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Truth-Telling and Memory-Work in Montgomery's Co-Constituted Landscapes

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Abstract

Drawing attention to the latent, hidden, and not fully reconciled historical landscape of trauma, we explore memory work in the contemporary US South, focusing on the ongoing cultural resurgence of Montgomery, Alabama. Self-branded and highlighted by the *New York Times* as the "Capital of Cool," we suggest that Montgomery is an analytically valuable site to understand the complex and still under-analyzed intersection of race, memory, and place. Focusing on Montgomery expands our conceptualizations of memory work beyond the typical focus on activists and artists who push progressive narratives. Placing the National Memorial for Peace and Justice within a larger understanding of the city's memorial landscapes, our paper argues that Montgomery's conflicted landscape evokes new questions and tensions about memory, racism, and white supremacy and their broader spatial interlockings.

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Keywords

Memory, race, lynching, memorials

Introduction

Cities in the Southern United States (US) are sites of critical commemorative debate and change (Dwyer et al. 2013; Hanna 2008; Hodder 1999; Logan and Reeves 2008; Rose Redwood and Alderman 2008), a reality that has intensified even more in post-Charleston and post-Charlottesville America. This intensification is a seminal moment in memory work, drawing attention to the range of labor—intellectual, social, bodily and political—required to create public memorials that build capacity to recognize and understand the legacies of discrimination, dispossession and violence integral to understanding the US landscape (Alderman and Inwood 2013; Jones 2011; Till 2012). Drawing attention to latent, hidden or not fully reconciled histories of trauma, memory work, and their associated built environments and landscapes, speaks to the challenges of confronting the ongoing links between racism and urban development in contemporary southeastern cities. This includes those that are physically visible but also the latent spaces and moments which sometimes sit "unmarked and unremarked" within the slick marketing campaigns and memorial experiences favored by city leaders, tourism promoters and branding firms (Tyner et al. 2012).

Perhaps no city in the American South captures the labor involved in memory work and its accompanying contradictions and complexities quite like Montgomery, Alabama. Situated along the banks of the Alabama River and once home to the most extensive domestic slave market in the US, more recently the city has witnessed a cultural resurgence. Self-branded and highlighted by the *New York Times* as the "Capital of Cool," Montgomery is attracting national attention (Yuan 2018). Redevelopment of its downtown cityscape includes a minor league baseball park and convention center, as well as the highly publicized Equal Justice Initiative's (EJI) memorial to lynching, the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, and its Legacy Museum, both of which narrate and unflinchingly embody the history of racial injustice and violence against African Americans since enslavement (Robertson 2018). Underlying this paper is a belief that within the current and highly charged memory-work moment that the US finds itself, Montgomery provides more than merely an interesting case study. Situated in a region that has often gone under-theorized (although see Wilson 2000; Woods 1998, 2017), Montgomery is in the midst of a powerful moment, and a geographical reordering focused on remembering and truth-telling, and the city is a valuable analytical indicator of how geographically conflicted that memory work can be, not just in Alabama but across the broader US.

We argue that Montgomery's conflicted landscape evokes new questions about truth-telling, racism, and white supremacy and their broader spatial interlockings, exposing the ways truth-telling and memory work fit within broader social, political and economic structures (Inwood et al. 2016). Drawing on Elizabeth Alexander's poem, *Invocation*, we examine Montgomery's current landscape of memory work, putting it in conversation with the tensions and possibilities that this work evokes to examine how landscapes can raise questions that have long been silenced. Alexander notes in her poem that "there is such a thing as the truth." Using her words as a framework, we suggest that the truth work of the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI), set within a landscape of a post-slavery, still-segregated, and now neoliberal city, problematizes the ways we come to see the truth.

The way "we" see the truth is an important point of departure for us as white scholars as well. This paper has come together in a time when there has been a broader and sustained pushback by reactionaries to the teaching of race and racism and critical race theory. Indeed, as we write politicians in Florida are proposing legislation that would prohibit public schools and businesses from making white

people feel uncomfortable or feel discomfort when learning about the history of racism within the US. This bill is part of a larger effort that seeks to keep hidden the most painful truths about the US. This fight over the ways that the truth of the past impacts the present (and in turn the future) and the emotional and physical labor this fight embodies needs to be integrated more fully within the broader discipline. As a result, we—three white, privileged scholars at high impact research universities—undertook this analysis and reading of the landscape as a point of departure to highlight what the struggle over memory and meaning might look like within the context of broader efforts to pushback against the white supremacist realities of 21st century America.

