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Making Memory, Making Meaning: Memorial Museums and the Participatory Audience

Hillary Kirkham

Claremont Graduate University
2020

Approval of the Dissertation Committee

This dissertation has been duly read, reviewed, and critiqued by the Committee listed below, which hereby approves the manuscript of Hillary Kirkham as fulfilling the scope and quality requirements for meriting the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Cultural Studies with concentrations in Museum Studies and Media Studies.

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Abstract

Making Memory, Making Meaning: Memorial Museums and the Participatory Audience

By

Hillary Kirkham

Claremont Graduate University: 2020

This dissertation explores the relationship between memorial museums and visitors, reexamining the process of remembering traumatic events in United States history. My work examines this meaning-making dynamic in case studies of four memorial museums: The 9/11 Memorial Museum, The Legacy Museum: From Slavery to Mass Incarceration, Manzanar National Historic Site, and Carthage Jail. By combining textual analysis of museums with data from visitor-produced materials such as guestbooks, letters, periodicals, and Instagram posts, I examine memorial museums' aims and rhetorical strategies while analyzing visitors' roles and contributions, illustrating how both guest and site collaborate to create memory and meaning. Drawing and building upon cultural studies, museum studies, and memory studies, this dissertation expands our understanding of participation at memorial museums, engagement with traumatic pasts, and the ways in which museums and audiences negotiate meaning. My particular focus on visitor participation illustrates how audiences exercise agency and contribute to the interpretive process at this complex museum genre.

For Chase

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INTRODUCTION

On any given New York City day, thousands of people fill the 9/11 Memorial Museum. Crowds slowly descend the sloped path towards the subterranean exhibition hall. At bedrock, visitors take photos in the cavernous space. In the Memorial Exhibition, guests move silently around the room covered in victims' photos, sometimes stopping at digital screens to delve into in-depth profiles. Within the Historical Exhibition, guests push against one another, craning their necks to see objects like dusty shoes or videos of first responders rushing to the scene. Boxes of tissue are at the ready in anticipation of emotional outbursts. Visitors sign digital screens resting by a piece of twisted metal, their responses projected onto a world map and joining comments like "We will never forget" and drawings of the Twin Towers. In a cool, dark room, recording booths invite visitors to share their remembrances or reflect on 9/11 by answering selected questions, while responses by both visitors and VIP guests project onto the wall.

The 9/11 Memorial Museum is only one example of a memorial museum, a genre of museum that resides in the complex space between history and memory, authority and freedom. While memorialization is not a new practice, in recent years the terrain of meaning-making of violence and atrocity has increasingly taken place at memorial museums. This genre emerged in the late 1980s and corresponds closely to the "memory boom"—which historian Jay Winter defines as "the efflorescence of interest in the subject of memory inside the academy and beyond it" (1)—that occurred in the same decade (Williams 189). However, even though memorial museums are relatively new, memorialization is a fraught process no matter its form. As historian Edward Linenthal argues in *Preserving Memory*, "The more volatile the memory, the more difficult a task to reach a consensual vision of how the memory should be appropriately

expressed, and the more intense become the struggles to shape, to ‘own’ the memory’s public presence” (52). Tension can arise in a number of spots, from the creation of the site itself to ideas about how visitors should behave.

Our technological age and a public increasingly accustomed to creating, contributing, and commenting add to the struggle over public memory as people become more vocal and assert their agency. This dissertation analyzes that tension, scrutinizing the ways in which memorial museums both invite and restrict the public from meaning-making, as well as how audiences assert their own agency. How do museums tell a narrative while including visitors’ voices, especially when the story is one individuals experienced personally? What are different approaches museums take, and how does this affect visitors’ responses? Furthermore, what happens when museums restrict participation? How do audiences go beyond museum resources to contribute to the meaning of the site, and how do these interpretations feed back into the museum? By addressing these questions through case-studies of memorial museums and analyses of visitor content, this dissertation explores how both museums and the public help shape the memory and meaning of traumatic events. Studying memorial museums through participation and expanding our understanding of how people engage with traumatic memory help us understand memorialization in new ways.

This dissertation’s analysis of participatory meaning-making at memorial museums connects to a larger history of the conceptualization of power and knowledge in museums. These changing understandings influence the perceived relationship between museums and visitors. Scholars have long considered museums institutions of control. Museums authorized information and disseminated knowledge, perpetuated hierarchies, claimed representation rights, privileged

certain narratives over others, and regulated the exhibition space. Some experts linked museum's educational aims to power, arguing that they trained the public into a docile citizenry. As Tony Bennett posits, museums "sought also to allow the people to know and thence to regulate themselves" (63) while Eileen Hooper-Greenhill describes the first public museums as "The seriated public spaces, surveyed and controlled, where knowledge is offered for passive consumption, are emblematic of the museum as one of the apparatuses that create 'docile bodies' in the disciplinary society" ("Museum" 71). In recent decades, however, there has been a notable shift in how museums approach the idea of knowledge and their relationship to audiences. Hooper-Greenhill argues that "Knowledge is no longer unified and monolithic; it becomes fragmented and multi-vocal," and there is an increasing trend towards viewing audiences as co-contributors (*Museums and the Interpretation* 152). Scholar of museums and heritage sites, Andrea Witcomb, commented on this move in 2003, remarking that "visitors themselves have an active role in the process, becoming co-authors in the production of meanings" (143). The most overt form of this dismantling of hierarchy of knowledge in the museum is the *participatory museum*, which fundamentally changes the relationship between visitors and the museum, as well as between visitors themselves. Power dynamics are deliberately reimagined by providing opportunities for visitors to add to the museum. These types of museums loosen their authoritative control and create space for people to contribute knowledge to the museum in specific ways.

The shift from authoritative, top down narratives to a more democratic view of meaning-making can also be seen in memorial practices. Those in power often used memorials to inspire patriotism and shape citizen's ideas about the nation. James Young, preeminent scholar of

memorialization, notes that “as part of a nation’s rites or the objects of a people’s national pilgrimage, they are invested with national soul and memory” (*Texture 2*). Indeed, memorials—especially those of war—were monuments designed to shape a collective memory of the country’s past. However, changes in ideology, and accordingly architecture and design, ushered in an era in which creators of these sites no longer saw visitors as a homogenous mass, rejected master narratives, and encouraged people to interpret the past according to their own perspective. For instance, Carole Blair, Marsha S. Jeppeson, and Enrico Pucci, Jr. describe the Vietnam Veterans Memorial as a form of postmodern architecture and argue that “The text of the Memorial changes materially over time. Each addition alters the text, for it focuses on a different individual, a different aspect of the war, or a different meaning a visitor has attached to his/her experience of the Memorial” (272). As with museums, changing ideas of the public related to more multi-vocal meaning-making experiences.

Memorial Museum Sites

Like participatory museums, some memorials privilege—even depend upon—the visitor. These memorials ask the public to be co-creators, and visitors continually produce memories and meanings as they engage with the space. Maya Lin’s Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Peter Eisenman’s Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, and even the September 11 Digital Archive exemplify these types of memorials that value idiosyncratic experience and interpretation. These participatory memorials pose interesting and important questions about how we remember, interact with, and interpret the past. But while it is true that museums and memorials are not as didactic as they once were and they frequently invite visitors to participate in some way, memorial museums present a new set of issues and add another layer of

complexity. Eisenman says of his memorial in the heart of Berlin, “The world is too full of information and here is a place without information. That is what I wanted” (qtd. in Hawley and Tenberg). Unlike these abstract memorials, museums possess educational objectives and provide a significant amount of information. Memorial museums straddle two worlds, trying to accomplish different goals simultaneously. How do they manage the tension between didactic motives and individual interpretations?

This dissertation explores four sites that pose particularly interesting questions and challenge assumptions about the meaning-making dynamic between visitors and memorial museums. Each of my four core chapters provides an in-depth analysis of a memorial museum that commemorates a different type of trauma in the United States. These sites are the 9/11 Memorial Museum (New York City, New York), The Legacy Museum: From Slavery to Mass Incarceration (Montgomery, Alabama), Manzanar National Historic Site (Independence, California), and Carthage Jail (Carthage, Illinois). In order, these institutions memorialize the September 11th terrorist attacks, racial terrorism in the United States, Japanese-American internment during World War II, and the murder of Mormonism’s founder Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum. The memorial museums in this dissertation both overlap and diverge from one another, but each provides unique facets to explore issues surrounding participation, meaning-making, and the memorialization of trauma.

These four sites provide especially useful comparisons to explore how memorial museums and visitors make sense of traumatic events. I limited the geographic scope of the sites, selecting sites not only located in the United States but also that memorialize events that occurred on U.S. soil. While a global comparison could provide an interesting perspective

concerning whether national context affects the participatory meaning-making process, I wanted to explore the response to American traumas and show how, despite a common geographic focus, the meaning-making process can be quite diverse. Notably, this choice excludes museums that memorialize the Holocaust, such as the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum or the Museum of Tolerance. While I recognize how foundational Holocaust museums are to the memorial museum landscape, I want to focus on how the nation grapples with its own atrocities. Memorialization in this country depends heavily on particular “American” values or narratives, and dark history that complicates those stories often meets strong resistance.

To explore how temporality intersects with memory and meaning-making, I chose sites that range in age. The oldest memorial museum is Carthage Jail, an unofficial visitor site since the 1840s and bought by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1903, and the newest museum is the Legacy Museum, which opened in 2018. I also chose memorial museums with differing temporal relationships between the traumatic event and the memorialization response. For instance, the 9/11 Memorial Museum opened almost 13 years after the tragedy, while Manzanar was virtually ignored until first Pilgrimage in 1969 and the Interpretive Center did not exist until 2004—nearly 60 years after the camp’s closure.

For a more expansive comparison of the relationship between institutional and personal interpretation, I selected sites that represent a variety of memorial museum spaces. The sites range from privately to publicly owned, run the gamut from traditional museums to historic buildings to national historic sites, and, above all, differ in their openness to visitor participation. For example, while the 9/11 Memorial Museum has publicly stated its desire for individual meaning-making and public involvement in remembering September 11th—and includes

numerous participatory elements—Carthage Jail consists of a guided tour and no outlets for visitor responses or collaboration.

Finally, to perform a more complex analysis of memorial museums, memory, and participation, I selected sites that memorialize different types of trauma. The 9/11 Memorial Museum memorializes a simultaneously national and global trauma caused by terrorism. While the terrorists attacked the United States, the tragedy had a widespread effect because of the diversity of victims and the media response. The Legacy Museum remembers racial violence, linking past horrors like slavery and lynching to modern day manifestation of mass incarceration. Manzanar National Historic Site likewise recalls racial discrimination, but focuses on a single event and emphasizes the political impetus. Carthage Jail is the site of religious trauma. The murders of Joseph and Hyrum Smith affected their family, friends, and congregants, but it also threatened the religion as a whole.

Even within my chosen parameters, there are a number of other memorial museums or memorial sites I could have included in this dissertation. For example, other museums such as Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum, the National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel, or the Sixth Floor Museum that could have all offered additional or unique insights. However, my specific research questions and chosen methodology necessarily limited the number of museums I could examine. However, I hope that this work inspires further research and comparison between memorial museums in the United States.

Methodology

To understand each memorial museum's relationship to visitors, I primarily approached the museums as texts, "reading" the institutions. As mediums, museums employ rhetorical

strategies to convey information and persuade visitors to adopt particular narratives. It is necessary to understand how they construct interpretations of the past and present those meanings to visitors. Accordingly, the bulk of my research involved on-site research, visiting each site multiple times. I used anthropologist Erica L. Tucker's guidance on exhibition analysis in her chapter "Museum Studies" in *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research* as the basis for my research. Tucker explains that "detailed description and analysis of the visual, written, and technological exhibit elements is typically the starting point for data collection in museum research" (343). For my particular research goals, I also paid close attention to any participatory elements. I kept questions like these in the forefront of my mind: How does the memorial museum direct visitor movement? How did the designers organize the space? What aesthetic designs does the museum employ? Does the museum invite the visitor to contribute and if so, how? All these considerations focus on what the museums are trying to accomplish or convey through their choices.

While I view museums as texts and focus on their meaning-making role, I consider equally essential the role of the visitor as "readers." Because this dissertation focuses on the museum/visitor dynamic, it is essential to study how the public both engages with the museums' interpretations of traumatic events and makes sense of the events themselves. To research the audience's role, I collected visitor-produced materials where available. These sources complement my more theoretical interpretations of how visitors participate in the meaning-making process at memorial museums.

Other primary and secondary sources help contextualize each site and its memorialization of trauma, providing valuable information about the events themselves, the museum creation process, and public feeling.

Below is a more detailed elaboration of my research at—and about—each site.

9/11 Museum

I conducted research at the 9/11 Memorial Museum from June-August 2017. I went through the museum numerous times. I took photographs in the spaces allowed, but the museum prohibits photography in both the Historical Exhibition and Memorial Exhibition.

The 9/11 Memorial Museum denied my research requests for archived Signing Steel comments and video responses created in the recording booths. The Signing Steel is a digital comment book whereby visitors write a message or create a drawing using a stylus. The message is then projected onto a map soon after submission, joining other comments for a short time. The *Reflecting on 9/11* videos are filmed responses to questions posed by the museum. Visitors can enter recording booths inside the museum, and then staff curates the responses, which are played on a loop in a viewing space. Accordingly, I relied on the in-person research I conducted, namely photographs I took of some Signing Steel responses and my viewings of the *Reflecting on 9/11* video responses.

I also analyzed official materials produced by the museum. This includes the *Museum Conversation Planning Series* reports and the book *No Day Shall Erase You: The Story of 9/11 as Told at the September 11 Museum*. These materials provided valuable insight into institutional intentions, concerns, and thought processes.

Manzanar National Historic Site

I visited Manzanar National Historic Site three times, traveling in September 2017, April 2018, and October 2018. I attended the annual Manzanar Pilgrimage during my April 2018 visit.

My analysis of the site includes the Interpretive Center, demonstration blocks, and surrounding landscape. I created a map of the Interpretive Center, as well as took extensive photographs. I also gathered materials from the site, including site maps and the paper ID tags. I spent hours exploring the outdoor space, including walking through the interior area.

The main source of visitor responses came from the Interpretive Center's guestbooks. The National Park Service granted me access to these guestbooks, which I photographed in October 2018. I photographed twenty-five guestbooks, ranging from the first guestbook (April-June 2004) to the guestbook that was on display (June-October 2018).

Legacy Museum

I visited Montgomery, Alabama in April 2019. I went through the Legacy Museum five times and the National Memorial for Peace and Justice once. During my visits, I took extensive notes and created a map of the museum exhibition space. The EJI prohibits all photography inside the museum. At the memorial, I took notes and photographed the site.

Official materials from the Equal Justice Initiative played a key role in my analysis. This includes the EJI's reports, guidelines for the Historical Marker Project and Community Soil Collection Project, Youtube videos, and their self-published book *The Legacy Museum*. Bryan Stevenson is also quite vocal about the museum and memorial, and his published interviews offer insight into the origins and goals of the EJI's public history initiatives.

Carthage Jail

I visited Carthage, Illinois, in October 2017. I toured Carthage Jail five times over the course of three days, taking notes and photographing the site and exhibitions during each tour.

To gather contemporary visitor responses to Carthage Jail, I searched for all public Instagram posts geotagged with Carthage Jail. I turned to Instagram because there are no participatory elements at Carthage Jail. The social media platform offers a way to glean some insight into visitor responses to the site. I collected posts on December 14, 2018, and January 10, 2019. The dates of photos range from August 8, 2013 to November 27, 2018. In total, my data set consists of 632 photographs. To analyze the Instagram posts, I separated the posts into images and captions. Using NVivo, I categorized the photographs by subject. For the captions, I conducted preliminary content analysis.

Unlike other sites in this dissertation, there are also historical accounts of visitor responses to Carthage Jail. The Church History Library in Salt Lake City contains documents from individuals who visited and recounted their experience. I gathered other reflections published in newspapers, church periodicals, and books.

My analysis of Carthage Jail—as well as its inclusion in this dissertation—emerges from my own Mormon identity. I am a life-long practicing member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This background and insider relationship to the site grants me knowledge of LDS history and religious practices, but also informs my analysis of the site and visitor behavior.

Note on methodology

In studying multiple memorial museums, an unevenness arises regarding methodology and sources. Some of this inconsistency is a natural by-product of the sites themselves. Museum

rules influenced my research at each site. These regulations affected both my fieldwork and collection of visitor-produced materials. For instance, both the 9/11 Memorial Museum and Legacy Museum restrict photography, albeit to varying degrees. More significantly, because I deliberately selected sites with varying degrees of participatory elements, not every site offers content produced by visitors in conjunction with the museum. Even when several sites have similar sources, such as platforms for visitor comments, the availability of access to these sources further precludes an identical approach. For instance, the 9/11 Memorial Museum's restriction on access to archived Signing Steel responses prevents the same type of analysis possible with the Manzanar National Historic Site's comment books. The differences between the sites naturally complicates comparisons between memorial museums. However, these differences also allow for a more complete look at participatory meaning-making and the memorial museum and visitor relationship. Restrictions on access or a denial of visitor participation is itself data that invites further analysis. Nevertheless, I recognize some ways to improve this unevenness in later work, which I will address more fully in the dissertation's conclusion.

