicit, such as a contributor to Memory Book urging site visitors of the importance of articulating their personal stories in a public forum.

There is yet more work to be done in this area. I observed and learned of some quite interesting social phenomena while in the field. In addition to the three reenactments I described in chapter three, which are all performed near the actual battlefields in various southern states, I have had the pleasure of attending reenactments in California. At these events, I have spoken with Latino and Asian American reenactors on both the Confederate and Union sides. At an event outside of San Diego, I spoke with a female military reenactor of Puerto Rican descent who emphasized her belief that the hobby is one taken up by "cultural outsiders" in an attempt to become "American." Another reenactor, whom I interviewed in Virginia, told me of a group of black men in Germany, who have no ancestral or social connection to the Civil War or the United States, but nevertheless are attempting to form a USCT reenactment group. Both of these examples, I believe, constitute potentially significant clues to topics for scholarship centered on communication, identity, and cultural globalization.

Moreover, the representation of more inclusive historical memory into the public sphere has not come without blowback from those invested in the dominance of traditional Civil War narratives. This includes the sites I have described, as well as sites that are beyond the scope of this particular project. In chapters two and three, I have already discussed, in varying levels of detail, the resistance reenactors and museum officials encounter during their activities. I have also mentioned, briefly in chapter four,

the substantial number of neo-Confederate websites that, as of this writing, far outnumber those involved in the refutation of the Lost Cause version of history. Media Studies scholar Tara McPherson (2000) has written extensively about these sites.

The backlash has also occurred on a larger scale. Cultural memories from the Civil War have also become embedded in the identity politics that characterize the contemporary political culture in the United States. In modern pluralistic societies, the multiplicities of memories that define decentered identities often engage in very public battles over legitimation. These battles are, essentially, contests over the popular distinction between "history" and "memory." Power relations dictate that the memories of the dominant and privileged group are conferred the status of legitimate "history," while those of the powerless remain relegated to the status of affective "memory." The encroachment of the latter unto the former thus becomes a struggle over the dominance of identities. In many parts of the South, state-sanctioned Confederate imagery continues to dominate the landscape. Their removal, or attempted removal, nearly always involves a substantial degree of political conflict. The reaction to these changes, on the part of neo-Confederate groups and their sympathizers, has increasingly invoked discourses in which these groups imagine themselves to be an aggrieved minority. This mindset motivates the Sons of Confederate Veterans in their battles with the American Civil War Center and the Museum of the Confederacy, and may be seen in some of the discourse at reenactments and on websites. On a broader level, this sense of victimhood has been channeled into the organization of a potent political subjectivity. This discourse of white, conservative males and their cherished symbols as being "under attack" has found a welcome home in the Republican Party as part of the contemporary

incarnation of its “southern strategy.” The political rhetoric advanced as a result of battles over Confederate imagery provides great potential for scholarly inquiry.

As my dissertation demonstrates, an African American southern identity centered on memories of slavery and the Civil War suggests the fragmented, complicated nature of identities. Moreover, the communicative practices and institutions involved in the construction of these memories and identity constitute a set of vernacular media forms that expand and ultimately strengthen the public sphere. At the beginning of this chapter, I initiated discussion with a very brief acknowledgement of the upcoming sesquicentennial of the Civil War. Much of the newspaper coverage and commentary on the planned commencement activities suggest that this set of celebrations will provide a much different tenor from those of anniversary festivities past. One newspaper article from the 18 May edition of the Richmond Times-Dispatch, asks the crucial question, “What legacies are we commemorating? End of slavery? Preservation of our Union? Birth of a historic struggle for civil rights and racial reconciliation?” The very fact that these are the public questions posed on the cusp of celebrations of the event at the center of southern identity foregrounds many implications for the connection among memory, identity, and representation. For those scholars and laypersons who, like me, are interested in the broader questions concerning the ways in which culture shapes and is shaped by identities, the articulations of this identity provide a good set of cases upon which to begin inquiry.

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