By briefly exploring and interpreting the commemorative landscape of Montgomery, Alabama, we initiate discussions of the role of memory work and its capacities and limitations in memorializing and coming to terms with longer histories and legacies of race and racism in the US South. Specifically, by highlighting the work of the EJI site and Montgomery's expansive downtown landscape, we situate the promises and perils of memory work and the ways the labor of remembering is wrapped up in and through broader understandings of race and racism in the US. While the EJI memorial has garnered national attention, other less prominent but no less important sites of memory exist within the city. Taking these sites seriously, we expose the myriad ways memory is made and repackaged in the downtown landscape and how this specific memory moment is central to highlighting and exposing the contradictions of race in the built urban environment.

Background

Montgomery is in various ways attempting to come to terms with its conflicted history and to look "cool" and welcoming to visitors and investors. The First Capital of the Confederacy, the secessionist, white supremacist government that waged a bloody civil war to preserve the enslavement of African Americans, Montgomery also played a significant role in birthing another very different revolution, the US Civil Rights Movement. The city was the site of intense civil rights protests in the 1950s and 1960s and the home of Martin Luther King Jr.'s first church (Dwyer and Alderman 2008). Its new experience economy (Pine et al. 1999) of entertainment venues, museums, and memorials highlight the contested, sometimes controversial role of memory in the development and marketing of urban areas. With the recent installation of monuments dedicated to this conflicted past, one cannot turn a corner in Montgomery without confronting the place-based realities of American structural racism interspersed, often uncomfortably, among new restaurants, trendy coffee shops, boutiques, and high-rise developments (Inwood and Alderman 2021; Alderman and Inwood 2021). Seeing these contradictions written so powerfully upon the Montgomery landscape raises questions of more general importance to many cities about the nature and potential of memorial landscapes to interrogate the broad array and long history of racist violence that exist within the US and the way those histories sit uncomfortably close to present-day consumptive scenes.

This uncomfortable and tension-filled situating of sober memory-work alongside the political economy of contemporary urban development is, in fact, the sine qua non of how these landscapes came to be in the first place. Montgomery sits on land that once belonged to Creek Indigenous peoples whose land was ripped away during some of the first waves of settler expansionism after the American Revolution (Rogers et al. 2018). The wealth and prominence of Montgomery was enhanced by its strategic location along the Alabama River. The waterway carried timber and raw materials from North Alabama and Georgia to Mobile and the Gulf of Mexico. Its waters also carried enslaved men, women, and children, and the city became one of the largest domestic slave markets in the US. This domestic, inter-regional slave trade, operating well after the abolition of the more widely discussed transatlantic trafficking of Africans, transformed Montgomery's position in the region as it was strategically located near the "Black Belt", a term used to describe the rich, dark, cotton-growing dirt in the region and the growing population of African Americans brought there with the expansion of slavery from the Upper

to the Deep South (Tullos 2004). It was, in fact, because of Montgomery's centrality within this economic geography of slavery and the intense pro-slavery secessionist sentiment in which it traded, which led the Alabama city to be chosen as the first seat of political power for the Confederate government (Rogers et al. 2018).

This historical landscape and its interlocking logic of racial capitalism rest tacitly—and at times explicitly—within the present confluence of memory and landscape. Within the surge of memory work, there exists the layering of history, politics, and economics, that at times is co-opted, but at other times reveals larger and broader truths about the nature of racial capitalism and dispossession in the city, region, and nation (HoSang et al. 2012; Melamed 2011; Pulido 2016). Ongoing struggles to connect to broader processes of racial capitalism and white supremacy in ways that confront, challenge and contextualize the realities of slavery and racial terror lynching (Alderman 2011; Gilmore 2002; Rice Kardux 2012) are localized and made sense of in Montgomery's new landscape of memory. In this way, Montgomery is at the forefront of efforts to connect broader national and regional stories and affects to local sites, streets, and buildings, to tell the truth**,** *and* as we argue in this paper, more precisely narrate and embody how communities confront these legacies and contemporary realities of violence (Doss 2012). Importantly the narration of violence and racism is not a singular or static moment of social and spatial translation but layered in such a way that it becomes folded back into processes of accumulation and co-optation. As we argue, Montgomery's new landscape raises questions about how and in what ways the work of memory is never straightforward, and how its contradictions, complexities and intensities course through the landscape, animating tensions within the city.

Montgomery highlights how the American South is part of, rather than apart from, broader regional and national trends (Jansson 2017; Nagel 2018). The city expands our conceptualizations of memory work beyond the typical, narrower focus on activists and artists who want to push progressive narratives (Till 2008). While the raw activism of memory work and the taking of responsibility for histories and victims of racism is necessary, creating environments for representing difficult, if not painful, memories of the past are now also firmly part of the architecture of urban political economy. An emphasis on truth-telling resonates with immigrant communities and people of color (Baikner 2015) who have long battled state-sanctioned denials of the histories and contemporary legacies of racism, and the life-and-death stakes of those battles have done nothing but grow in a post-truth Trump America.