Literature Review and Theoretical Foundations

This study of the memorial museum/visitor relationship crosses a number of fields. In analyzing visitor participation at memorial museums, some overarching questions arise: How do audiences make meaning? What is the relationship between museums and visitors, and how does this connection change? How do these sites mediate our relationship to the past? To answer these questions, this dissertation draws and builds upon literature in museum studies, cultural studies, and memory studies that help answer these questions in different ways. This interdisciplinary

approach aligns with memorial museum expert and Senior Content Developer at Ralph Appelbaum Associates Paul Williams' argument that "the lack of an overarching 'theory' should...be seen as part of the appeal of this topic. The field of memorialization is simply too diverse, and needs to take in too many areas of study...to support a singular or all encompassing theory" (191). Theories from all these disciplines provide valuable arguments about visitors and the meaning-making process.

This dissertation rests on museum studies scholarship that reevaluates the relationship between museums and audiences by focusing on knowledge production and visitor agency. In both *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* and *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill examines where power resides in museums. She contends, "Questions of meaning are questions of power...Who has the power to create, to make visible, and to legitimate meanings and values?" (*Museums and the Interpretation* 19). In the post-museum, she contends, there is a democratization of knowledge and museums reimagine visitors' meaning-making power. In *Museums, Prejudice, and the Reframing of Difference*, museum studies scholar Richard Sandell discusses his audience research at two museums, the Anne Frank House and the St. Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art. He offers a qualitative analysis of visitor agency, studying written responses to study the effect of museums' efforts to combat prejudice. Furthermore, he employs cultural studies theory to explain the transmission of knowledge. Perhaps the most important museum studies scholarship about the museum/audience relationship is Nina Simon's work *The Participatory Museum*. This text is central because of its exploration of a new genre of museum where the power dynamic between museums and visitors can be radically altered. Together, these texts provide useful insight about the museum/audience

relationship. While audiences have never been passive, museums have loosened their authoritative power and frequently create space for people to contribute to the museum in particular ways.

While the meaning-making dynamic in museums is vital to my analysis, my particular focus on memorial museums requires a grounding in memory and memorialization scholarship. The literature I draw upon similarly explores the role of the public, but it adds specific insight about how and why people remember and make sense of the traumatic past. In particular, my dissertation relies and builds upon scholarship that analyzes a new commemorative age. As Paul Williams explains:

Without positing that older memorial conventions have been eclipsed or abandoned, it is clear that the critical consensus now favors minimalist and abstract design over that which is grandiose and authoritative; decentered and incommensurable space over that which is central and iconic; bodily visitor experiences that are sensory and emotional rather than visual and impassive; interpretive strategies that utilize private, subjective testimony over official historical narrative. (3)

Underlying these changes is a concern for how the public contributes to the production of memory and meaning making. The ways a society conceptualizes people's relationship to the past influences the approach to commemoration.

In *The Texture of Memory*, James Young explores the contextual nature of memorialization, contending that meaning is neither inherent nor static. Importantly, he draws attention to the influence of memorial visitors. He contends, in part, that "memorials by themselves remain inert and amnesiac, dependent on visitors for whatever memory they finally

produce” (xiii). He also argues that “New generations visit memorials under new circumstances and invest them with new meanings. The result is an evolution in the memorial’s significance, generated in the new times and company in which it finds itself” (3). There is a tension between the intended meaning and the audience’s interpretation, and how people make sense of the memorial continually changes. It is up to the public to keep the memory alive. Kristin Hass takes the idea of an unfinished memorial even further as she analyzes the phenomenon of people leaving tokens of remembrance at Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Hass, a scholar of American culture who has written extensively on U.S. war memorialization, contends that “The Vietnam Veterans Memorial may be the only truly ‘living’ national memorial in the United States. It is alive because it is transformed every day by medals and tennis balls and cans of beer left at its base” (63). While we see this practice at other memorials in the U.S. (the National September 11 Memorial is a prime example), Hass provides foundational insight into not only this form of memorialization, but into the larger idea of contested, plural, and unfinished memory. Hass contends that leaving objects at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial indicates a shift in memory practices; the memory and meaning of the Vietnam War shattered previous narratives. Leaving objects at the memorial illustrates the tension between individual and national memory, as well as how the public negotiates meaning in a memorial space (Hass 1-2, 21-22).

How bodies play into the meaning-process is integral to my analysis of visitor participation. Of course, all museums—not just memorial museums—have long been concerned about the visitor’s body. As mentioned earlier, museums were designed to create “docile” bodies, hoping to shape behavior and educating the public by controlling bodily movement. Museums continue to focus on controlling or directing the body despite providing more freedom to move

throughout the museum. Paul Williams suggests that memorial museums draw upon understandings of trauma and its physical nature and use this to design visitor experiences (98). Whether it is through physical movement or an engagement of the senses, I am interested in how physical participation intersects with memory and helps produce meaning.

The connection between physical movement, memorialization, and meaning have been discussed in the literature to some degree, and my dissertation rests on these ideas. Rhetorical studies scholar Carole Blair argues, for instance, that memorials “direct the vision to particular features, and they direct—sometimes even control—the vector, speed, or possibilities of physical movement” (46). Memorials are “destinations” that require travel, they “may hail or *summon*” us, they might “interrupt[] the path of pedestrians,” and they sometimes “suggest—sometimes *prescribe—pathways* for a visitor to traverse” (46-47). Blair’s analysis of memorials involves a specific focus on how design influences bodily movement, which provides a useful lens to study memorial museums. Examples exist in the literature of what this influence over bodies looks like in memorial design. For instance, James Young describes the experience of walking to the Majdanek memorial in Poland (*Texture* 124). In line with this scholarship, I am interested in the dynamic between bodies and sites, and I rely on the idea that museums help produce knowledge through bodily movement.

While memorial museums might manipulate bodies, there is also a significant degree of autonomy and personal experience that comes into play that a museum cannot control. I am interested in exploring and parsing out that dynamic in memorial museums. Given my interest in the visitor’s agency and the dynamic between memorial museums and visitors, Marita Sturken’s idea of the body as a “technology of memory” provides an additional theoretical framework

(*Tangled Memories* 12). Technologies of memory diverge from “vessels of memory” in their activeness, and, most importantly, they “embody and generate memory and are thus implicated in the power dynamics of memory’s production” (9-10). While I diverge from Sturken’s focus on how certain bodies, like wounded veterans, become imbued with symbolic meaning in society, I embrace her idea that bodies are technologies of memory and that they are objects of contested memory. Bodies can *produce* memory, and accordingly meaning, and I am interested in how this can happen on a more individual level.

The importance of bodily experiences also depends on literature that explores the connection between affect, history, and memory. In large part, the focus is on the intersection between affect and knowledge. American Studies scholar Erika Doss argues that memorialization and public feeling intersect, arguing that “Today’s ‘memory boom’ reflects less an abandonment of history than a cultural shift toward public feeling as a source of knowledge” (50). Alison Landsberg, a leader in memory studies, focuses on history, arguing that “affectively engaged modes of representation of the past...can and do produce new forms of historical knowledge” (*Engaging* 9). People do not merely connect to the past via feeling; rather, they learn about the past in a different way. It is not that individuals do not learn via conventional means; rather, “The experiential mode complements the cognitive with affect, sensuousness, and tactility” (“America” 76). Importantly, the body is the conduit for this form of knowledge. Landsberg argues that “affective or bodily provocations can lead to new thoughts, ideas, or historical insights” (*Engaging* 16).

A number of foundational cultural studies theorists interrogate the tension between “producers” and “consumers.” Key cultural studies texts that engage with this topic and illustrate

the interpretive power of audiences include Stuart Hall's "Encoding and Decoding," Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance*, Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life*, and Ien Ang's *Watching Dallas*. In interrogating the relationship between institutions and the public, these authors ultimately reject the idea of a passive audience. More importantly, they illustrate how audiences exercise their agency to interpret texts. Henry Jenkins provides an especially useful framework for understanding participation. Jenkins troubles the line between consumers and producers, particularly in popular culture, in both *Textual Poachers* and *Convergence Culture*.

While I rarely invoke these specific theorists directly, my dissertation rests on the assumption of an active audience and likewise interrogates the idea of a hierarchical flow of meaning. In each chapter, I explore how visitors contribute to the meaning-making process. Sometimes, these contributions are overt. For example, reflecting on an Instagram post, recording remembrances, or collaborating in the memorialization process demonstrate obvious ways the audiences becomes producers. At other times, visitor contributions are much more subtle but no less essential. For instance, I contend that actions such as bodily movement or listening are also forms of active participation that contribute to memorialization and produce meaning.

Terminology

I want to clarify how I am using two terms in this dissertation: memorial museum and participation. My particular use of these two terms reflects my theoretical foundation. A strict, one-size-fits all definition of a memorial museum does not exist, and other scholars emphasize particular attributes. In this dissertation, I follow Paul Williams' more expansive definition of the

genre in *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities*. While he includes some characteristics that help differentiate memorial museums from history museums that address similar topics, Williams broadly defines memorial museums as “a specific kind of museum dedicated to a historic event commemorating mass suffering of some kind” (8). I also adopt his qualification that “Any distinctions between monuments, memorials, and museums should not be considered indurate” (8). Thinking of memorial museums more expansively allows me to explore a wider variety of sites—including those that might not be immediately considered memorial museums—and incorporate pertinent surrounding features of the site, whether that be the landscape, an accompanying memorial, or supplemental initiatives. Williams’ definition is more useful for my purposes than sociologist Amy Sodaro’s interpretation in *Exhibiting Atrocity*. Sodaro grounds her definition in what she sees as the museum’s overarching mission, contending that memorial museums are “intended to translate the suffering of the past into ethical commitments to creating a better future through education and commemoration” (4). Sodaro also gives memorial museums a political identity, arguing that despite their optimistic aims, “they are also political tools, often created and utilized with specific political agendas that can and often do compromise their declared efforts to openly confront and learn from the past” (5). Sodaro’s definition is too specific for my purposes. While I agree that many memorial museums seek to improve the future—evidenced by the common refrain “Never Again”—I contend that viewing memorial museums so narrowly excludes certain sites, limits interpretive possibilities, and obscures a memorial museum’s other goals.

I also adopt a broad definition of the term participation. Nina Simon, the former Executive Director of the Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History who coined the term

participatory museum, defines these institutions as “a place where visitors can create, share, and connect with each other around content” (ii). She adds,

Rather than delivering the same content to everyone, a participatory institution collects and shares diverse, personalized, and changing content co-produced with visitors...Instead of being ‘about’ something or ‘for’ someone, participatory institutions are created and managed ‘with’ visitors. (iii)

In short, the participatory museum means that there is a dialogue between visitors and the museum, as well as between visitors themselves. Both the museum and the visitors produce content in a collaborative effort, as well as share information and content between each other. Some of the memorial museums I analyze in this dissertation fit this definition. In particular, the 9/11 Memorial Museum is an archetypal example as visitors can record memories and thoughts, which the museum shares in curated videos. However, I approach participation from the cultural studies perspective that all visitors are meaning-makers, not just meaning-absorbers. In every instance, the visitor interacts with the memorial museum and develops a personal interpretation from the content provided. Accordingly, when I say participation, I mean any way that the visitor contributes to the memory or meaning making process. Whether it is walking through Manzanar or listening to videos of former incarcerated individuals at the Legacy Museum or posting photographs on Instagram of Carthage Jail, I contend that these visitors are co-producing memory and meaning. If memory is an act in the present, then visitors play a key role in its creation. In addressing how meaning-making in and around museums is changing in an increasingly user-focused, digital age, my dissertation examines, and expands the idea of,

participation so museums can better understand their visitors and think about their role in society differently.

Significance

By combining multiple disciplines, this dissertation provides a needed critical analysis of memorial museums. Memorial museums are rapidly popping up across the world yet they are an “under-explored field” that lacks “the level of criticism that conventional museology enjoys” (Williams 22). This is not to say that memorial museums have been completely ignored. While the research on memorial museums might be more scant than, say, art museums or universal survey museums, there has been some scholarship. Williams’ *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities* takes a broad view, exploring the relatively new museum genre and introducing some topics that warrant further analysis for future researchers. However, much of the scholarship focuses on Holocaust museums specifically. Edward Linenthal’s *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum* provides an in-depth analysis of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s creation. Books published recently include *Holocaust Memory Reframed: Museums and the Challenges of Representation* by Jennifer Hansen-Glucklich, *The Holocaust Memorial Museum: Sacred Secular Space* by Avril Alba, and *Figures of Memory: The Rhetoric of Displacement at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum* by Michael F. Bernard. Even *The Witness as Object: Video Testimonies in Memorial Museums* by Steffi de Jong, which focuses on testimony in memorial museums, centers on the Holocaust. There are some in-depth analyses of memorial museums that focus on other atrocities, including *Memory from the Margins: Ethiopia's Red Terror Martyrs Memorial Museum* by Bridget Conley, but they are few and far between. Other

scholars incorporate memorial museums into larger analyses. For example, Annie Coombes examines Robben Island in *Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa*. Only one work, Amy Sodaro's *Exhibiting Atrocity*, engages in a comparative case-study of diverse memorial museums. Sodaro takes a global view of memorial museums, analyzing the US Holocaust Memorial Museum (Washington, D.C.), House of Terror (Budapest), Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre (Rwanda), the Museum of Memory and Human Rights (Santiago), and the 9/11 Memorial Museum (New York City). Sodaro's work is an analysis of memorial museums as a genre, and she seeks to "explore the questions of why and how societies today use memorial museums as mechanisms for dealing with the past" (5-6). Sodaro focuses on the purpose and methods of memorial museums, which she ultimately claims are deeply political (11).

While all of this literature provides valuable analyses of an understudied type of museum, there is an overarching focus on analyzing a single institution. Conversely, my dissertation provides a comparative study of memorial museums in the United States. There are unique issues that influence the way individuals and society memorialize national traumas in America, and my research situates a study of memorial museums within that particular context. More importantly, these analyses do not adequately focus on visitors. It is crucial to study how institutions help construct collective memory and create meaning about past trauma, but this process is not done in a vacuum. Furthermore, the dynamic is much more fluid and less hierarchical than it might appear. Grounding my dissertation in a multi-pronged museum studies, cultural studies, and memory studies analysis helps to remedy a myopic emphasis on the institution and to better understand the relationship between memorial museums and visitors as both shape the meaning and memory of trauma.

By focusing on the memorial museum's relationship to visitors in the United States, my dissertation adds to the larger conversation about memorialization. Underlying many of the studies on memorialization is not only the question of how people and society make meaning of the past, but more so on how that meaning is often contested.¹ However, my dissertation tackles the topic from a different angle by addressing how audience participation complicates the struggle over traumatic pasts, especially in a highly institutionalized setting like a museum. I seek to delve beyond the overt fights between institutions and the public. After the creation process, how do museums and visitors interact in the memory and meaning making process? How do museums and visitors rely on one another to make sense of traumatic pasts? How do museums transmit their intended meanings, and how do visitors respond? Is there space for personal interpretation? Why would the museum provide—or exclude—participatory opportunities? I argue that viewing memorial museums through the lens of participation shifts the view from contestation to conversation. Participatory experiences challenge the idea that there is a “consensual vision” by expanding memory's ownership. This does not mean that disagreement ends; there will always be differing views about the memory of a traumatic event. However, participation creates room for this diversity and multiplicity, in part by inviting the continual evolution of memory and meaning. James Young contends in *The Texture of Memory* that “By returning to the memorial some memory of its own genesis, we remind ourselves of the memorial's essential fragility, its dependence on others for its life; that it was made by human hands in human times and place” (14). In a similar way, I explore how participation reveals the fragility of meaning. Memory is not stable, but neither is an interpretation of the past. My

¹ See Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*; Linenthal and Engelhardt, *History Wars*; Sturken, *Tangled Memories*; Foote, *Shadowed Ground*; Doss, *Memorial Mania*.

dissertation examines the new ways in which visitors are enabled to contribute at trauma sites, further changing the dynamic between memorial institutions and audiences, as well as between audiences themselves.

My approach to memorial museums also provides a different perspective on interpreting museums' powerful structuring narratives, a focus of many memorialization studies. In exploring this topic, many scholars emphasize memorialization's intersection with nationalism or national identity.² These sources offer a distinctly political analysis. While I touch on memorialization's frequent politicization, my focus on the dynamics inside the memorial museum departs from this memorialization literature. In examining the dynamic between memorial museums and their visitors, I am concerned with how museums and visitors both shape the meaning of traumatic events. It is essential to analyze the museum's aims and techniques, but there needs to be a complementary analysis about the role of visitors.

While this dissertation focuses on a rather niche type of museum, I argue that its significance goes beyond expanding the literature about memorial museums specifically or memorialization more generally. Rather, I suggest my particular focus on the meaning-making dynamic between memorial museums and their visitors helps rectify the persistent disconnect between cultural studies and museum studies. In 1995, Eileen Hooper-Greenhill lamented in "Museums and Communication: An Introductory Essay" that:

Media studies in the 1950s proposed the active audience and the importance of social context in the reception of the message long before we had even begun to study our

² Bodnar, *Remaking America*; Sturken, *Tangled Memories*; Hass, *Carried to the Wall*; Blight, *Race and Reunion*; Foote, *Shadowed Ground*; Doss, *Memorial Mania*; Kelman, *A Misplaced Massacre*; and Sodaro, *Exhibiting Atrocity* are all prime examples.

audiences in museums. Our methodology in museums has not paid attention to methods used by communication and cultural theorists, and an over-reliance on behaviorist, positivist methods has failed to reveal the importance of audience decoding. (9)

Museums are mediums, and accordingly we can—and should—apply the same theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches that we do to media such as TV, film, or literature. Of course, museums have progressed over twenty years when Hooper-Greenhill made this argument. Richard Sandell's before-mentioned *Museums, Prejudice, and the Reframing of Difference* is a notable example of how one can study museums using qualitative methodology or apply cultural studies theories. Nevertheless, there is still a surprising disconnect between museum studies and cultural studies over their approach to audiences. Even when museum studies scholars draw attention to visitors' agency or knowledge production, they often disregard foundational audience studies scholarship. For instance, Simon strikingly says that museums can become more relevant and connect with audiences "by inviting people to actively engage as cultural participants, not passive consumers" (ii). Simon starts with the assumption that audiences, by default, are passive, a position cultural studies and media studies scholars dismissed years earlier. More frequently, however, is that museum studies' turn to audiences is overwhelmingly focused on marketing; relevancy is the central focus.³ By examining the tension between museums and audiences that arises from participation through a cultural studies perspective, my dissertation moves away from a business-minded perspective that is overly focused on increasing attendance, making more money, or maintaining their relevance in society.

³ See Weil, *Making Museums Matter*; Spalding, *The Poetic Museum*; Falk, *Identity and the Museum Visitor Experience*; Holo and Alvarez, eds., *Beyond the Turnstile*; and Anderson, ed., *Reinventing the Museum*.

While museum practitioners naturally want visitors to attend their museums, and engaging experiences foster increased attendance, there is more at stake in memorial museums.

Participating in memory-making—and meaning-making surrounding memory—can create a shift in public thinking and shape cultural values. Cultural studies reforms how we look at audiences, reevaluating power hierarchies and affording visitors much more agency. Adopting this framework allows for a more expansive view of the museum/audience relationship, adding nuance and offering ways to reevaluate meaning-making.

Why does it matter if visitors participate at memorial museums? What difference does it make if visitors play a role in the memorialization process? Answering these questions can help bridge disciplinary divides or address gaps in the literature, but I argue that exploring the necessity of the visitor has practical applications. Memory is closely connected to meaning, and we are at a historical moment when the public is grappling with the impact of commemoration. The 2017 protest in Charlottesville and the debate surrounding the removal of many Confederate statues reveal how the fight over historical memory can escalate to the point of violence. This contention also signals James Young's argument in *Textures of Memory* that, while the memorials represent the mindset of their creators and the context in which they were created, their meaning also comes from the memory-work of individuals. However, as I explore throughout this dissertation, we need to expand how we think about the visitors' role. Participation at memorial museums can be crucial for other purposes, as individuals might help build the historical record, serve as secondary witnesses, or become activists. Analyses of memorialization need to consider many kinds of engagement. This study of memorial museums and participation will hopefully

provide some considerations about the public's involvement in remembering the past and how memorial museums might look toward the future.

Chapter Outlines

Each chapter of this dissertation explores the meaning-making dynamic between museums and audiences at a specific site. On an individual level, the chapters offer an in-depth analysis of particular memorial museums. Taken as a whole, however, the chapters elucidate how participation affects the memorialization process.

I arranged the chapters according to each site's relationship to visitor participation. Alternative orders would have provided their own particular insights. For instance, progressing chronologically by the date of creation could help reveal particular trends in memorialization and participation, shedding light on changing commemorative practices. However, by beginning with a museum that touts itself as a democratic space and ending with a site known for its lack of visitor control, I am able to continually question and expand our understanding of meaning-making at traumatic sites. Importantly, as this dissertation will show, the order is not necessarily representative of visitors' meaning-making authority; participatory elements do not automatically dismantle hierarchies of knowledge production, while visitors can always find ways to construct—and share—meaning outside of official outlets. My goal is to uncover and explore the tension between institutional intention and visitor agency, and this chapter arrangement allows me to continually trouble assumptions and initial analyses about how visitors engage with commemoration at memorial museums.

Chapter One analyzes the 9/11 Memorial Museum. I begin with this museum because it is, by all accounts, the most conventional participatory museum. The 9/11 Memorial Museum

invites visitors to share their memories and feelings with others; in fact, their view of the public's connection to the attack requires this inclusive perspective. Not only do the exhibits incorporate visitors' experiences, but the museum offers technological tools to allow for this collective memorialization. However, the 9/11 Memorial Museum simultaneously invites and prohibits visitor participation. Control over participation is heavily influenced by not only the nature of the event, but overarching questions of meaning-making. I explore how participation intersects within the institution's narrative frameworks designed to help people work through the trauma of September 11th, parsing the difficulties of making sense of a trauma both recent and far-reaching. By beginning with the 9/11 Memorial Museum, I unsettle expectations about participation at memorial museums in the 21st century.

Chapter Two explores Manzanar National Historic Site. This chapter focuses on the role absence and presence play a role in memorialization. More specifically, it examines how absence at Manzanar—whether that be a profound lack of physical structures or a manufactured amnesia in U.S. memory—invites important questions about individuals' roles at the site and beyond. Instead of being a detriment to memorialization, I argue that absence invites visitor participation and allows for different modes of engagement.

Chapter Three analyzes The Legacy Museum, along with the accompanying National Memorial for Peace and Justice and other supplementary public memorialization initiatives. This chapter focuses on the memorialization of an ongoing trauma—that of slavery and its subsequent evolutions into lynching, segregation, and mass incarceration. I examine the issues surrounding memorializing an ongoing trauma, contending that the Equal Justice Initiative engages with multiple frameworks to grapple with the legacy of slavery. The nature of the trauma

memorialized—and the frameworks employed—engage visitors in different and, at times, competing ways. These sites complicate visitor participation at memorial museums further, illustrating the limits of interpretive frameworks. While the founders at times invite participation, they simultaneously restrict visitor contributions or limit meaning-making opportunities.

Chapter Four analyzes Carthage Jail. Carthage Jail and serves as a comparative bookend to this dissertation, not only because the site deals with the opposite issue of time as the 9/11 Memorial Museum—temporal distance—but also because it provides a strong contrast regarding participatory elements. This chapter explores a site with a highly controlled and institutionally determined interpretation. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints’ response to the event over time reflects both personal and collective memorialization, as well as reveals clearly how institutions can employ memory for a variety of purposes throughout time. Here, the Church fits the trauma into a meaningful interpretive framework that, while helping its members make sense of the event, serves broader institutional aims. While I explore the development of that institutional narrative, I more importantly analyze the ways in which visitors contribute to the site’s meaning when there initially seems to be no room for agency. I illuminate how people continually create meaning during their visits, whether they reinforce the existing narrative or offer alternative perspectives.

Conclusion

Why does a memorial museum memorialize trauma the way it does? On the surface, one could simply say that these museums want to commemorate, educate, heal, or inspire social change. However, I consider the question from a different angle by keeping the museum and the visitor in dialogue. Focusing on participation, I explore how the specific way the museum asks

visitors to participate—or not—reveals different concerns and fault lines. In *The Texture of Memory*, James Young asserts that “I will allow every site to suggest its own definition, each to be grasped in its local context” (viii). I posit that one could make a similar argument about visitor participation at memorial museums. Participation does not take the same form at every memorial site, but that is not merely because of institutional whims. To better understand the museum and visitor meaning-making dynamic, we must recognize how the context of the site helps determine the form and role of participation. Everything from the type of event to the physical location to the time of the site’s creation affects how visitors contribute to the memorialization process. More importantly, I argue that a museum’s approach to memorialization heavily depends on how it imagines visitors and their role. While participation might be linked to the museum’s aims, the institution’s perception of visitors requires them to approach their goal in strikingly different ways. Asking questions about why and how a memorial museum asks visitors to participate provides new insights about the dynamic process of memorializing trauma in America today.

CHAPTER 1: THE 9/11 MEMORIAL MUSEUM

This dissertation begins with one of the nation's most well-known—and visited—memorial museums: The 9/11 Memorial Museum.⁴ This museum is both an archetypal memorial museum *and* participatory museum. It commemorates a mass tragedy while providing multiple opportunities for visitors to contribute their memories of the event. In this shared space, visitors collectively tell a story of the September 11th terrorist attacks and their aftereffects. In the process of producing memories, individuals also help construct the event's meaning. This memorial museum is a prime site to explore the dynamic between museums and visitors, but not merely because of its participatory features. What makes the 9/11 Memorial Museum such a compelling site to study is that its openness to visitors' participation belies a more complicated dynamic.

This chapter unsettles the idea that visitor participation necessarily disrupts hierarchical knowledge production. The 9/11 Memorial Museum, more than any other memorial museum in this dissertation, allows individuals to collaborate in the memory and meaning-making process. Visitors' recorded memories and reflections literally become museum content. Yet, I contend, this co-authorship is less democratic as it might initially appear. By interrogating the museum's exhibitionary design and techniques, I show how the museum constructs meaningful narratives, crafts visitors' experiences, and shapes individuals' understandings. The entire visit is subtly overlaid with meaning and strategically designed to dictate particular interpretations, but the overt opportunities to share overshadow this structuring power. Audiences participate, but their agency is heavily restricted.

⁴ The museum is also known as The National September 11 Memorial Museum.

In this dissertation's introduction, I suggested that to understand participation at memorial museums it is imperative to understand the site's context. I thus begin my analysis by examining initial responses to, and memorialization of, September 11th. This background provides vital insights into external factors that I contend influenced the 9/11 Memorial Museum's particular approach. We cannot fully understand the relationship between visitors and the memorial museum without looking at the circumstances from which the institution emerged.

The Fateful Day

Early in the morning of September 11, 2001, nineteen al Qaeda hijackers—four pilots and fifteen “muscle hijackers” assigned to “storm the cockpits and control the passengers”—boarded four different planes on the East coast headed towards California; three of the planes were on route to Los Angeles and one was destined for San Francisco (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks 237, 244; “September 11 Attack Timeline”). No one had any inclination what was soon going to transpire. People headed to work or boarded their flights, just as they had many times before.

When the first plane hit the North Tower of the World Trade Center at 8:46 am, it crashed through floors 93-99, killing those in the plane and trapping everyone on the 92nd floor and above not immediately killed upon impact (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks 285). Seventeen minutes later, at 9:03 am, a second plane crashed into the South Tower, hitting floors 77-85. Unlike what happened at the North Tower, those above the impact zone—at least to the 91st floor—not killed instantaneously could escape via one stairwell because of the angle at which the plane struck (293). In the midst of panic in New York City, the third plane flew into the Pentagon at 9:37 am (314), striking the west side of the structure before exploding (Goldberg

et. al 16). Flight 93, headed towards Washington, D.C., crashed in Shanksville, PA at 10:03 am “after passengers and crew storm[ed] the cockpit” (“September 11 Attack Timeline”). Because of flight delays, Flight 93 was behind schedule; when passengers called their loved ones after the hijackers took control of the plane, they learned about the World Trade Center attacks (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks 10, 12-13).

Of the coordinated attacks, the collapse of the Twin Towers caused the most devastation. When the South Tower collapsed at 9:59 am, the 110-story high-rise “collapsed into itself, causing a ferocious windstorm and creating a massive debris cloud” in 10 seconds (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks 305-306). Videos of the tower collapsing depict a terrifyingly surreal scene: the building ripples downward as glass, steel, and concrete transform into a cloud of white dust that billows through the streets like a wave. Photos of Lower Manhattan in the aftermath show debris scattered and white dust coating everything in sight. From the moment the first plane hit the North Tower to the building’s collapse at 10:28 am, the terrorist attack lasted 102 minutes (285). In total, 2977 people died directly from the attack; of those, 246 were passengers or crew on the four flights, 125 were Pentagon employees, and 441 were first responders (“Memorial”; “About the Memorial”).

History of 9/11 Memorialization

Almost immediately, people began memorializing September 11th. The outpouring of emotions, expressed in material form, was immense. For example, “In the weeks after the attacks, parts of New York City had been literally blanketed with makeshift memorials... The display was echoed outside the Pentagon, and in other places around the country” (Gardner and Henry 40). Public spaces became laden with public expressions of grief and sorrow; images of

this widespread, vernacular memorialization show plazas overflowing with objects such as candles, American flags, flowers, and makeshift signs.

However, vernacular memorializing and remembering 9/11 did not just occur through material forms or in public spaces. Many people turned to digital memorialization, an act that changed how people engage with tragedy and prefigured digital participatory elements in the 9/11 Memorial Museum. While 9/11 was not the first instance of web-based memorialization, an astonishing number of digital platforms arose after the event. As Kirsten Foot, Barbara Warnick, and Steven M. Schneider explain, “In the wake of the terrorist attacks in the U.S. on September 11, 2001, hundreds if not thousands of Web sites were expanded or created expressly for the purpose of memorializing and commemorating the losses incurred” (73). These web memorials provided a space for individual expressions of grief and loss, thus representing a decentralized remembrance process. National trauma became personal. However, the process of sharing online transformed these individual memories into public memory, albeit somewhat disjointed. For instance, the September 11 Digital Archive, a collaboration between the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media at George Mason University and the City University of New York Graduate Center, allowed people to share their “stories about what they did, saw, or heard on September 11” and it became an archive of the “stories and images that constitute the memory of that day” (Gardner 297). In some ways, the September 11 Digital Archive serves as an early version of the *Reflecting on 9/11* recording booths or the Witnesses and Survivors Registry at the 9/11 Memorial Museum. In both the digital memorials and the 9/11 Memorial Museum’s platforms, people share their stories and participate in creating the collective memory of September 11, 2001.

The process of remembering 9/11 so soon after the attack raised immediate questions for the museum community. In their essay “September 11 and the Mourning After: Reflections on Collecting and Interpreting the History of Tragedy,” historians and museum professionals James B. Gardner and Sarah M. Henry discuss how the efforts of museum professionals and public historians clashed with the realities of such an event. This difficulty could perhaps be summed up in this question: “When rescue workers were still sifting through rubble seeking for survivors or for human remains, how could we even raise the question of preserving materials for posterity without appearing ghoulish, insensitive, or opportunistic?” (39). Even beyond this ethical question, there was also the logistical issue of how to know what to collect when there was an abundance of material—not to mention a lack of perspective to judge the future historical value of objects (40). Nevertheless, following the attacks on September 11th, different historical institutions began building collections and displaying exhibits. For example, the National Museum of American History began collecting on September 12, 2001 (Rivard 87), and local museums such as the New York Fire Museum, New-York Historical Society, South Street Seaport Museum, and Museum of the City of New York “worked quickly to create special exhibitions that reflect directly or indirectly on the tragedies themselves” (Gardner and Henry 50). The museal process signaled the importance of 9/11 to history, even without the benefit of a retrospective perspective.

How to grapple with the public’s feelings about, and memories of, the event further complicated the collection and display process. Individuals’ reflections were just as essential to the historical process. James B. Gardner explains that “In the immediate aftermath of the attacks, a number of museums in New York invited the public to write in memory books, light candles,

draw pictures—in other words to express their grief within museum walls as they were doing elsewhere around the city” (298). A year later at the National Museum of American History, the exhibit *September 11: Bearing Witness to History* opened in order to “provide the public a place for commemoration and memorialization, acknowledge the many voices, stories, perspectives of that day, and give visitors opportunities to contribute, not simply observe” (299). The subtitle of that exhibition is important. “Bearing witness to history” acknowledged the value of everyday people’s memories for the historical record. It was in these spaces that history and memory once again merged, much like they did in the digital archives. More importantly, these institutional efforts foreshadowed the way that the 9/11 Memorial Museum approached their exhibitions and audience engagement. Visitors brought their individual memories and feelings to the museum, and the museum officials recognized the need to include the public in 9/11 memorialization.