Equal Justice Initiative and a Truth-Telling Agenda

The Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) represents a watershed intervention in truth-telling and memory work within Montgomery and the larger nation. Dedicated to exposing the interrelationships existing between racialized mass incarceration and the legacy to slavery and racial terror, EJI works to transform how we see the past in order to reshape how we understand and act upon the present and future, especially in the area of criminal justice reform. Behind the leadership of activist lawyer Bryan Stevenson, EJI has been part of several high-profile cases and lawsuits in Alabama, overturning of 135 death sentence convictions in the state and successfully arguing for the abolishment of mandatory life without parole for children (Schilling 2018). Under-girding EJI's memory-work is the belief that challenging contemporary racial inequalities of police harassment, anti-Black violence and penal injustice requires a historical and geographical understanding of legal and extralegal violence against Black lives. EJI defines racial terror lynching as having at least one of six different attributes: resulted from accusations of interracial sex; occurred in response to casual social transgressions; allegations of serious violent crime; public spectacle; violence that escalated into the targeting of a larger community and African American leadership that resisted being mistreated or the mistreatment of the Black community (EJI 2017, 5). In addition, the lynching that EJI documents focusses on violence that occurred during the era of Jim Crow segregation and efforts to intimidate Black communities and people from asserting their constitutional rights (ibid).

Given the public nature of racial terror lynching and its long connection to racism and white supremacy, and as EJI highlights, there is a geography to the way lynching and its associated oppressions operated throughout the US. A goal of EJI is to show that lynching was not only a southern phenomenon, but a trauma carried out and experienced throughout the US. By highlighting this geography, EJI expands our understanding of the role that lynching played in the making of the contemporary US cultural, economic and political landscape—reaffirming what Bledsoe (2019) sees as the "primacy of anti-Black oppression" to the story of the American nation. By connecting to broader narratives of racial capital and other forms of injustice related to race and racism, EJI opened the National Memorial to Peace and Justice in April of 2018.

It is difficult to envision a community in the US without a connection to lynching. Yet, as a nation, we have never told the truth of its geographical scope, nor have we fully exposed the ways that contemporary landscapes hold latent racial processes—the unnamed names, the untold horrors of racism, the unpunished perpetrators and the unmarked places of white supremacy and racial capitalism that shape the development of the nation. The sheer extent of institutional denial and forgetting is staggering. After over a century of almost 200 unsuccessful Congressional bills that would have made lynching a federal crime, the US Senate finally approved an anti-lynching bill in late 2018 (Schuknecht 2018). EJI's work to memorialize the legacy of terror lynching fits within broader processes of memory work, the way activists, artists, non-profits, local and regional governments, citizens and even presently elected officials are increasingly coming to terms with the reality and deep contexts of racism.

From the City of Montgomery's standpoint, EJI's hard-edged memory work fits within the softer heritage displays and performances of urban marketing campaigns and branding, even as these new economic development tools clearly delineate the limits to which racial neoliberalism can ever come to terms with the latent and ongoing workings of racism. Neoliberal promotions—with their reduction of social justice to exchange value—may seem to offer progressive and inclusionary solutions to the racist histories of cities, but these reforms are seldom avenues for realizing full reconciliation or building deep, reparative geographies of memory for past and continuing victims of inequality (Brasher et al. 2018; McFarland et al. 2019). Attracting international attention, Montgomery has been keen to use the national and international attention garnered by the EJI's Memorial and Museum to help market the city, successfully bringing 400,000 visitors to the city since April 2018 and contributing $1 billion in traveler spending to the local economy. EJI exposes memory work as not just the labor of remembering and creating public memorials, but also the power of memory to rework or influence the circulation and flow of meaning, people and capital that frame broader understandings of politics, culture and the economy. These flows then raise new questions by evoking, naming and presenting untold truths in the contemporary landscape.

Truth is not simply a factual narration, although the excavating and recognition of long suppressed facts of trauma is important for historical accountability. Recent interventions note that when it comes to monuments that deal with racial injustice there is a need to shift discourse from "interpretation" to a "more critical interrogation of the very histories we choose to see in the first place" (Flewellen et al. 2021, 230). As a result of these insights the sharing of the emotional and psychological truths of racism becomes important. We use truths purposely to demonstrate that within the context of EJI's efforts to speak truth to power there exists a multiplicity of perspectives and realities about lynching in the US. As way of example, the ways in which these crimes were carried out is contextual and shifts through time and space and across sexualities and genders as white society used lynching violence to enforce the ever-shifting terrains of white supremacy within the US. Truth telling is an important avenue for local communities and community activists to animate local and regional politics around entrenched injustices, longstanding legacies of racial violence and the continued work that those violences do in communities across the US, all of which are grounded in geographic conditions (Inwood 2016). Yet such

truth claims-making can be difficult work for neoliberal authorities who have tended to treat inequality as safely in the past (McFarland et al. 2019). Thus, memory work is often in tension with city urban and economic development efforts. The southeastern US has been at the forefront of these contradictions.