Eventually, in 2006, planning began for a museum solely dedicated to teaching about and commemorating the lives lost because of the terrorist attacks: the 9/11 Memorial Museum (Greenwald, “Through the Lens” 12). The creation of the museum, the angular glass and metal building now a tourist mecca in the Lower Manhattan’s Financial District, was not without its setbacks. In fact, as Marita Sturken argues,

The existence of a memorial museum at Ground Zero in New York now seems like an inevitable outcome of the events of September 11, 2001. Yet this is a retrospective inevitability, a quality we read into the museum today, since its very presence seems to convey the sense that it is the natural outcome of that day...Such a sense has been retrospectively constructed, since a memorial museum was not part of the first visions for

the site and is the result of many years of debate and controversy; its fate was often precarious and unpredictable. (“9/11 Memorial Museum” 474)

So what issues affected the museum creation process, a process Sturken describes as “mired in politics” (474)?

First and foremost, as Sturken points out above, the museum was not included in the original plan for rebuilding at Ground Zero. Another interpretive center was originally conceived instead of the memorial museum. Called the International Freedom Center, it originated in 2004 by Tom Bernstein (Greenspan 131-132). One element of the IFC’s goal was to “educate, inspire and engage people around the world to consider freedom’s promise, to feel freedom’s power and to act in freedom’s service” (Tofel). However, the IFC was quickly nixed. In short, some protestations—spearheaded by Debra Burlingame, a 9/11 family member—revolved around the fact that the center did not focus enough on 9/11 or that it politicized the event through its contextualization of the event (Greenspan 135). This demand for a narrow focus on the terrorist attacks was resolved through the 9/11 Memorial Museum, which began as a “underground interpretive center” architect Michael Arad added to his memorial design after the jury pressured him to include a space to exhibit artifacts recovered from Ground Zero (126, 131).

Even once the site plan included the memorial museum, financial problems threatened its completion. Exorbitant costs—and the question of who was going to pay for them—stopped the museum construction process for about a year (Bagli). The players at the front of the fight were Michael Bloomberg, New York City Mayor and chairman of the National September 11 Memorial & Museum Foundation, and New York Governor Andrew Cuomo who, along with New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, controlled the Port Authority (Maloney and Brown; Bagli).

Eventually, they resolved the issue when the “\$300 million that the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey said it was owed by the 9/11 Memorial and Museum Foundation for additional design and construction costs” was “dropped in exchange for financial oversight of the museum and memorial” (Boyette and Kastenbaum).

Beyond the financial dispute, other complications centered on content in the museum and the museum’s approach to certain elements. While there were a number of critiques and controversies, two of the most prominent concerned the storage of human remains and display of the hijackers’ names and photographs of their faces (Hampson). In both instances, some family members of victims protested. Regarding the first issue, in 2011, some families rejected the long-held plan that unidentified human remains—which the Office of the Medical Examiner controlled—would be underground in the museum itself instead of residing in a separate structure outside (Hartocollis). The museum responded to the backlash with a “statement summarizing their efforts to reach out to the WTC families regarding the repository” (Mulqueen 232). Despite the controversy and protests, the museum held firm on the location. As the museum’s president Alice Greenwald said when defending the repository’s location when responding to anthropologist Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh’s article “The Disappeared: Power Over the Dead in the Aftermath of 9/11,”

The decision made more than seven years ago to move the remains to bedrock at the World Trade Center site was driven by the expressed wishes of a coalition of 9/11 family groups. In public hearings and private meetings, coalition representatives repeatedly stated the necessity of locating the remains at the sacred bedrock of the site, along with a private room for families: exactly the plan that is being enacted. (11)

In terms of the second issue, some families protested the inclusion of the hijackers in the museum exhibition for various reasons, ranging from people who “did not want to have to see the faces of the people who murdered their child or spouse or parent” to others who “worried about the symbolism of such display” to some who “worried that displaying photographs of the perpetrators in the historical exhibition could end up suggesting they were part of the museum’s broader commemorative project” (Greenspan 211). Ultimately, the museum decided to keep the hijackers’ photos in the exhibit, deeming them essential to telling the 9/11 story. However, they made the images smaller and less noticeable. Furthermore, they featured FBI evidence stickers, distinguishing them from the images of victims (211-212).

While arguments erupted throughout the process of constructing the 9/11 Memorial Museum, debates are actually integral to the memorialization process and not, as the popular media might frame them, indicative of a problematic process. Geographer Kenneth Foote argues that “debate—however heated—is an essential part of the process of honoring victims and preserving memory...debate over what, why, when, and where to build is best considered part of the grieving process” (342). This need for diverse opinions in the memorialization process helps explain the 9/11 Memorial Museum’s collaborative creation. The Museum Planning Conversation Series, which began in 2006, consisted of different groups helping determining how 9/11 would be both understood and remembered, namely:

family members of victims, survivors, appointed liaisons from the New York City Policy Department (NYPD), the New York City Fire Department (FDNY), and the Port Authority Police Department (PAPD), local residents, downtown businesses, interfaith

clergy, architects and landmark preservationists, colleagues in the museum and cultural communities, government personnel, exhibition designers, and other interested parties. This large group is in addition to the “expert advisers” that ranged from museum professionals to historians to psychologists (Greenwald, “Through the Lens” 14-15). The Museum Planning Conversation Series tackled a number of topics, ranging from the OCME facility to the display of “sensitive material” (*Museum Planning* 3, 6). Collaboration was not just to appease different constituencies; it was a core part of healing itself.

Difficulties in 9/11 Meaning-Making

The tension, controversies, and protests about Ground Zero and 9/11, at their core, revolve around meaning-making. Burlingame’s question “who the hell are they to decide, not just for New York, but for the entire country, what 9/11 is going to be about?” captures not only the desire for meaning, but also the concern about the process behind making meaning (qtd. in Greenspan 136). This interest over meaning-making in and of itself is not revelatory. Memorials and memorial museums that commemorate victims of trauma and violence are inherently fraught places. Memorialization is even more fraught when commemoration centers on the actual site where the event occurred. Kenneth Foote, writing about sites of violence, argues that “the evidence of violence left behind often pressures people, almost involuntarily, to begin debate over meaning. The sites, stained by the blood of violence and covered by the ashes of tragedy, force people to face squarely the meaning of an event” (5). There is a need to do *something* about the site.

However, the uniquely global reach of the event complicates the 9/11 memorialization process, arguably more so than some other violent events. Despite occurring on United States

soil, victims came from more than 90 countries. Furthermore, the widespread media response—not just bystanders taking photos and videos, but also news broadcasts on radio, television, and the internet—meant that people all over the country and the world knew what was happening almost immediately. As a result, there was a collective traumatization. Yes, victims’ families and loved ones suffered more directly than those without personal connections, but there was still a way in which an astounding number of people were affected by an attack that killed innocent civilians. Normal, everyday behavior like flying in an airplane or going to work suddenly felt like dangerous activities. As a result of this collective trauma, how does a memorial site accommodate countless voices and opinions in order to allow people to work through their experience?

More than the sited-ness of the commemoration or the multiplicity of victims, the fact that Ground Zero was still smoldering when memorialization and historicization efforts began intensified the level of disagreement. There is generally a period of reflection after a traumatic event (Foote 5-6). With 9/11, however, the process was condensed. The question becomes: How did this temporal proximity influence the 9/11 Memorial Museum’s approach to memory, memorialization, and meaning-making, and what are the implications of this approach?

Healing an Open Wound

By virtue of the recentness of the September 11th terrorist attacks, the 9/11 Memorial Museum intended to be a participatory space and to provide visitors an expressive freedom. Alice Greenwald insists that “we acknowledged that our job—for the moment, at least—could not be to attempt to graft historical ‘meaning’ onto the events” (“Through the Lens” 12). Likewise, James Young, an advisor to the museum, argues that the 9/11 Memorial Museum’s

emphasis “would be more on presenting than interpreting that day” (Afterword 214). The 9/11 Memorial Museum did in fact follow through on its vision to incorporate individual experiences with 9/11 into both the exhibitions and the archives. There are multiple opportunities to share one’s story or reflections about the event with others, contributing to the collective meaning-making experience.

However, while the 9/11 Memorial Museum focuses on personal memories, it simultaneously applies interpretive frameworks to the responses. Part of this framing is inevitable as there is always a subjectivity to museum display. Young concedes that “any curated presentation of 9/11 is also an interpretation of events” (Afterword 214). In many ways, though, the 9/11 Memorial Museum does not unintentionally interpret. In fact, the way the museum constructs its exhibits and presents its collection—including visitor memories and reflections—works in favor of the museum’s interpretation but with the veneer of objectivity. Through archaeological exhibits, the museum emphasizes its location on the actual site of Ground Zero in order to authenticate its representation of September 11th. In fact, Alice Greenwald explicitly says, “At sites of memory, authenticity is the critical element for achieving moral authority. Our location at Ground Zero in the presence of archaeological remnants of the original site reinforced this value” (“Through the Lens” 29). The 9/11 Memorial Museum is not unique in its use of archaeology (Williams 96-97). Nevertheless, it is evoked frequently here. Throughout the museum are remnants of the original foundations, including the giant slurry wall in Foundation Hall and the floors of the Memorial Exhibition’s Inner Chamber, where visitors walk over glass floors that hover above the “B-6 slab,” which was the “lowest level...of the Twin Towers” (Weisser 60). Showing exposed archaeological elements does more than testify to the

authenticity of the site itself. By virtue of its association with science, the archaeological evidence subtly substantiates the museum's exhibitions and framing of 9/11. How can we explain this tension between visitor participation and institutional interpretation?

At its core, the 9/11 Memorial Museum's interpretative framing is guided by the desire to help visitors work through the trauma of 9/11. The recentness of the atrocity necessitated visitor participation in sharing personal memories, but it also intersected with an overarching desire to help people heal.⁵ While Ground Zero is no longer a gaping pit of rubble, it remains an open wound. While it might be impossible (and, some would say, undesirable) to completely heal from trauma, there is still a desire to reduce pain through the working through process. Violence and death shake people from their everyday life, and there is an effort to make the trauma "fit."

According to trauma scholar Cathy Caruth, trauma "literally *has no place*, neither in the past, in which it was not fully experienced, nor in the present, in which its precise images and enactments are not fully understood" ("Recapturing" 153). Even for traumatic events that we did not experience first-hand, there is a need to make meaning, to understand an event, in order to hopefully make it less traumatic. Some trauma experts contend that the solution is to create an interpretive framework. For example, Bessel van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart argue that "Traumatic memories are the unassimilated scraps of overwhelming experiences, which need to be integrated with existing mental schemes, and be transformed into narrative language" (176).

⁵ Marita Sturken argues that a "culture of mourning and memory has converged with the concepts of healing and closure that are central to American national identity. American mythology clings tenaciously to the belief that one can always heal, move on, and place the past in its proper context, and do so quickly. The memorial culture of the United States has thus been largely experienced as a therapeutic culture, in which particular citizens, primarily veterans and their families, have been seen coming to terms with the past and making peace with difficult memories" (*Tourists* 14). My use of the term heal aligns with this conception. Healing, in this sense, involves making sense of trauma in a way that it does not continue to hurt the victim. It echoes treating a physical wound and making someone "okay."

Through the frameworks of victimhood and witnessing, the museum provides structure to the memories as a way to help visitors make sense of what occurred and ameliorate trauma's damage. These narratives influence visitors' understandings of, and relation to, the event, while the intersection of personal memories and official narratives affects the public memory—and meaning—of September 11th. However, this process is neither seamless nor unproblematic.

Narrative 1: Victimhood

On the broadest level, the 9/11 Memorial Museum invites visitors to assume the role of victim. There are multiple layers to this victimhood identity accessible to audiences.⁶ Those most affected are those who directly survived the attack, whether they were working at the World Trade Center or the Pentagon, served as first-responders, or were simply in the surrounding areas. On a more emotional level, people who lost family and friends were severely affected as well. While perhaps not physically attacked, their lives irreparably changed. Further removed—but still close to the attack and its effects—were people living nearby and who volunteered in the recovery and clean-up efforts. They experienced the aftermath first-hand, and, in the case of residents, often could not return to their homes or schools for months afterwards. Finally, there are those victimized by viewing media broadcasts of the attack. They too felt fear and horror watching the towers crumble. As a whole, what connects all these layers of 9/11 victims is that, at least for U.S. citizens, they were in a sense directly targeted. The terrorists attacked the country physically, but they also assaulted the nation symbolically. What we see, then, is that victimization involves a wounding, whether that is physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual.

There might be layers and levels and degrees to victimization, but that wounding connects

⁶ The core victims are those who died in 9/11 (or those who have since died from 9/11-related illnesses), an identity naturally inaccessible to visitors.

people together. This collective traumatization does not replace individual trauma, nor does it mean that being directly affected is the same as experiencing emotional distress from afar.

Sociologist Arthur Neal argues that national traumas, which include the Great Depression, the JFK assassination, and the Challenger explosion, affect people to different degrees depending on their connection to the event. He contends

National traumas enter into the personal sphere of individual lives in a selective process.

The trauma of war, for example, has a direct impact upon the military personnel assigned to combat units and upon their families...In the final analysis, however, the test for a national trauma is that of the disruptive effects on the institutional underpinnings of the social order. (xi)

In the case of September 11th, those who were there in New York City or the Twin Towers experienced the national trauma in a profoundly personal way. They must contend with both the individual and collective nature of the damage. The creators of the 9/11 Memorial Museum recognize this, but they frame all visitors as victims because of the shared experience that comes through national trauma.

However, this victimhood is not without redemption. The museum does not present a vision of a nation beaten down. It is true that Ground Zero is a site closely associated with rhetoric of an attack on grand American ideals and values (e.g. democracy or freedom)⁷ and upholds a “narrative of innocence” that absolves the United States from any wrongdoing

⁷ This ideology emerged in President George W. Bush’s September 20, 2001 address to both Congress and the nation when he contended: “Americans are asking ‘Why do they hate us?’ They hate what they see right here in this chamber: a democratically elected government. Their leaders are self-appointed. They hate our freedoms: our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other...These terrorists kill not merely to end lives, but to disrupt and end a way of life. With every atrocity, they hope that America grows fearful, retreating from the world and forsaking our friends. They stand against us because we stand in their way.”

(Sturken, *Tourists* 16). However, it is also highly associated with the sacrifices that both emergency personnel and ordinary citizens offered in the face of tragedy. Marita Sturken contends that the victim narrative cannot stand for too long because the “implication of weakness” for victims “often necessitates the rewriting of victims in contexts like 9/11 into narratives of heroism” (*Tourists* 8). But for 9/11, the heroism narrative also sought to affirm the values terrorists purportedly attacked. Put differently, the reframing from victim to hero reaffirms conceptions of American identity. Kenneth Foote, speaking about how only certain sites of violence gain special status and identification, argues that

The selectivity of this process produces a highly filtered view of the past. The Boston Massacre, Harpers Ferry, and Pearl Harbor were commemorated because they could be molded into a heroic view of the national past...these are sites that affirm a sense of patriotism, uphold community values, and honor sacrifices made for nation and community. (284)

These meanings are similarly grafted onto the site, which is evident in the museum’s mission statement:

The mission of the 9/11 Memorial Museum, located at the World Trade Center site, is to bear solemn witness to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and February 26, 1993. The Museum honors the nearly 3,000 victims of these attacks and all those who risked their lives to save others. It further recognizes the thousands who survived and all who demonstrated extraordinary compassion in the aftermath. Demonstrating the consequences of terrorism on individual lives and its impact on communities at the local, national and international levels, the Museum attests to the triumph of human dignity

over human depravity and affirms an unwavering commitment to the fundamental value of human life. (“Mission”)

Certain key values, among others, stand out in this mission statement: honor, sacrifice, and compassion. There is also the overarching sense of a strict divide between good and evil, especially with the emphasis on “human dignity” versus “human depravity.”

The museum helps create the narrative of visitors as victims through techniques to help audiences re-experience aspects of September 11, 2001. The former creative director of the museum, Michael Shulan, designed the main historical exhibition in a way that “replicate[d] the mood of the day, particularly the experience of witnessing the attacks...The confusion, the shifting accounts of what was transpiring, the multiple ways in which people made sense of what was happening” (Greenspan 2009). It is impossible to completely recreate the mood of September 11th—there is legitimately no way to capture the shock, fear, confusion of seeing two planes crash into the Twin Towers, watching people jumping out of windows to the concrete below, viewing towers dissipate into a rolling cloud of toxic dust, or hearing sirens blaring and people screaming. Nevertheless, the museum does represent shades of those experiences. When visitors enter the space, it is crowded, chaotic, and, at times, confusing. Multiple video screens are playing throughout the space simultaneously and people are crowded around them, trying to catch what is on display. The voices of reporters grappling with what occurred echo in the air.

There are varying explanations as to the desire for visitors to remember or relive or re-experience trauma in a museum, albeit heavily mediated. Importantly, the experience offered at the 9/11 Memorial Museum avoids what Alison Landsberg calls prosthetic memory, a type of memory employed by some other museums that deal with difficult history. These museums

provide people opportunities to “remember” something they did not actually live through (*Prosthetic Memory* 2). This often happens through the “experiential as a mode of knowledge.” In this mode, people learn through physical and affective experiences (130). There is an acknowledgment that the memories are not actually one’s own, but the memories *function* as if they are. Pasts other than our own become personally meaningful. As people “feel themselves a part of larger histories” for which they are not directly connected, they develop empathy and care about other people as much as they care about those whom they have no personal connection (152). However, museums that employ prosthetic memory as a tool by and large invite visitors with no direct experience or memory of the event. There is largely no need for prosthetic memory at the 9/11 Memorial Museum. Most visitors have a 9/11 story, so there is not much need to adopt another person’s memory. Furthermore, given the proximity in time to 9/11, there is increased sensitivity to perceptions of appropriateness or decorum. The museum is devoid of problematic reenactments that would allow visitors to “know what it was like” to be on the hijacked airplanes or in Lower Manhattan as a cloud of dust enveloped the city. The museum evokes the mood of the day, but it is not trying to recreate the actual destruction.

I would argue that the museum avoids prosthetic memory for yet another reason. Landsberg argues elsewhere that empathy “requires one to imagine the other's situation and what it might feel like, while simultaneously recognizing one’s distance from her” (“Memory” 223). In other words, empathy creates a connection between us and another, but there is an acknowledgement that they are *not* us. If the museum were to create a prosthetic memory experience and encourage an empathetic response, we would not see ourselves as victims.

Some argue that reliving 9/11 is our only available option. In his *New Yorker* piece “Stones and Bones,” staff writer Adam Gopnik argues that 9/11 was “a crime deliberately committed in open air as a nightmarish publicity stunt, one already as well documented as any incident in history.” Accordingly, he concludes, “We can’t relearn it; we can only relive it.” By focusing on recreating emotional aspects of the event, the museum appears to align with Gopnik’s theory. But the museum twists its approach to recreation as a way for visitors to also relearn the event. The institution aims to create an emotional experience for visitors, but it provides an environment that contrasts how victims grapple after a traumatic event. Political scientist Jenny Edkins argues that “With a traumatic event, we are not able, even in a preliminary way, to say ‘what happened’” (39). Furthermore, she elaborates, “trauma and traumatic memory alter the linearity of historical, narrativized time, time which has beginnings and ends” (40). This lack of linearity is precisely the opposite of the Historical Exhibition’s presentation of September 11th that is overwhelmingly chronological. In the first part of the exhibition, pivotal moments in the day are displayed in big, bold letters on the wall and multiple timelines loop around the walls, laying out the day in excruciating detail to show what was happening in the airplanes, on the ground, and between government officials. So what is the effect of this type of “reliving”?

In a key way, the 9/11 Memorial Museum’s historical exhibition of 9/11 offers a way to understand—and therefore try to heal from—the atrocity. Compare the exhibit to cartoonist Art Spiegelman’s comix *In the Shadow of No Towers*, which represents his personal 9/11 experience. Memory studies expert Marianne Hirsch, when analyzing this work, argues that it “performs an aesthetics of trauma: it is fragmentary, composed of small boxes that cannot contain the material, which exceeds their frames and the structure of the page” (“Editor’s Column” 1213). Indeed, the

pages contain overlapping frames (which sometimes block each other), images that appear scattered onto the page rather than neatly aligned in rows, and faux ads for products like “Jihad Brand Footware” or “The Architects of Armageddon Collectors’ Card Deck” shoved into the middle of the story. An image of the burning towers, “the looming north tower’s glowing bones just before it vaporized,” which Spiegelman says “didn’t get photographed or videotaped into public memory but still remains burned onto the inside of my eyelids several years later,” appears on every page (Spiegelman). Through these aesthetic devices, the comix visually represents symptoms of trauma: its too-muchness, the flashbacks, the struggle to fit it into a coherent narrative, and—evoked by the title—the ever-present looming of something that is no longer there.

The concept of an “aesthetics of trauma” is particularly pertinent to understanding the 9/11 Memorial Museum’s interpretive power. The form of representation creates meaning just as much as the content itself. However, if Spiegelman’s comix shows the material overflowing and uncontainable, the 9/11 Memorial Museum provides an opposite perspective. Techniques of exhibition bolster the museum’s narrative frameworks, echoing the idea of control and containment. The toxic dust, whose effects are still killing victims today, covers clothing stored safely in display cases. Twisted metal that fell from the sky rests behind protective barriers. A minute-by-minute chronology of the day structures the first section of the exhibit, binding it rigidly in measurable units. The towers’ footprints literally contain the two main exhibitions. Throughout the museum, elements such as these use physical containment to counter psychological trauma.

The message the 9/11 Memorial Museum sends through these exhibition techniques is that the trauma can be narrativized and contained; ultimately, it can be understood. The museum's inability to recreate the traumatic experience—or, more accurately, its attempt to remember with a difference—is not completely problematic. In fact, the linearity can actually be a helpful tool for healing. As Jenny Edkins explains, narrativizing “loses the immediacy of the traumatic recall, but more importantly, it loses ‘the force of its affront to understanding’” (41). Being able to tell one's story might be integral to the healing process, but it simultaneously eliminates the unique essence of trauma itself. It is a catch-22; what makes something traumatic is caught up with its inexpressibility. However, if the aim is to heal visitors, then the exhibition and its techniques support the larger narrative the museum offers. The exhibition provides a literal story of Ground Zero, the day itself, and the aftermath, and it is supported by elements that support the message of control. Visitors might identify as victims in their museum visit, but it is in this process of identification that the experience can no longer overwhelm them. Like the toxic-dust coated objects unable to harm the body because they are kept behind protective barriers, the memories can no longer reach out to hurt the mind.

Other design techniques at the museum similarly attempt to influence audiences' interpretations through physical experiences and emotional prompts. At first, it appears that there is a high degree of freedom at the museum. There are wide open spaces, and multiple exhibition spaces that visitors can pick and choose to go through. However, while visitors do not go through the museum in a singular path like they do at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, there are elements in which the experience is overladen with meaning that appears to dictate a particular interpretation or emotional response. In fact, museum officials explicitly recognize this

experience crafting. One way it works is by heavily influencing bodily movement. For example, to get down from the ramp area to the main museum hall, visitors must descend either stairs or take an escalator that runs parallel to the Survivor Stairs, a “staircase that once connected the northern edge of the World Trade Center Plaza to the Vesey Street sidewalk below” and which “provided an unobstructed exit for hundreds seeking to escape” (Greenwald, *No Day* 57). The placement of these stairs was highly strategic. As former Senior Vice President for Exhibitions Amy S. Weisser explains, the architectural firm that worked on the project, DDB, advocated for the location of the stairs because it “in a kinesthetic manner, would intensify the visitor’s experiential journey” (60). This experiential journey would allow visitors to walk a “path of survival to arrive in Memorial Hall—suggesting that, in some sense, we are all survivors, living in the post-9/11 world” (Greenwald, *No Day* 57). Put simply, the architectural design intended to position visitors within a particular identity. The survivor identity closely intersects with the victimhood identity, transforming it into a position of strength. Likewise, Alice Greenwald describes Thinc Design’s “Visitor Experience Map” as “an early attempt to visualize a visitor’s pathway through the spaces of the Museum, capturing the affective or emotional objective for each location and stage of the visitor’s journey.” Furthermore, Greenwald explains, the “exhibition program for this museum would be defined by a commitment to create environments that spur sensory and emotional cognition even before a visitor might fully comprehend narrative content” (“Through the Lens” 16). There are even tissue boxes throughout the Historical Exhibition. While this could be a pragmatic decision, as people might not expect to be moved to tears and therefore do not come prepared, the tissues also signal that someone is supposed to have a significant emotional response to what they are seeing. The exhibition becomes an

affective experience, which departs from the stated historical purpose. Having goals for affective reactions or creating spaces with the intention to encourage an emotional understanding of an event is a covert way to encourage a particular interpretation. It is not merely that emotions can influence decision-making and influence how we remember the past (Doss 59-60). Rather, there is a way in which feeling is interconnected with thinking. As Doss explains, “cognition is embodied, sensate, interested, and invested” (58). Experiential exhibitions like those found in the 9/11 Memorial Museum lead visitors to feel like a victim using strong sensory cues, which then encourages them to think that they are victims (or, in the case of the stairs, survivors).

Narrative 2: Witnessing

The other narrative offered at the museum is that of the witness. Even if visitors were not directly affected, they have a connection to the event through watching or hearing about the event.⁸ The 9/11 Memorial Museum frames their audience as witnesses in a way that is different from most other memorial museums. It is common for audiences to be positioned as witnesses. When walking through the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, for example, visitors are exposed to countless images and artifacts from the Holocaust, and they see what happened in history unfold. However, by virtue of the fact that this tragedy occurred less than twenty years ago—not to mention the mass visual representation via video cameras and photographs—most visitors

⁸ Witnessing is sometimes defined by conscious action. According to some scholars, witnessing involves a degree of speaking out (Polchin 211). For example, Ann Kaplan explains that “‘Witnessing’ is the term I use for prompting an ethnical response that will perhaps transform the way someone views the world, or thinks about justice” (123), while Amy Louise Wood argues that “A spectator or a bystander becomes a witness when his or her spectatorship bears a legal, spiritual, or social consequence; when it can establish the true course or meaning of an event or action; or when it can confer significance or value on an event” (4). These definitions create a hierarchy, or perhaps more accurately a progression, between seeing and doing something with what one saw. However, witnessing is sometimes used more broadly, and can function synonymously with spectating. The 9/11 Memorial Museum employs the term in this broader sense that does not necessarily require speaking out, so I am likewise employing the term to include less active forms of viewing.

literally watched the event unfold. Therefore, they are firsthand witnesses (or even participants as survivors or rescuers) before they arrive at the museum. Thus, they occupy a completely different identity position. Witnessing in this museum, then, works differently. The museum invites people to share their experiences, contributing to the museum and its archive. It is not a passive viewing experience, but rather contributing individual memories, stories, and opinions to the collective memory-making—and meaning-making—process. More importantly, it invites everyone into the healing process.

To some degree, the inclusion of visitors' stories is pragmatic given the personal connection millions of people have to the event. However, framing visitors as witnesses has much larger implications when used as a way to help audiences heal from the trauma of 9/11. As with the victimhood narrative, "I am a witness" becomes a frame for making sense of the event. If it is indeed too soon to "graft historical 'meaning' onto the events," as Greenwald argued earlier, the witnessing narrative still provides a way for visitors to position themselves in relation to the event. Furthermore, given the close connection of witnessing to healing, this narrative—perhaps more than the victimhood narrative—seeks to heal collective trauma. Sociologist Kai Erikson defines collective trauma as

a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality... 'I' continue to exist, though damaged and maybe even permanently changed. 'You' continue to exist, though distant and hard to relate to. But 'we' no longer exist as a connected pair or as linked cells in a larger communal body. (154)

By the constant framing of all visitors as witnesses, the 9/11 Memorial Museum seeks to use this narrative—and the identity it creates—to reconnect people and fix the mass fracturing. “I am a witness” becomes “We are witnessing,” uniting people together once again.

From an early stage in the museum’s creation, visitors’ voices were included in telling the story of 9/11—in many ways quite literally. Michael Shulan advocated for a “non-didactic” museum that made space for every point of view” (Greenspan 208). As he argued, “The visitors really need to feel that it is their story. Everyone has a stake, and therefore it needs to be an open museum” (qtd. in Greenspan 208). Alice Greenwald similarly insisted that “we knew that many would bring their own memories of that day to the Museum. We recognized that one of the great opportunities of this museum would be its ability to become a place where those memories could be affirmed, preserved, and integrated into the larger narrative it would contain” (“Through the Lens” 12). To accomplish this vision, the 9/11 Memorial Museum partnered with the design firm Local Projects, who launched an initiative called Make History. Make History was a website in which people could submit photographs, videos, or written stories. As Jake Barton, the Principal and Founder of Local Projects explained in his Ted Talk,

it really made us recognize what this institution needed to be in order to actually tell that story. We can’t have just a historian or a curator narrating objectively in the third person about an event like that, when you have the witnesses to history who are going to make their way through the actual museum itself. (00:08:43-00:00:09:03)

The Make History website was joined by an oral history booth where people could talk about their 9/11 experience (00:06:57-00:07:40). Eventually, these oral histories made their way into the museum in the introductory walkway where recollections of the day in different languages

are projected in the shapes of countries onto banners hanging from the ceiling and disambiguated voices float in the air, sharing memories of the experience.

The 9/11 Memorial Museum continues to frame visitors as witnesses by asking for—and incorporating—visitors’ memories, reflections, and feelings. It does so through technology that would fit in seamlessly in any participatory museum. The museum provides opportunities for people both directly and indirectly affected to share their stories. In the case of the Witnesses and Survivors Registry, witnessing seems to serve a more evidentiary function as it “invites the public to join in creating a more complete historical record of survival, recovery, and commemoration in response to the 9/11 attacks.” The website, also available on computers in the museum in Foundation Hall, invites those with “firsthand experiences” from the 9/11 WTC attacks, the Pentagon attacks, and the 1993 WTC bombing to contribute their stories (“About the Registries”). The registry asks for play-by-play of peoples’ day. Broken down by specific location (e.g. 2 WTC, Marriott Hotel, Plaza, etc.), contributors describe where they were at key moments, such as the minute the first plane hit the North Tower or the South Tower collapsed, and they also have the opportunity to elaborate on their experience.

The registries are only one component to the invitation to witness; the museum provides the opportunity for all visitors to share their experience of 9/11, no matter their connection to the event. For example, guest books are found by what is called the Signing Steel, a piece of twisted metal from the South Tower. Next to the metal are several screens that serve as digital comment books where visitors can sign their name, draw a picture, or write a message and have it projected onto a nearby map in a few seconds. The responses join other archived messages that similarly express messages of hope, peace, resilience, sadness, and reflection. More significantly,

recording booths are in a section of the museum aptly titled *Reflecting on 9/11*. Visitors are invited into small rooms where they have three recording options: 1) We Remember, which asks guests to “Describe where you were on 9/11 and what you did and felt on that day,” 2) In Memoriam, which invites guests to “Share a remembrance of a loved one, friend, or colleague killed in the 9/11 or 1993 attacks,” and 3) Reflecting on 9/11, where guests are prompted to “Join the conversation about the continuing effects of 9/11” and asked to respond to a set of preselected questions. During my visit there, the questions were:

Why do you think it is important to remember 9/11?

Did a piece of art or artifact you saw today connect to your own memories of 9/11? How?

How has 9/11 influenced your feelings about New York?

How have you been affected by global terror attacks since 9/11?

Also in the space with the recording booths is a projector playing curated videos of responses to *Reflecting on 9/11* questions. The videos alternate between sets of visitors and VIP guests, such as high-ranking officials during 9/11, survivors’ relatives, or experts on 9/11 or terrorism, responding to the questions. On average, each video is around 5 minutes and generally includes around seven speakers. The elements at the 9/11 Memorial Museum that allow visitors to share their stories or reflections help visitors to position themselves in relation to the event.

Through the witnessing narrative, individual voices become part of a larger whole. While combining voices can provide a collective healing effect, the coalescing is not without its problems. Regarding the 9/11 Memorial Museum’s inclusion of diverse witnesses’ voices in the opening passageway, Amy Sodaro argues that

As one listens, the visitor realizes that like the map, the voices also converge. The individuals from France, England, Morocco, California, and New York finish each other's sentences. What at first seems to depict the multiplicity and fragmentation of individual memories of the day begins to literally form into one coherent narrative: collected memory becoming collective. (146)

Sodaro is concerned about the loss of individual memories. As she says, what results from the museum's participatory efforts is a "hegemonic and monolithic memory of the event" (143). While Sodaro focuses on the collapsing of memories into a singular narrative, a similar phenomenon is occurring at the Signing Steel surrounding meaning making. As the responses fall into easily characterizable categories, it appears as if there is a failure of personal interpretation.

But why are these individual voices and interpretations collapsing into one another? Part of this is because there is a way in which participation is "prescribed" (Doss 137). The presence of participatory elements does not necessarily mean that audiences have complete agency; how an individual interacts in the space is highly constrained, and there is a clear takeaway message and desired emotional effect that visitors pick up on. There is still participation, but it is dictated. Even when museums or memorials are overt in their prescriptions, participation can also be influenced by external norms, whether those are dictated by society or more specifically by memorial tropes. We are accustomed in many ways to ready-made expressions of grief and mourning. For more common losses, such as the death of a loved one, short condolence statements like "I'm sorry for your loss" and "Thinking about you," or evocations of religion like "She/he is in a better place now" and "It is all part of God's plan" fill Facebook posts or pass from the lips of guests at a funeral. This seemingly autofill response to suffering extends to more

public tragedies. A common trope popular in recent months, “Thoughts and prayers,” is offered again and again after each mass shooting. People evoke “Never forget” to losses and events big and small; for example, the hashtag #neverforget is used 6.6 million times on Instagram, and a search of hashtags shows it applied to posts ranging from the death of Stan Lee, Veterans Day, and the anniversary of the November 2015 Paris terrorist attacks.