What is interesting about the work at EJI and what sets it apart from some of the other truth processes taking place in the region is that EJI is folded into the broader community. In many of the other areas where truth telling takes place the work is often done in opposition to local government and civic leaders who find the truth inconvenient or too painful (Inwood 2012a, 2012b). Perhaps one of the reasons Montgomery is embracing the lynching memorial is that because the peace and justice memorial takes a broad scale view of the racial violence, it does not focus solely on Montgomery, it leaves space for Montgomery to embrace the memorial without having to fully engage in the more difficult process of coming to terms with its own past traumas.

This reality raises many new questions, not just in terms of how memory work can take place in cities, but for how contradictions within the landscape expose painful truths about the still unresolved realities of white supremacy. Through our focus on the broad array of significant memorials in Montgomery, we argue that the memory work in the city is indicative of the way different actors internalize, come to terms with and portray the longer-term legacies of violence and trauma that come to define what geographer Karen Till calls "wounded places," or sites of trauma and forgetting that reinforce inequalities (Jonker and Till 2009; Till 2012).

Placing the Memorial for Peace and Justice

The cultural landscape is important for understanding how we come to remember, celebrate or come to terms with complex historical legacies. While there are myriad ways to discuss the cultural landscape, central to our modern-day understandings is the way the landscape is both a thing that can be analyzed, but also a process that helps us to understand our place within larger socio-political histories and contemporary realities (Schein 1996). As a material thing, the landscape is composed of tangible objects—steel, stone, wood, brick—that shape visitors' experiences of a memorial site, helping form a commemorative atmosphere or feeling (Sumartojo 2016). The materiality of landscapes varies in scale and scope—they can be immersive experiences, or they can be moments within larger landscapes, and these material landscapes can work in tandem with one another across the scale of a city. As a socio-political process, memorial landscapes help us to understand history—to see and to feel the depth and the scope of historical events, processes, and systems. More importantly, they help us to understand *our place* within those same events and their ongoing impacts. When it comes to questions of truth, the discursive and material connections within a memorial tableau works to create understandings about history and the place of those events within a longer and more sustained local, regional or national story. Memorial landscapes can help reinforce or challenge dominant narratives about the foundational events that have shaped place, and they raise questions about our collective understandings of who we are, how we got here, our place of belonging within the social and political life of the nation and whether these landscapes point us to more inclusive and socially just futures (Alderman and Inwood 2013; Dwyer and Alderman 2008; Tolia-Kelly 2016; Whelan 2016).

Perhaps nowhere is this provocation of untold truths been made more visible than in the National Memorial to Peace and Justice. The memorial sits on top of a hill overlooking downtown Montgomery. As you enter, you begin your journey along a gravel path. On one side are a series of installations dedicated to the historical context of slavery, justice and the place of terror lynching within the history of the nation. On the other side sits a wide grass field and a sculpture by Ghanaian Kwame Akoto-Bamfo representing slaves on a slave ship. Shackled in steel, the figures reach out trying to steady themselves against the buffeting of storms and waves on their forced journey from Africa through the middle-passage and into the US. The starkness of the memorial and these bodies against the green fields challenges the tradition of trivializing and deflecting the physical and emotional pain of racism.

Farther ahead and as the path takes a sharp left turn you enter into the main memorial site. There, you are confronted by 800 suspended Corten steel box monuments. The seemingly endless rows of suspended steel box monuments allude to the way many lynching victims were hung from trees. The materiality of these weathering steel boxes is critical, as they are intended to rust and oxidize over time, resulting in a rich brown color that contrasts with the expansive green lawn and the rough textures of wood and concrete that make up the memorial. Engraved on each box is a name of a state and county along with the names of those murdered and the date of the racial terror. As you work your way through the memorial site, those steel sarcophagi slowly rise and, as you walk down a wooden ramp, you are at the bottom of the memorial, literally drowning in a sea of names, and boxes and counties. By entering into this area of the memorial, the full weight and experience of racial terror lynching are exposed and the vast expanse of steel begins to enclose you until it feels inescapable. With the impossibility of being able to read every individual monument, one develops an overwhelming if not smothering sense of the scope and scale of the injustice. As the designers of the National Memorial for Peace and Justice realize, the very form, materiality and layout of memorials have an affective power that advocates hope to harness so as to “re-work” or reshape how people interact with and appreciate these painful histories.