In light of grief tropes (whether specific to the event or broadly applied), the question emerges for the 9/11 Memorial Museum: How much interpretive agency can visitors have if they are overwhelmingly accustomed to other memorials and memorial language? We see indications of this consensus phenomenon happening with the Signing Steel responses which, unlike the video responses in *Reflecting on 9/11*, are not curated. Rather, they are projected on a global map for visitors to see shortly after submission. While researching the 9/11 Memorial Museum in August 2017, I took some photographs of the Signing Steel in the space of fifteen minutes. Comparing responses projected on the map for even that brief amount of time, consistent patterns emerge, including: Drawings of hearts, messages of “Never Forget,” evocations of God, and expressions of peace, whether explicitly written or expressed through symbols like peace signs or doves. More specific to 9/11, it is also common to see drawings of the Twin Towers. While these responses illustrate adjacent interpretive frameworks other than “I am a victim” or “I am a witness,” they are still established ways to make sense of tragedy. They demonstrate a need to make sense of what has happened, but there is seemingly a lack of interpretive freedom. Their similarities suggest some external structure of meaning-making that is influencing visitor participation.

Being a witness does not necessarily exist outside of victimhood; at some points, the witnessing narrative supports the first narrative of victimhood. Cathy Caruth argues that there is “a way in which one’s own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another, the way in which trauma may lead, therefore, to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another’s wound” (*Unclaimed Experience* 8). In this instance, it is not that witnessing itself traumatizes. Rather, it is that one’s own trauma enables hearing and, ultimately, witnessing (9). The two identities become part and parcel of one another. This duality is not the only way in which the museum connects victimhood and witnessing. The narrative of witnessing in some ways prevents the wound from healing. Friedrich Nietzsche once said that “only that which never ceases to hurt stays in the memory” (qtd. in Williams 98). In some ways, the 9/11 Memorial Museum inadvertently does not heal trauma, but continually traumatizes—and re-traumatizes—audiences in a way that compels them to continually remember. Suffering as a result of encountering another’s suffering can be applied to images in the 9/11 Memorial Museum, particularly the Falling Bodies photos. There are warnings outside of the alcoves that contain the photographs, alerting audiences to the difficult material inside. Even prepared with that warning, there is a possibility that viewing the images will be traumatizing, for, as Marianne Hirsch argues, “seeing is a form of wounding and being wounded” (“Editor’s Column” 1211). Speaking in reference to photos of torture during the Iraq War, she claims that “potential victims who confront photographs of tortured bodies will not merely look at these as representations of trauma suffered by others but also experience the trauma affectively and viscerally, in their own bodies” (1211). Likewise, there is a bodily response to seeing the Falling Bodies photos. In that moment of looking, the witness becomes a victim.

More than anything, the witnessing narrative touted by the museum can preclude visitors from recognizing that for much of the museum visit, they should actually be listeners before they can be witnesses. As visual culture scholars Frances Guerin and Roger Hallas argue, “For a witness to perform an act of bearing witness, she must address an other, a listener who consequently functions as a witness to the original witness” (10). This witnessing is not of the event itself, but of the other’s testimony. This listening is vital. As Guerin and Hallas continue, “In this process, the listener becomes a witness to the witness, not only facilitating the very possibility of testimony, but also subsequently, sharing its burden” (11). This relationship changes the role of the 9/11 Memorial Museum visitor. To be sure, this position is already available at the museum. The *Reflecting on 9/11* space is not solely where visitors can share their 9/11 story or reflections on 9/11. Rather, it is also a place to watch and listen to others’ testimonies. Similarly, in the Memorial Exhibition, visitors are invited to sit in the Inner Chamber and view tributes to victims. Unlike the entrance to the museum where the cacophony of voices speaks to the widespread nature of the event, the Inner Chamber instead focuses on one voice at a time. The space is silent except for the reading of an individual’s name and, if available, an oral remembrance from a loved one. The singular focus counteracts the mass tragedy to emphasize the individual lives lost. There is also a fair amount of silence as visitors sit in the dark room, prompting solemn contemplation. That such spaces exist—and that contributors know they are not just sending their stories into a void—matters not just because it exemplifies the nature of participatory experiences. It is integral for contributors to know that people will hear their story and have the opportunity to be a witness for their witness. If visitors use the witnessing narrative as a way to focus on others, not themselves, they can support the

healing process for others. While the museum provides the listening opportunities mentioned above, they should not necessarily be framed as a jumping off for one's own story. The purpose should not be "they told their story, so I need to tell mine." Rather, in many instances, it might be more appropriate for visitors to listen and then witness another's testimony instead.

Narrative Exclusions

The recentness of the tragedy compels the museum to invite visitor participation, but it simultaneously inhibits certain behavior or controls the results of said participation. The *Reflecting on 9/11* videos encapsulate the dichotomy present in the 9/11 Memorial Museum surrounding participation. On the one hand, the museum clearly welcomes and invites visitor participation. Guests are encouraged to provide their stories and perspectives about 9/11 and its impact, and the museum displays these responses for other visitors. In a very clear way, this element of the museum embodies Nina Simon's definition of a participatory museum as "a place where visitors can create, share, and connect with each other around content," and meaning is shared outside in a more networked fashion (ii). On the other hand, this participation is highly managed. Part of this control comes from the questions, although Simon would argue that the provided questions serve as scaffolding that, rather than limiting participation, actually enables people to better respond and therefore contribute (13, 22-23). For the most part I agree, and accordingly the questions are less problematic for me than other aspects. What actually demonstrates the high level of control is the strong editing and production. Visitor responses are not freely exhibited; rather, someone clearly culled through them, selected the most effective responses, and arranged them into an edited video.

The oversight illustrated by the edited videos matters because, by controlling visitor contributions, the museum can exclude interpretations that depart from the dominant narrative frameworks. Visitors to the museum might also notice that not every opinion or voice is present. James Young argues that “There will be competing stories, not all of them welcome, not all of them compelling or sympathetic. But the point is that this is not a place of didactic insistence on one meaning, or one lesson, or on one kind of experience on that day” (Afterword 214). While a nice sentiment, it is not entirely accurate. To be sure, there are different connections to, and experiences of, 9/11 taught at the museum; the videos culled from the recording booths certainly express people’s various viewpoints. Nevertheless, it is difficult to claim that “unwelcome” stories are present in the museum. Notably absent are the opinions of “truthers,” those with conspiracy theories about 9/11, or those who argue that those killed in 9/11 were not, in fact, innocent victims.⁹ I am in no way advocating for the inclusion of these conspiracy theories or offensive explanations, but it is important to recognize their exclusion. Multiple voices might be represented in the museum, but not *all* voices are. These alternative theories about 9/11 contradict the narrative of victimhood, especially one in which not only were innocent individuals attacked but that America itself was a victim. Arguing that the government killed its own citizens or, at the very least, brought this upon its citizens directly contradicts the idea of innocent victimhood. By excluding these viewpoints and opinions, the museum preserves its official narratives.

⁹ Infamously, former University of Colorado professor Ward Churchill called World Trade Center employees “Little Eichmanns,” insisting that through their work they were complicit in the United States’ military actions in the Middle East. He argued: “True enough, they were civilians of a sort. But innocent? Gimme a break. They formed a technocratic corps at the very heart of America’s global financial empire – the ‘mighty engine of profit’ to which the military dimension of U.S. policy has always been enslaved – and they did so both willingly and knowingly” (qtd. in Colorado Committee to Protect Faculty Rights 6, 27).

There is also a clear way in which the museum struggles to maintain certain codes of interacting with traumatic material and the desire to invite audiences to individually engage in the experience. In both the Historical Exhibition and the Memorial Exhibition, the museum prohibits photography. Banning photography is not unique to the 9/11 Memorial Museum; this regulation is found in other memorial museums as well. For example, until 2014, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. did not allow photography in the permanent exhibit (Wecker), while the Holocaust Museum Houston prohibits photography to the point that visitors must leave their cameras at the front desk (“Plan”). The prohibition of photography also predates the 9/11 Memorial Museum itself. As Marita Sturken explains, “the site of Ground Zero was considered to be taboo for photographing.” There were some varying reasons for this perception, including the fact that it was “considered both a crime site and a site of emergency.” Others did not want photography because “photographs were seen to be inappropriate, if not touristic, signifying a superficial response to the site” (*Tourists* 186). Through framing photography as inappropriate, the event and the site were seen as sacred, even private. However, given the emphasis on witnessing at the 9/11 Memorial Museum, it is glaringly ironic that photography is not allowed in certain spaces, especially in the Historical Exhibition. That exhibition is a space that tries to replicate witnessing, and yet visitors are barred to some degree from doing so. This decision seems antithetical for a museum that invites visitors to contribute to the museum. It sends the message to visitors that they can be witnesses, but only in certain prescribed, museum-approved ways.

Photography is a way in which audiences can engage in the interpretation process. Some experts argue that photography allowed for a safe way to make sense in the aftermath of 9/11.

Paul Williams insists that “photography may have provided both a means of participation and a kind of safety valve, in that it provided the semi-detached role of documentarian” (68). Similarly, Marita Sturken points out that “It is striking that still photographs seem to have played a dominant role in the response to 9/11, far more than the television images. Unlike the television images which defined the media spectacle, the photograph seems to aid in mediating and negotiating a sense of loss” (*Tourists* 186). Likewise, Marianne Hirsch insists that “The photographs might enable us to look at an indescribable event, to make it manageable, frame it, bring it home, show it to friends, make it small enough to fit into our living rooms or even our pockets. Flattening and miniaturizing death is a coping strategy” (“Day”). Photography might have provided a distance, but in a way that enabled future interpretation and meaning-making. Taking photos was a physical embodiment of the belatedness of trauma; it might not have been fully experienced in the moment, but it could eventually be integrated. Given how spectators responded after 9/11 itself, it makes sense that visitors would respond in a similar manner to such a dramatic representation of the event that seeks to replicate the mood of 9/11 and asks visitors to relieve the day minute by minute. At the museum, the experience is still mediated heavily through the exhibition itself, but visitors cannot distance themselves from the onslaught of images, sounds, and objects unless they decide to exit early. Rather, they are in some ways forced to re-experience elements of 9/11 in a wholly present way. Certainly, it is true that not everyone who visits the museum and wants to take a picture in the Historical or Memorial exhibitions is using photography to distance themselves from the traumatic images. However, for those more affected, they could use photography to navigate the experience and make sense of it in their own way, in their own time.

The museum's official reasoning behind the photography ban is that there is a fear of what people might do with the photographs. But *doing something* with the photographs is a way to make meaning and integrate 9/11 within personal narratives. Visitors in some ways "poach," to employ cultural theorist Michel de Certeau's terminology, from the museum when they take photographs, display them on social media platforms, or share them with others. This idea of poaching shifts the meaning-making relationship between museums and audiences (as producers and consumers) in another way, outside the bounds of the approved participatory experiences. While the concept of poaching originated with written texts and, more popularly today, fan engagement with mass-produced media, the theory applies well to other texts—including museums. Consider this statement by de Certeau:

The reader takes neither the position of the author nor an author's position. He invents in texts something different from what they 'intended.' He detaches them from their (lost or accessory) origin. He combines their fragments and creates something un-known in the space organized by their capacity for allowing an indefinite plurality of meanings. (169)

This detachment is particularly pertinent to analyzing the 9/11 Memorial Museum. The museum imbeds objects not only in a chronological timeline but also the narrative frameworks. Likewise, the entire exhibitions fit within the identities set forth by the museum. So in a way, a concern over what visitors might "do" with their photographs contains not only a worry about using them in a disrespectful way, but also how visitors might make sense of what is on display.

Photography allows visitors to "poach" what they want from the exhibit and use it in their own ways, perhaps imbuing them with an alternative perspective or context. With the *Reflecting on 9/11* videos or even the Signing Steel, the audience creates texts in conjunction with the museum

to be utilized by the institution. They are created to align with the intended meaning.

Alternatively, photographs—and the forms they might take later—take from the museum and are not co-authored in the same way. By so doing, the meaning of the objects or exhibits can become disconnected from the museum as a whole and fit into an individual's personal narrative.

There are less overt exclusions to the museum's dominant narratives. In an important way, the witnessing narrative can potentially limit interpretive viewpoints and, more importantly, activism.¹⁰ This single focus occurs not despite the participatory witnessing elements but rather because of them. Erika Doss, paraphrasing political scientist Carole Pateman, explains that “‘participation’ is often championed as an expedient tool of consensus rather than a transformative vehicle of democratic action; participation does not, in other words, guarantee public agency” (127). The mere act of participation does not necessarily mean that people come to drastically different conclusions or are spurred to change. Instead, they can collectively contribute to maintaining the status quo. In the case of memorials, for instance, leaving tributes at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial involves participation, but in a way that frequently supports larger narratives of national sacrifice. While I will argue in Chapter Two that Manzanar National Historic Site positions some visitors as perpetrators, such an identification would never occur at the 9/11 Memorial Museum. Amy Sodaro argues that this perpetual victimhood is linked to witnessing, insisting that “while the story the museum tells is one of a wounded America, all visitors, because of the ethical implications of their role as witness to the events, are invited to identify with the individuals and values that were attacked” (159). Upon first glance, this identification makes sense because the terrorists *did* attack the United States—both literally and

¹⁰ This is ironic, given the frequent association of witnessing with activism.

symbolically. We identify with the individuals because we were in fact targeted, even if not directly. However, as Sodaro points out, “It presents a simple, Manichean image of the world, in which the good ‘us’ (Americans, and by extension, visitors to the museum) was attacked by the evil ‘them’” (159). What this stark dichotomy does is preclude visitors from seeing how they, too, might—albeit to a much lesser degree—engage in behavior associated with hate or divisiveness. While closely associated with the Holocaust, the message of “Never Again” is frequently invoked in reference to 9/11 (and other traumatic events; notably it was employed by activists following the Parkland school shooting). However, how can we work towards eliminating these types of events if we do not see ourselves as capable of such feelings towards others? Unlike other memorial museums that identify as sites of shame, reconciliatory gestures to help make amends for past mistakes, the 9/11 Memorial Museum positions itself as a wholly commemorative museum. So, what does the call for “Never Again” even mean in this context? What good would witnessing do if we are only speaking out about our victimhood? What are we working towards? Is it just empty calls, a mindless repeating of a memorial cliché? Is it just giving us a false sense of activism?

Looking Ahead

The 9/11 Memorial Museum provides an important lens into what it looks like to memorialize—on an institutional scale—an atrocity soon after its occurrence. The narratives presented at the museum provide a way for visitors to make sense of the event and their connection to it. It will be interesting to see how the 9/11 Memorial Museum changes and adapts in the future, both as its historical meaning becomes clearer and, perhaps more significantly, its visitor demographic changes. Can they sustain the narratives of victim and witness when

younger visitors do not have personal experience with the event? If not, what structuring narratives will take their place? Furthermore, if the narratives exist to heal trauma, what happens when the wound closes, or, at the very least, is not quite so gaping?

At the same time, the 9/11 Memorial Museum seems, to some degree, like the exception rather than the rule when it comes to how the nation deals with violence and terrorism. The United States for the past few years has experienced a seemingly constant barrage of violence and loss, mostly in the form of mass shootings: Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, an Aurora, Colorado movie theater, Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida, Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, and the Route 91 Harvest music festival in Las Vegas, Nevada. Countless others could be included in that list. These events are difficult to memorialize for a number of reasons, especially because of the terrorism being domestic and guns' entanglement in political debate. But like 9/11—itself a political minefield—these events are difficult to memorialize because of their relation to time. While physical memorialization occurred quickly after 9/11 and web-based tributes did exist, digital memorialization has exploded in the digital age. Immediately after a tragedy, apps explode with posts about the event. These hyper-speed reactions lead to superficial reflections that rely heavily on the common memorial tropes discussed earlier, or, more frequently, calls for the government to reform gun laws.

Perhaps it is not just the event's recentness and the societal impulse to quickly memorialize online that challenges meaning-making. Rather, it is that the wound literally cannot heal because each attack stabs the collective body yet again. Even if we could develop a narrative to make sense of an event, new violence renders it ineffective. Take witnessing, for

example. This narrative seems to apply, as we all see media coverage of a tragedy and, furthermore, might even speak out about it. But witnessing does not heal the wound because it provides no meaning to the situation. Rather, our witnessing seems to serve instead as a symptom of—rather than a solution to—trauma. With each new act of mass violence, it is like a flashback or a nightmare, jarring us from our everyday life without warning.

Returning to the 9/11 Memorial Museum and its potential future, it is important to consider how more recent violence in America could affect it. With the rise in domestic terrorism, for instance, will visitors continue to feel the divide between a “good us” and an “evil them”? Will we become further entrenched in a victimhood narrative? Will the idea of “Never Again” become meaningless, or become an actual impetus for demonstrable action?

CHAPTER 2: MANZANAR NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

Driving along Highway 395, it is easy to miss the exit to Manzanar National Historic Site, one of the ten desolate camps where the U.S. government forcibly relocated and incarcerated around 120,000 people of Japanese descent.¹¹ Manzanar alone housed 11,070 Japanese Americans internees (“Japanese Americans”). While there are road signs, Manzanar is off the beaten path and, perhaps with the exception of a lone guard tower, does not readily catch drivers’ attention. One’s first introduction to the site is a bit underwhelming as well. To be sure, the barren landscape is disarmingly beautiful, flanked by the Sierra Nevada mountains. However, the location looks like a rest stop at first glance, complete with picnic tables and a large, rather empty parking lot. The location and appearance of Manzanar National Historic Site exemplify an overarching issue: absence and presence. The largely empty landscape belies an astonishingly deep and dark history. The site reveals the paradoxical nature of absence, simultaneously full and devoid of meaning.

Issues of absence and presence surround Manzanar National Historic Site and intersect with interesting questions surrounding the role of visitors in the memorialization process. Memorialization, in a fundamental way, always requires people to make meaning. Nevertheless, certain memorials are not truly complete without physical interaction. For instance, Menashe Kadishman’s memorial *Fallen Leaves* in the Jewish Museum in Berlin requires people to walk upon a sea of abstract metal faces, mashing the iron pieces against one another to produce a clanging sound that reverberates against the towering concrete walls. Likewise, Maya Lin’s

¹¹ The other nine internment camps are: Tule Lake (California), Minidoka (Idaho), Heart Mountain (Wyoming), Topaz (Utah), Granada (Colorado), Poston (Arizona), Gila River (Arizona), Rowher (Arkansas), and Jerome (Arkansas) (Burton et. al 2).

Vietnam Veterans Memorial symbolizes a scar in the land, but it truly becomes meaningful when people touch the names, leave letters, or see the Washington Memorial reflecting off the glossy black stone. Manzanar, too, works because of bodily movement at the site itself, whether it is walking the paved loop around the site, traversing dusty paths to visit rock gardens, or gathering with other pilgrims on the last Saturday in April. Absence here is not just a popular memorialization trope or a metaphorical sign. At Manzanar, absence is connected to responsibility. It serves as a means to an end, a request for visitors to reflect and respond. Participation does not just stay at the site, but rather extends beyond the visit.

Historical Context of Internment

While the commonly told narrative about internment focuses on the bombing of Pearl Harbor or Executive Order 9066, what is often left out from the discussion is that anti-Asian sentiments and racism had been brewing in America for many years prior. Japanese internment was neither necessary nor inevitable, but it is also clear that it was not a sudden, rash decision made in the heat of war either; the ground had been prepared.

Racism against Asians in America is no doubt rooted in the larger system of imperialism and colonialism that pervaded Western society for centuries. Nevertheless, specific examples of racism in America against people of Asian descent were largely tied to labor and concerns about economic competition. While anti-Asian sentiment permeated the nation, legally supported racism came in 1882 when Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act. This act is significant because “for the first time, Federal law proscribed entry of an ethnic working group on the premise that it endangered the good order of certain localities” (“Transcript of Chinese Exclusion”). As the name suggests, the Chinese Exclusion Act only affected those from China,

and America continued to allow Japanese immigration because there was still demand for cheap labor, especially agricultural (Robinson, *Tragedy* 8). Over time, however, resentment began to grow towards Japanese immigrants. Again, labor was at the forefront of the backlash, bolstered by racist claims (13). There was a strong nativist impulse in America at the time, which focused on the immigrants' "‘heathen’ religion, their poor English, and their tendency to congregate in separate communities" (11). Japanese success in farming was a significant factor in racist attitudes, as the Japanese immigrants began to cultivate their own farms and build stores instead of working for whites (13). In fact, at one point "the agricultural production from Japanese-held farmland in California was valued at \$67 million, or one-tenth of the total value of the state's produce" (Robinson, *By Order* 32). Each success brought backlash through additional restrictions concerning land ownership, citizenship, or immigration. Eventually, this competition and racism led to the Immigration Act of 1924, which barred all Asian immigration ("Immigration Act").

Fears concerning Japan's power compounded the racism and prejudice towards people of Japanese descent in the United States. After Japan's upset victory in the Russo-Japanese War in 1905, there were worries "among Americans of a 'yellow peril' of encroaching Asian world mastery" (Robinson, *Tragedy* 13). While this fear subsided somewhat during World War I, it ramped up again when tensions between America and Japan heightened in the 1930s (18). The relationship between Japan and America caused the government to become "increasingly anxious about potential disloyalty by both Issei and Nisei, especially in the territory of Hawaii" (32). The fears about Japanese and Japanese Americans continued to increase. In fact,

Despite the lack of documented threat, during the eighteen months before Pearl Harbor the administration stepped up contingency planning for war with Japan, including curbs on Japanese Americans considered dangerous. After the outbreak of World War II in Europe, the U.S. government enormously increased efforts to coordinate counterintelligence. (47)

Even more disturbing than this surveillance and focus on Japanese Americans was the fact at the United States government was already creating plans for “camps designed for mass confinement of aliens” (48). These camps extended to other groups. In 1941, the Immigration and Naturalization Service created detention centers, holding German sailors at Fort Stanton in New Mexico and Fort Lincoln in North Dakota, as well as Italian sailors in Missoula, Montana (Fiset 69-70; Robertson, *Tragedy* 49).

The government was not the only institution with unfounded fears about the Japanese. In large part, the press exploited the nation’s racism and fears. For example, “Throughout the 1930s, West Coast tabloids and popular magazines had spread improbable tales of Japanese American spies and saboteurs” and “in the tense atmosphere during 1940 and 1941, nativist and headline hunters circulated further unfounded stories of Japanese Americans disloyalty, whipping up hysteria against Japanese communities” (Robinson, *Tragedy* 53). By the time Pearl Harbor occurred, the stage was already set.

Executive Order 9066, issued on February 19, 1942, enabled Japanese internment, stating:

I hereby authorize and direct the Secretary of War, and the Military Commanders whom he may from time to time designate, whenever he or any designated Commander deems

such action necessary or desirable, to prescribe military areas in such places and of such extent as he or the appropriate Military Commander may determine, from which any or all persons may be excluded, and with respect to which, the right of any person to enter, remain in, or leave shall be subject to whatever restrictions the Secretary of War or the appropriate Military Commander may impose in his discretion. (“Transcript of Executive Order”)

Interestingly, the Executive Order does not explicitly refer to people of Japanese ancestry. In fact, Italian and German immigrants were initially included in discussions of forced removal and internment (P. Smith 113-114; 124-25). At the very beginning, the evacuation was framed as “voluntary.” Of course, the evacuation was voluntary only so far as Japanese and Japanese Americans moved from their homes without explicit military force. Soon after the passing of EO 9066, Lt. General John L. DeWitt “issued Public Proclamation No. 1” and Military Area No. 1 was created, dividing Washington, Oregon, and California into East and West sections, and Japanese and Japanese Americans “living to the west of the boundary was required to evacuate” (P. Smith 144). The voluntary evacuation plan was chaotic and largely failed, however, which led to a “controlled” evacuation (149-50). This mass evacuation program required administrative control, leading to the creation of the War Relocation Authority (155).

The government originally constructed Manzanar as an “assembly center” designed to temporarily house prisoners before they were sent to the more permanent internment camps (Robinson, *Tragedy* 129). The location was selected because it met several desired conditions: the land had a single owner, there was agricultural potential, it was not near infrastructure (such as trains) and it was isolated (Lynch). Griffith and Company began the construction process in

March 1942, but as Jeffrey F. Burton, Mary M. Farrell, Florence B. Lord, and Richard W. Lord, researchers on the report *Confinement and Ethnicity: An Overview of World War II Japanese American Relocation Sites*, explain, “After initial construction, all additional buildings at Manzanar were completed using paid evacuee labor” (163). In late March 1942, around 1,000 individuals of Japanese descent arrived at Manzanar to help with the construction project in what was considered a “voluntary evacuation” (Unrau 1: 53). Manzanar became one of the internment camps when the War Relocation Authority assumed governance on June 1, 1942 (Robinson, *Tragedy* 154). Manzanar closed in 1945, and was occupied until November 21, 1945 (*Cultural Landscape Report* 85).

Difficulties in Memorializing

While this larger context is often glossed over, internment as a whole was not publicly memorialized for many years. As I will explore shortly, it took until the late 1960s for commemoration efforts of internment to begin. On one level, the delay in memorialization is not uncommon in the United States, and Manzanar memorialization could be compared to other shameful events in America, whether that be lynching or Native American massacres or violent labor disputes. The country is rife with places of violence and discrimination that reveal a dark underbelly. While most sites of trauma require some period of reflection to determine its meaning, the United States government is not necessarily known for discussing or memorializing events that depict the nation in a negative light. As the founding director of the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience Liz Ševčenko argues in “Sites of Conscience: Reimagining Reparations,” “Historically, the United States has rarely undertaken official state reparations and has rarely harnessed heritage as a central component of social policy” (26-27). Furthermore, sites

connected to racism in particular, Kenneth Foote argues, “remain difficult to assimilate with heroic notions of the national past” (35). The government is not the only reticent party; many citizens resist efforts to address unsavory parts of the nation’s history. The recent uproar over Confederate monuments shines a light on the continuing failure to acknowledge, let alone atone for, grave injustices. Often this reticence stems from long entrenched white supremacy, and the larger way in which America sees itself as perpetually innocent. As Marita Sturken argues, “American national identity, and the telling of American history, has been fundamentally based on a disavowal of the role played in world politics by the United States not simply as a world power, but as a nation with imperialist policies and aspirations to empire” (*Tourists* 7). While Sturken’s argument here refers to the United States’ relationship with terrorism, especially after 9/11, the argument can extend to other atrocities on U.S. soil, especially those perpetuated by Americans themselves. In this mindset, if America sees itself as innocent, then Japanese internment was a justified reaction to Pearl Harbor and violence by insiders becomes an exception to the rule, or at least “not from American culture” (17). If we as a country do not see ourselves as the guilty party, then there is no need for recognition, let alone redress.

However, unique concerns complicated efforts to memorialize Manzanar. Beyond a governmental and societal difficulty in confronting shameful history, Manzanar poses an especially problematic dilemma as a wartime site that does not fit into a Manichean view of war where there is a simple and clear fight between the “good guys” and the “bad guys.” Most American war sites are steeped in patriotic sentiment, evoke themes of bravery and heroism, and espouse this reductive narrative. But Manzanar complicates an image of the United States which fought against an enemy which, among many aggressions, targeted its own citizens based on

identity (especially racial and ethnic). Furthermore, as psychologist Donna K. Nagata points out, “at the same time that Japanese Americans were living in concentration camps and considered hazardous to national security, 23,000 additional Japanese Americans (including relatives of those in camps) served in the U.S. military during World War II, protecting the American ideals of equality, justice, and democracy” (viii). The Interpretation Center today acknowledges the paradox of an internment camp in the United States—a country that touts itself as the land of the free—by projecting an image of Manzanar complete with barracks and a soaring American flag onto the wall of internees’ names near the end of the exhibition. For many years, though, memorializing a World War II site that directly contradicts traditional national narratives presented a glaring problem. Instead of acknowledging the nation’s mistakes, one sees evidence of U.S. society manufacturing amnesia. For example, schools did not teach about internment (Nagata 188; Harth 4). Several examples from the Interpretive Center’s visitor comment books illustrate these personal experiences with this omission, with some older visitors to the site talking about never learning about internment:¹²

As a 51 year old American citizen I am appalled by this. I certainly never learned about this in history class. (1/30/10, Visitor Comment Book 01/2010-08/2010)

Although I majored in history, graduated in 1961, I heard nothing, or very little, about the internment of the Japanese. (1/14/06, Visitor Comment Book 10/2005-05/2006)

¹² None of the visitor comments included in this dissertation include names. There are several reasons for this: 1) Many visitor did not write their name and/or initials, 2) the names and/or initials were indecipherable, and 3) while displayed at the historic site, the books are not published nor accessible to the wider public. In not attributing comments to specific individuals, I follow the approach employed by several other scholars researching comment books or cards, namely Livingstone, Pedretti and Soren, “Comment Cards and Visitors’ Understanding of the Cultural Context of Science;” Macdonald, “Accessing Audiences: Visiting Visitor Books;” Magliacani, Madeo & Cerchiello, “From ‘Listener’ to ‘Speaker’ Museum Visitors: Guest Book as a Means of Dialogue;” and Morris, “The Frightening Invitation of a Guestbook.”

Half a century ago, my family used to hike into the Sierras from Kearsarge Pass, just northwest of here. It was less than 15 years since this camp had been reality and home to more than 10,000 souls. But I never heard of Manzanar or the War Relocation Program, in or out of school. I simply wasn't told. No one in my generation of privileged Baby Boomers was informed that our government could and did do this shameful thing to its own citizens. (10/19/17, Visitor Comment Book 09/2017-06/2018)

Material absence compounded the silence. After the camps closed, the site was dismantled. Some barracks were sold to veterans in November 1946, and after Manzanar closed, the remaining structures were “demolished and their materials used for much needed post-war housing” (*Cultural Landscape Report* 85). Instead of confronting or atoning for its mistake, the government instead tried to erase the evidence.

These issues help explain the lack of national efforts to memorialize Manzanar for years. But what of the absence of memorialization by those of Japanese descent? There was a marked silence by those formerly incarcerated as well. There are a number of reasons for the silence. The desire for assimilation played a part. According to historian Alice Yang Murray,

This drive to forget the internment experience and assimilate into white society often affected the way the Nisei raised their Sansei children. Many thought they could ‘protect’ their children from the stigma of internment by hiding this part of their history and helping their children to better assimilate. (200)

Internalized shame played a significant role as well. Diana Meyers Bahr argues, “The majority of both Issei and Nisei did not talk about internment to anyone, even their children...They buried depressing camp memories because there was a feeling of shame, that they had done something wrong” (115). Ultimately, though, this silence was deeply rooted in trauma. Murray explains that “A growing number of Japanese Americans soon began to reevaluate this silence as evidence of

psychological damage caused by internment. By the 1980s there would be a consensus among activists and scholars that many internees found it too painful to confront their memories of life in the camps” (197).

Given all these difficulties in remembering Japanese internment, what ultimately contributed to and allowed for the memorialization at Manzanar? By and large: student activism. The remembrance effort was catalyzed by political activism in the United States that emerged during the late 1960s. The Asian American movement developed during this time, drawing on other contemporaneous activism, namely “the Black Power movement, the anti-war movement, and Third World liberation movements around the globe” (Maeda 5). In many ways, remembrance and confronting silence came out of resistance to the “model minority” stereotype (Murray 186, 213). There is an interesting comparison to be made between European memorialization of WWII and Japanese internment beginning in the 1960s. In both cases, student activism led to younger generations questioning narratives and confronting silence, both of their government and their relatives. Their activism spurred a turn to—and reevaluation of—the past. There are important differences: in France and Germany, students often questioned the complicity of their parents during the war (Wiedmer 80; Winter 27). Conversely, in America, younger Japanese-Americans confronted their parents and grandparents about their silence or even their lack of resistance (Murray 200-201; Yoo 682). Speaking about some Sanseis’ response, one internee, Bert Nakano, remarked that “Many of them found out that their parents were in the concentration camps and this appalled them. How could my parents, and all of the Japanese people go quietly into a concentration camp without a fuss, a fight? So...the kids

started questioning their parents” (qtd. in Murray 201). Still, in both instances, memory and social change became linked together as younger generations engaged with the past.

Confronting silence and bringing stories of internment into the present led to a physical return to Manzanar and memorialization of the site. With the exception of two religious leaders—Buddhist priest Sentoku Maeda and Christian minister Soichi Wakahiro—who returned to Manzanar each year since the closing of the camp, it did not become a ritualized place of remembrance until 1969 when a group of “young Japanese Americans journeyed to the site” (Iwamura 938). After this initial pilgrimage, the Manzanar Committee—a non-profit created to “educate the general public about the World War II imprisonment of Japanese Americans in United States concentration camps”—formed (Nakagawa, “Manzanar Committee”). Warren Furutani and Sue Kunitomi Embrey, two founders of the Manzanar committee, explain the origins of pilgrimage:

The United Farm Workers had just marched from Delano to Sacramento. Americans were marching on Washington—all with a cause and a vision of a better world, with no more oppression and no more war. What could Japanese Americans organize around? What issue in our experience would touch nerve endings? Yeah, we could march; we were sure of that, but where? To Gardena? Boyle Heights To reclaim Terminal Island? We needed a ‘real’ issue that would move many people. And that’s when we thought of the camps. (8)

Over the years, the Manzanar Committee not only returned annually to the site, but also worked to get Manzanar recognized on a variety of historical registers.