It is also under the weightiness of these steel boxes and their inscriptions that the visitor is prompted to think about the justifications used to lynch and terrorize African American men, woman and children. Along the walls are the rationales white Americans used to justify the widespread use of racial terror lynching: they are curated to challenge generations of myth making that framed lynching as anything but a tool of white social control over the bodies, livelihoods and psyches of African Americans. Once out of the main memorial site, visitors confront duplicate copies of the suspended steel boxes, laid out, almost like coffins or caskets, for further inspection by visitors. These were cast so that counties where lynching occurred can take their memorial back home for the purposes of highlighting and reflecting upon the histories of violence that have occurred and the role that terror lynching played within their own communities. As one EJI staff member described, once this process begins, the remaining unclaimed steel boxes will serve as a report card of sorts of who is trying to come to terms and who is not. Taking responsibility for past trauma is one of the key aspects of meaningful memory-work and truth-telling.

As you leave the main memorial, additional sculptures and monuments speak to the wider array of anti-Blackness that permeates the American landscape. Dana King’s sculpture, *Guided by Justice*, prompts you to think about the Black women who led the Montgomery Bus Boycott and Hank Willis Thomas’s *Raise Up*, speaks to the ongoing precarity of Black life at the hands of law enforcement. Leaving the memorial, you finally come to a plaque displaying Alexander’s poem, *Invocation*. During our visits in June 2018 and February 2019 her words, etched in black granite, cut against the bright blue Montgomery sky and Montgomery’s downtown cityscape. They evoke and harness the magnitude of what you have just witnessed:

> The wind brings your names
> We will never dissever your names
> nor your shadows beneath each branch and tree.
>
> The truth comes in on the wind, is carried by water.
> There is such a thing as the truth. Tell us
> how you got over. Say, *Soul look back in wonder……*
>
> Here you endure and are luminous.
> You are not lost to us.
> The wind carries sorrows, sighs, and shouts.
>
> The wind brings everything. Nothing is lost.

By placing Alexander's poem *Invocation* at the end of the memorial, the landscape design is an invitation to broader reflections on the meaning of lynching and the significance of the EJI memorial complex to the city and nation. In this way space is opened to reflect on what McKittrick and Woods (2007, 5) describe as the need to explore knowledges that are created "within and against the grain of dominant modes of power, and space." The juxtaposition of Alexander's poem against a backdrop of downtown Montgomery, with its high-rise bank buildings built over the site of domestic slave markets (Inwood et al. 2020), is a reminder that the city is built through the very material realities that EJI highlights through their memorial complex. Returning to McKittirck and Woods (2007, 5) and Alexander's poem evokes how Black geographies entwine "with—rather than outside—what has been called coloniality's persistence." Alexander's words bring the past into the present providing testimony to the truth of racial terror never fully or truly confronted in the US.

The poem prompts a new set of questions. Now that the memorial has remembered the names of the murdered and has saturated the landscape with the scope and inhumanity of racial violence, how do we see Montgomery? How do we see the city's contradictions, erasures and still emboldened memorials to white supremacy in relation to new memorials that seek to highlight African American achievements and struggles? These contradictions expose the city to a critical rethinking and prompt us to ask: on whose labor is this city built and in what ways does this city's rebranding of itself isolate these histories from the broader reimagining that city leaders are pushing and promoting? Thus, it is necessary to place—literally and metaphorically—the EJI memorial within the larger landscape of memorialization and urban redevelopment in Montgomery. This emplacement process is about asking how Montgomery's different memorial landscapes, ongoing white supremacy *and* its urban redevelopment all speak to or past one another.

Montgomery's Memorial Landscape as Conflicted Spatial Landscape

Scholars of social memory increasingly assert the value of understanding the locational and dialogic relationship between different memorials and of situating memorials within larger understandings of landscapes and memorial complexes. Memorials form together—either by design or sheer experience—a spatial narrative that generates meaning beyond the sum of its parts (Hanna et al. 2019; Ryan et al. 2016; Smith and Foote 2017). To fully understand the place of the National Memorial for Peace and Justice within Montgomery, one must trace their steps to Court Square, which you can see, as anchored by the Renasant Bank Tower, from the EJI memorial site. The square, with its central fountain, is surrounded by mid-rise and high-rise buildings that once housed the city's historic business hub of banks, insurance offices, drug stores, shops and hotels. Court Square now house banks, local businesses, the Montgomery Convention and Visitors Bureau and a small triangular park commemorating Rosa Parks. Court Square was once the city's busiest slave auction site and slaves were marched to the square up to what is now Commerce Street from the Alabama River. EJI collaborated with the Black Heritage Council of the Alabama Historical Commission to sponsor the establishment of slavery-related historical markers in downtown Montgomery. As one of these memorial plaques notes, "Africans of all ages were lined up for inspection and auctioned at this as well as four other major depots, three of which lined Market Street (now Dexter Avenue)." According to EJI, by 1859, Montgomery had "as many slave depots as it did hotels and banks" (12). Court Square is also the site where Rosa Parks boarded a bus in 1955 and launched the Montgomery Bus Boycott and arguably the modern Civil Rights Movement. At the park adjacent to Court Square, a memorial plaque marks the spot of that consequential boarding of the bus (Alderman et al. 2016).

Court Square is the turning point from Commerce Street to Dexter Avenue, linking Dexter to the State Capitol building, the site where Jefferson Davis was sworn in as the First – and only—President of the Confederate States of America. The axes from the Alabama River to Court Square and from Court Square to the Capitol are still clearly delineated in the landscape of Montgomery, with wide streets

legibly engraving the visual axes of power, commerce and racism. Dexter Avenue illustrates, as Hebbert (2005, 581) notes, the capacity of the street to serve as locus of collective memory, not only as a site for "overt commemoration of public memory," but also as "the accumulation of group memories" through the everyday material settings and socio-spatial patterns of living, moving and remembering. Hubbard and Lyon (2018, 937) similarly locate streets within the wider performative systems and histories of space and urban social life, arguing that streets are "contradictory and complex" sites of contestation.

Dexter is most assuredly a contradictory landscape. Civil rights marchers pushed up from Court Square Fountain to the state capitol during the Selma to Montgomery Voting Rights March. Martin Luther King organized the Montgomery Bus Boycott in the basement of the first church he pastored, Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, which sits at the top of Dexter. Yet, Dexter Avenue was also the white shopping district of the city during times of segregation, only one block away from Monroe Street, which was the African American shopping district. On Dexter sits a dense historic fabric of low-rise commercial buildings, including the Kress Department Store, which has been recently renovated with upscale housing and retail space. The Kress site is a critical site of memory work on the corridor, creating an urban heritage aesthetic for consumers through its several internal memorial sites dedicated to race and reconciliation in the city. It is at Kress where one can find recovered marble slabs that once marked and hung-over segregated drinking fountains in the store, as well as a story booth and podcast studio, where the people of Montgomery can tell, record and archive the stories of their lives and hardships. Just adjacent to the Kress and its coffee shop, is a new public park at the former site of the Montgomery Fair Department Store, where Rosa Parks worked and which now commemorates Parks's civil rights activism. Dexter, between Court Square and the capitol building, is now a mix of vacant commercial properties, restaurants, redevelopment, the Retirement Systems of Alabama building, as well as state judicial and educational buildings.

Dexter reminds us that US history has always included the lives and perspectives of African Americans, even if it takes decades to begin to come to terms with what that story is and how we remember it. The celebrated avenue is now the site of several memorial plaques honoring Montgomery's deep role in civil rights organizing and protests, including one highlighting the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church and one to Fred David Gray, the civil rights attorney who represented the 623 victims of the Tuskegee Syphilis Study. At the top of Dexter, just before the Capitol, are two memorial markers that capture so well the divided nature of southern social memory. On the north side of the street, one stone memorial commemorates the Selma to Montgomery March, which began with the bloody encounters at the Edmund Pettis Bridge and ended at the nearby State Capitol Building. The march precipitated the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act—arguably the crowning achievement of the Southern Movement for civil and political rights. On the south side of the street, another almost unreadable stone memorial commemorates the 1861 inaugural parade for Jefferson Davis. Dexter Avenue culminates at the steps that lead up to the capitol building. Recently, as part of a wider public art strategic plan, the city commissioned a public art crosswalk at the top of Dexter that depicts footprints commemorating the Selma to Montgomery March.

Situated at the top of a long upslope, the Alabama State Capitol, with its white dome, impressive grounds and manicured lawns, dominates Dexter Avenue and its approaches. Within the capitol grounds are an array of memorials, plaques, and monuments to Alabama's development and major and minor figures in the state's history. These plaques and memorials also call attention to contradictions and tensions that filter through the work of memory and exemplify the ways in which memory is always and everywhere contested. For example, after climbing the stairs from Dexter Avenue to the top of the capitol, a small plaque on the capitol steps draws attention to the site where Jefferson Davis took the oath of office to become President of the Confederate States of America in 1861. Located some steps away is the site where Martin Luther King, Jr., delivered a speech at the culmination of the Selma to Montgomery

Voters Rights March. Opposite the church on the other side of the Capitol is a large memorial dedicated to Confederate veterans of the civil war. This memorial was a site of conflict in 2015. In the wake of the killing of nine African Americans in Charleston, Alabama Governor Robert Bentley reluctantly took down the Confederate battle flag and other Civil war-related flags from the foot of the Confederate memorial on the State Capitol grounds in Montgomery, leaving behind conspicuously empty flagpole mounts (Dean 2015). If you turn from this embattled Confederate memorial and stare down Dexter Avenue from the top of Capitol Hill, you see the Court Square fountain, discussed previously, that was the site of the largest slave market in the United States.

Taken and read together, these memorials illustrate a central contradiction in the southern memorial landscape. By situating the commemorated lives and experiences of important African Americans and events related to civil rights next to those memorials dedicated to white supremacy without context or effort to interpret these contradictory emplacements, the landscapes of Dexter and the wider city project the idea that a kind of moral equivalency exists among these memorials and attendant ideological messages. Architectural historian Dell Upton (2015, 15) challenges the tendency in Montgomery and other southern cities to separate Black and white history into a dual heritage of "parallel, equally honorable paths" rather than seeing them as consequentially entangled. These parallel paths do much to foreclose meaningful and fruitful dialog around issues of race and inequality in the US and, perhaps even more so, show the ways that memory work can foreclose engagement as much as it can foster meaningful interactions and interpretations. Ironically, or perhaps intentionally, these parallel paths reinforce notions of segregated histories and experiences rather than working to integrate the complexity of US history into a broader narrative of race and racism. In so doing, the memorial landscape of Montgomery, like the many southern commemorative landscapes, situates the contours of memory work in and through a lens that silences broader discussions about justice and reinforces the racialized boundary making that reflects the dominant realities of US society.

Mis-Naming the Past in Montgomery's Landscape

Returning to poet Elizabeth Alexander's conceptualization that "there is such a thing as the truth," how might we make sense of Montgomery's conflicted landscape of memory and truth-telling? Does Montgomery's landscape speak to the advances of racial capitalism in the 21st century? Here we suggest that EJI and the memorial plaques mark space and transform our understanding of Montgomery at the same time that ongoing markers of white supremacy, memorialized in plaque, monument and Capitol architecture, also mark space. They exist together in Montgomery, at times side by side, in a way that evokes the still ongoing confines and segregating workings of white supremacy. This contradiction between an ostensibly progressive narrative at EJI (one that evokes themes of race, capital and the continuing processes of social confinement, oppression and exploitation) and a more traditional understanding of the South's history through a Confederate, Lost Cause iconography and narrative needs to be read together. Only by having these memories and memorial spaces speak with each other, rather than past or in isolation of each other, can we hope to better understand and realize this moment of racial reconciliation, truth-telling and memory work. Alexander, through her poem *Invocation,* speaks to these tensions as well:

> Ancestors, you will find us still in cages,
> despised, and disciplined.
> You will find us still mis-named.
>
> Here you will find us despite.
> You will not find us extinct.
> You will find us here memoried and storied.

You will find us here mighty.
You will find us here divine.
You will find us where you left us, but not as you left us.

Here you endure and are luminous.
You are not lost to us.
The wind carries sorrows, sighs, and shouts.

The wind brings everything. Nothing is lost.

Alexander speaks to the layers of mis-naming that are fully apparent in Montgomery's present and conflicted memorial landscape. One of these layers is the legacy of erasure. Slaves were ripped from Africa and shipped to the "New World'—to be marched up Commerce and held captive before being auctioned off as property. In contrast to the Memorial for Peace and Justice, whose immersive experience instructs visitors in the evils of lynching, the plaque marking Court Square as a site of slave auctions does not evoke the continued operation of these pathways as sites of and to white power within Montgomery. Similarly, the plaque commemorating Rosa Parks minimally marks space, without fully embodying the transformative work that her protests did well after bus de-segregation, nor the spatiality of conflicts around transportation justice that have expanded and continue to expand out from this one site and historical moment. The plaques around Montgomery that narrate its involvement in slave trade and the Civil Rights Movement ground the idea of slavery in a particular place and at a particular time. Rather than exposing the ties that bind slavery to the broader development and wealth of Montgomery, to the broader region and nation or even to the continued racial workings of mass incarceration, the plaques to the slave market and Rosa Parks sever those ties and ground Court Square in a particular time and place. This type of memorialization does important work marking space and history, but at the same time it severs events from broader systemic, structural and ongoing forms of racism. *The plaques, therefore, both name and mis-name.*

Similarly, at the top of Dexter Avenue, the conflicted memorial landscape exists in tension between King's church, the two plaques that mark both the march from Selma and for Jefferson Davis's inauguration, the Capitol building itself and its monuments to white supremacy. Here, there is no museum or immersive experience to contrast the ways that these simple memorial plaques sit under the shadow of the Capitol. Here, the architectural power of axis and scale, embodied in the monumental steps of the Capitol and the clear directional vista down Dexter and toward Court Square, bear heavily (though not completely) on ongoing contestation against racism and its ongoing iterations and expressions.

This misnaming also speaks to the way the memorial landscape of Montgomery unfolds. The city is littered with the remnants of past stories that are only partially retold or understood within the broader memorial landscape. Montgomery is therefore partially named, partially unnamed—a collapsed temporality of racism and luminous remembering. Yet to see the EJI museum and the memorial plaques and the landscapes of Dexter Avenue as not in conversation with each other is to miss the ways the contradictions between the sites reveal what Alexander evokes as the ways *there is such a thing as the truth.* Taken together, the plaques and the EJI Memorial to Peace and Justice and its Legacy Museum speak to each other and the ongoing workings of racism—from slavery and lynching to mass incarceration. They collectively speak to the inhumanity of our present realities, the way the city's foundation is created through the blood, bone, and sinews of countless peoples. When taken together it exposes the complicated and still incomplete understanding of our collective past. The truth, if we are to take Alexander's words seriously, is found in the incompleteness of the story, the way the plaques and the museums and the memorial sites sit in tension with each other and the ways that tension is revelatory of the story itself. The truth is that as a nation the people of the US have not yet begun to fully incorporate

or understand the true weight of violence, exploitation, erasure, genocide, mass incarceration or a host of other forms of dehumanizing and exploitative histories and realities that have come to make America, America.

Critical to the broader “truth” of the City of Montgomery and its complicated past is the way these memorials need to be situated together. To fully understand the memorials dedicated to the Selma to Montgomery March, for example, they have to be placed in conversation with the memorials dedicated to the Confederacy, Jefferson Davis, the slave market, and other markers that call forward the complicated legacies of race and history in the city. Such a moment requires a kind of broader reading of the city and its history than what is understood through slick marketing campaigns or the city's efforts to package and sell itself as the South's "Capital of Cool." Recall from our introduction that the memorial landscape of Montgomery calls forward and exposes painful realities about the still unresolved realities of white supremacy and a changing Southern landscape. Central to this unfolding are the ways the landscape in Montgomery situates the very fibers of racial capital and Indigenous genocides and dispossession that made it a critical site of commerce, business, empire building and politics at the eve of the US Civil War—and the ways that it is trying to remake itself today. Such a reading of the landscape and the ways the broader memorial complex fits together and how visitors experience and read those memorials, is the latent yet enduring dimension of memory work because it exists beyond the scope and scale of what landscape designers, architects, or city leaders or branding experts envision.

Concluding Remarks

By telling some truths, memory work in Montgomery evokes the dormant depths of racism—the existing but not fully realized work of truth-telling. In other words, the broader memorial complex within the Alabama city, when taken together, is revealing of what Alexander refers to as truths carried along by the wind. This truth of everything reveals the ways slavery, forced removal and the realities of racism lie everywhere exposed to those who can read the city beyond the overt and obvious signs, markers and memorial posts. The truth of everything reveals that the ancestral histories and realities of the making of the city are far from extinct and continue to animate and refresh the self-evident truths of racial capitalism. Memory works to invoke these latencies, drawing them out—telling us how this moment of this city came to be. It illuminates the city in new ways. When read together across Montgomery, memorials uncover and retell so that the past cannot be dis-severed from the present, so that the future can be something else. While ongoing public and scholarly debates about southern places of memory are rightly focused on the meaning of the past, less attention is given to what future might be at stake. If we are to fashion a more socially just and survivable future for those groups who have been (and continue to be) harmed by racialized violence, then we must enlist all aspects of the landscape in truth-telling, memory work and conversations with each other about the obvious, enduring and latent workings of racism in the South and the nation.

Montgomery, because of the important truth-telling in which it engages (and the truth telling it fails to make complete within its landscape), can be an important analytical workspace for geographers, not only for understanding the conflicted spatial politics of memory work happening in this specific city but also broader challenges and tensions facing the larger region and nation. The mis-naming of the past happening in Montgomery is indicative of a broader need to put contradictory and traditionally segregated memories and memorials in direct conversation with each other to realize the broader “truth” of cities and their complicated and painful past. As communicated in such affective terms at EJI’s National Memorial for Peace and Justice, the geography of racial terror, white supremacy and anti-Black oppression engulfs all of our communities, then and now. Yet how this moment is used—and how it ultimately reworks the landscape of Montgomery—remains unknown. In part, we suggest that by asking new questions about what continues to be named, mis-named and un-named, Montgomery severs the possibility of silence and casts new shadows even on the ways that memory work itself is co-opted by

racial capitalism through urban development. The shadows and the tensions are where the next layer of truth lies. These are the luminous spaces Alexander speaks to—a new possibility where the past is not lost and can come to bear on the future.

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