On March 3, 1992, the Senate passed H.R. 543, thereby establishing Manzanar as a National Historic Site. The creation of Manzanar as a National Historic Site resulted from joint

efforts between the U.S. government and the Japanese American community. On the one hand, the government began making a concerted effort to present a more complete—and complex—national narrative in the early 1990s (Pitcaithley 444). As former Chief Historian of National Park Service, Dwight T. Pitcaithley, explains, Congress passed a number of acts that “designated new kinds of historical parks, parks that require that we understand the past, not simply celebrate it” (444). Consequently, the NPS began changing its focus. The shift towards these untold stories was also a result of the NPS starting to “clarify and expand its interpretation of the educational mission,” resulting in an effort to “support openly and aggressively the telling of untold stories, stories that had not traditionally been part of the dominant narrative told at parks” (444-45). On the other hand, however, the push to establish Manzanar National Historic Site built on the work of previous activism. The Manzanar Committee worked to get Manzanar recognized as a California Registered Historical Landmark, which was achieved in 1972 (Nakagawa, “Manzanar Committee”).¹³ In July 1976 the site was placed on the National Register of Historic Places, and in February 1985 it became a National Historical Landmark (“Park Statistics”).

The legislative process to designate Manzanar as a National Historic Site also reveals the combined efforts of the government and the Japanese American community. The bill began as two separate House bills, H.R. 543—to “establish the Manzanar National Historic Site”—and H.R. 2351—the “Japanese-American National Historic Landmark Theme Study Act” (Unrau 2: 827). Several key members of the Japanese American community testified in support of the bills, namely Sue Embrey, Hiroshi Takusagawa, Rose Matsui Ochi, and William Yoshimo (828).

Embrey also testified in the Senate to establish Manzanar as a National Historic Site (Shumaker

¹³ While designated in January 1972, controversy over the wording of the plaque delayed its dedication until April 14, 1973 (Murray 268, 274)

238-39). The collaboration did not stop with Manzanar's designation. Importantly, the law also established an "Advisory Commission" that included former internees to help with the "development, management, and interpretation of the site" (United States, Congress 41-42). Today, the National Park Service runs the site, but the Manzanar Committee continually assists with the pilgrimage (Nakagawa, "Manzanar Committee").

Site Today

Uncovering the internment experience

It's all right there on the map.
It's all right there in the mind.
Find it. If you care to look.
—Lawson Fusao Inada, "Concentration Constellation"

Manzanar National Historic Site remembers two layers of Japanese internment: the camp experience itself, as well as the attempted erasure of that shameful event in American history. The debate over reconstructing Manzanar represented these core positions. Many older Japanese Americans resisted reconstruction and, as Jennifer McStotts contends, "some would prefer to commemorate the abandonment and attempted forgetting along with the camp experience itself" (285). What does it mean to commemorate "abandonment and attempted forgetting?" While seemingly counterintuitive at first, this group wanted to call attention to the elision of Japanese internment from both the physical landscape and the national narrative. Both mentally and materially people tried to make Manzanar disappear, and some wanted to remember these attempts in order to refuse to absolve the nation for its silence. Rebuilding all of the barracks, mess halls, latrines, and other structures would obscure the fact that the government hurriedly dismantled the camp and tried to move on. However, younger generations pushed for some

reconstruction. For example, Sue Kunitomi Embrey wrote a letter in 1996 to the National Park Service supporting reconstructing some key elements of the camp, including the rock gardens, a barrack, and guard towers (Hays 77-78). In this case, “The next generation—those who were infants or young children in the camps and the children of internees born afterwards—would prefer to be fully immersed in the camp experience” (McStotts 285). For those who either did not remember or did not experience the camps, reconstruction would allow a glimpse into their, or their relatives’, lives during this time. The current management of the historic site demonstrates a balance of these two positions. The National Park Service reconstructed two barracks and a bathroom for a demonstration block at what was originally Block 14, as well as relocated a “World War II-era mess hall” from Bishop Airport (*Manzanar* 59). These reconstructions provide visitors a small sense of what living conditions were like for internees, with the model structures outfitted in historically accurate furnishings and equipment. In a complementary way, the Interpretive Center—one of the few original structures that exists— attempts to evokes the past and uses design to help visitors get into the historical mindset. The center contains lots of raw wood paneling, while a guard tower looms over the space.

The majority of the site, however, emphasizes absence. Or, perhaps, more accurately, it embodies what Marita Sturken terms an “absent presence” (“Absent Images” 36). Here, the site calls attention to absence by identifying what used to be present. The three-mile self-guided tour, which follows a loop around the perimeter of the site, invites visitors to explore the site by car or by foot. Those walking at Manzanar are allowed to traverse the site, exploring the sprawling interior that includes elements such as the orchards, judo dojo, and garden remnants. Occasionally, visitors have to walk through untamed flora to get to a location, including trekking

through wild brush complete with thorns. Visitors can stop at interpretative spots associated with significant structures. Sometimes a descriptive sign is visible, but in each instance, visitors are essentially staring at empty land covered in native brush. A closer look might reveal reminders that the land was once occupied, such as a baseball base or foundation markers, but often a single sign is all that signifies the original structure. In a way, the signs function like the *Stolpersteine* found across Europe that mark the absence of victims of the Holocaust by identifying their “last-known freely chosen residence” (Apperly). While the *Stolpersteine* turn people to individuals, in both instances markers identify absence, making it visible by calling attention to loss.

Manzanar frequently emphasizes the nation’s manufactured amnesia by invoking absence through the form of burial. This burial is both literal and metaphorical, a point noted by the NPS in their brochure, which reads: “As time passed, Manzanar was further buried, both in sand and in memory” (*Reading*). Not only are significant structures like internee-constructed gardens buried, but people forgot what happened in the desert over 75 years ago. The language of burial is also used by Japanese-Americans as well. In filmmaker Tadashi Nakamura’s documentary *Pilgrimage*, there is language of “digging” and “buried” when talking about the past. One former internee, Robert Nakamura, remarks that “Even though I was in camp, I really buried the experience. I very seldom thought about it and that was very easy because I didn’t want to talk about it, my parents didn’t want to talk about it. The whole Nisei generation didn’t want to talk about it” (00:02:40-00:03:00). Warren Furutani, a founder of the Manzanar committee, likewise comments about the Nisei’s reaction to talking about Manzanar, saying: “A lot of the Nisei were so angry. ‘Why are you digging up this old story? It’s better left buried’” (00:03:15-00:03:23). The Pilgrimage experience was critical to digging up the past. As one participant interviewed in

the documentary noted about the power of the experience: “It unlocked what I had buried” (00:09:33-00:09:35).¹⁴ This metaphor of burial is also found in artistic pieces about Manzanar. Artist and activist Nobuko Miyamoto writes in her poem “Manzanar Bushi:” “one hundred ten thousand stories buried in the sand / one hundred ten thousand stories...”. The language of burial is key to how people interact with Manzanar because it evokes intentionality and action; if something is buried, it must be uncovered. Through this language, there is a stated need to end the silence about internment and to expose lost stories.

Sometimes there is a literal digging up of the past. The NPS currently leads public archaeology digs to uncover sites throughout Manzanar National Historic Site. While the NPS supervises these digs, volunteers are crucial to the process. As Mary M. Farrell, an archaeologist with Trans-Sierran Archaeological Research, explains,

Often, former inmates have participated in the first stages of research, shaping research designs and identifying features not listed in the documentary records. Former inmates and their families and friends along with other members of the public often assist archaeologists with survey, excavation, and analysis.

At the 2018 Pilgrimage, I stopped to take a photo of a garden remnant and the volunteer stationed there told me that her great grandfather had built the garden foundation I was looking at. Because of photographs, they knew it existed, and it was uncovered on a dig. Since the site had been bulldozed when the camps were closed, volunteers had to build the garden back up, but it is exactly how it looked during incarceration. This discussion of the garden led to her telling me about her great grandfather, as well as how she was learning more about what her family

¹⁴ This quote was unattributed in the film and the speaker was not pictured.

went through. In this instance, literal digging allowed for a metaphorical uncovering. However, with the exception of the sanctioned archaeology events, by and large visitors are not allowed to physically dig for remains.

Manzanar calls attention to how the U.S. tried to simply move on from their treatment of Japanese-Americans—this metaphorical burial of the past—not only through the lack of reconstruction, but also by identifying where previous structures once stood. Through both signs and drawings on maps, the NPS points out and highlights now empty space. For example, at one spot is a wooden sign that reads “Catholic Church,” but all the visitor sees is dirt, dry brush, and some scraggly trees. Because Manzanar uses the pre-existing ruins and landscape to highlight an attempted destruction of memory instead of building a grand structure that monumentalizes Japanese-American resilience and strength, Manzanar necessitates visitor participation in the memorialization process. Visitors at Manzanar are asked to actively remember what happened there. For example, they are prompted to uncover the camp, a move encouraged by a brochure given to visitors which reads: “Today, when visitors see Manzanar, they may think there is nothing out there. Yet for those who learn to read the landscape, the place comes to life.” The brochure provides instructions for how to “read Manzanar’s landscape,” which directs visitors to look for things like rock arrangements, sidewalks, water pipes, and foundations (*Reading*).

The idea of uncovering or reading or finding complicates the absence at Manzanar, because it is obvious that many of the physical structures at Manzanar are actually gone, razed when the camp closed. In this instance, absence is a somewhat temporary position as reading becomes a performative act. As the explanation in the brochure continues,

A pipe sticking out of the ground becomes a water faucet where children splashed their faces in the summer heat. A foundation reveals the shoe prints of a child who crossed the wet cement. Ten iron rings embedded in a concrete slab evoke the humiliation of ten women forced to sit exposed next to strangers, enduring private moments on public toilets. (*Reading*)

What seems to be happening, then, is that visitors look at Manzanar's fragmented remains and use them to imagine what life was like for the internees. Other scholars similarly argue the role of performativity at Manzanar. English and American Studies professor Floyd Cheung, for instance, posits that "revisiting Manzanar now is like walking onto an empty stage, albeit one layered with memories" (149). What appears to be happening, then, is that Manzanar provides the space for this imaginative reconstruction to occur, helping bring the past into the present.

Absence allows for personal meaning—and memory—making. In contemporary memorialization, absence is a common trope. There has been a prevalence towards favoring more abstract expressions of grief in lieu of the grand and glorifying monuments commonly found at war memorials (Williams 3-4). By and large, this embrace of absence in these structures or sites is linked to a larger belief in the shortcomings of language. For example, Jacque Micieli-Voutsinas, a human geographer, terms this phenomenon "affective heritage," which "relies less on authoritative narratives and official rhetoric to shape and sustain meaning at commemorative sites" and whose "impetus is for visitors to *feel* meaning as it is produced through embodied encounters with and within memorial spaces" (94). In other words, the architectural design allows for personal meaning-making, and this meaning-making is primarily made bodily, not linguistically. We see such a phenomenon at Manzanar. When walking through the site, there are

some interpretive signs, but they are not ubiquitous. Furthermore, the signs still leave much unsaid and undepicted. This space left open for interpretation was made especially clear when I compared my solo exploration to the tour given by a park ranger after the pilgrimage. At the first spot, the location of the camp's hospital, the ranger launched into a long story about the history of the hospital during internment, as well as the story of the Manzanar Riot and how it intersected with the hospital. None of this information is available at the location itself, nor on the map. A similar situation occurred again at the site of the orphanage, as the ranger detailed not only the creation of the orphanage, but also multiple stories of children who lived there.

While absence invites personal interpretation, Manzanar is not by any means devoid of institutional narratives. The fact that there even *is* a Manzanar National Historic Site run by the National Park Service signifies that the United States government is willing to acknowledge on a national level its grievous mistake and that it is willing to complicate a generally honorific narrative of WWII by recognizing our government's own use of concentration camps. Furthermore, the aptly named Interpretive Center is quite explicit about its meaning and the interpretation it desires visitors to come away with: the internment of people of Japanese descent during WWII was racist and unconstitutional, the government made a horrible error, and such behavior must never happen again.

Even though absence infuses Manzanar with meaning, this absence and the demand for participatory meaning-making sometimes means that people do not suffuse the site with the "intended" meaning. There is certainly the possibility to look at the absence at Manzanar and deny what happened at the camp. This interpretative reading of the site occurred during the 1990s as work began to open Manzanar to visitors. Some residents of the area denied the

existence or function of certain camp structures. For example, “Some of the park’s opponents have long argued, for example, that the camp was surrounded not by eight guard towers, but by a lone fire-watch tower” (Booth). Worse still, some argued against the nature of the internment, insisted that “People in Manzanar were not confined, they were free to go any time they wanted” (W.W. Hastings, qtd. in Forstenzer). Supporting this argument that internees were not forcibly confined, the revisionists “insist that instead of five strands of barbed wire surrounding the camp to keep internees from escaping, there were only a few strands of mostly plain wire to keep cattle out” (Forstenzer). This resistance to Manzanar illustrates how the absence can be read differently. While some visitors see the lack of structures and not only imagine what the camp looked like during WWII but also envision how the government tore down the evidence, others view the absence supporting a different version of the past. In this case, the attempted forgetting of what transpired at Manzanar succeeded.

Some guestbook comments similarly reflect these alternative interpretations. The comments are relatively sparse, but they are still important to examine. While rare to see explicit support of internment, it is present. For instance, one comment reads “I honestly think the Japanese deserved this” (12/23/17, Visitor Comment Book 09/2017-06/2018). Other commenters rationalize the situation, emphasizing the historical context. One commenter exclaimed: “How typical it seems to me to have the younger generations slam their fist and protest another issue about which they know nothing. You weren’t there. You cannot appreciate the time” (n.d., Visitor Comment Book 08/2004-04/2005). The above comment, while not outright supporting internment, lacks any remorse. More often, we often see a cognitive dissonance as visitors will admit the error or acknowledge the trauma while simultaneously trying to make sense or justify

the government's decision. Historical context becomes a way to offset shame. Here is a small sample:

The government did what they had to to secure our nation's future. wrong it may be been...but it's over now" (n.d., Visitor Comment Book 10/2005-05/2006)

Fear is a difficult motivation. The unprecedented attack on Pearl Harbor vaulted the United States out of its isolation into a war it had assiduously tried to avoid participating in. The camps were a knee-jerk reaction to fear that does not justify the reaction, but at least provides some understanding to this grievous mistake. (n.d., Visitor Comment Book 01/2016-07/2016)

This is really very sad—However—SO WAS PEARL HARBOR!! Let's not forget that, too. Again—NO PEARL HARBOR NO MANZANAR. I am still a good American, and I love my country (10/15/05, Visitor Comment Book 10/2005-05/2006)

Remember the times when this center was built. It was not a concentration camp and could have been. It may have been wrong but I understand why when you put it in the context of the times. When you reflect on these events over 60 years later always remember when this and other centers were built there was extreme anger and hysteria about Pearl Harbor. Many of the Japanese were 1st generation—Did we really know where their loyalty was. Notice the bombings today done by people from other countries living in the west. 9/11/01 is the most glaring example. Sabotage to the U.S. was a real fear following Dec. 7, 1941. (n.d., Visitor Comment Book 10/05-5/06)

By constructing a "Yes, but..." interpretive structure, explaining the government's decision-making serves as a way to reduce fault. Furthermore, the focus on Pearl Harbor as the historical context elides a discussion on the government's incarceration of Americans citizens. Other comments do not deny the awfulness of what people of Japanese descent went through while incarcerated, but do compare atrocities on a sliding scale in a way that diminishes internees' experiences. This interpretation similarly tries to reduce shame. For example:

This is a sad part of our history, truly! But also try to imagine the national sentiment after the Pearl Harbor attack. We cannot judge well our leaders' actions for that time. The treatment here was humane and fair, and prisoners were well fed and medically cared for. Compare this place to what the Japanese did to our POW's. Remember the BATAAN DEATH MARCH. How PC was that!!! (n.d., Visitor Comment Book 01/2016-07/2016)

It's understandable if we are at that time of history—For me, these hardships are much less painful than what we had been through during 1975-1988 in a Vietnam Communist government. (n.d., Visitor Comment Book 09/2017-06/2018)

Better than a Jewish concentration camp, but we are not focusing on the Jewish concentration camp. (n.d., Visitor Comment Book 09/2017-06/2018)

Although holding the Japanese against their will, they were educated and fed and had medical treatment in these camps. They were not treated as bad as the Jews. (n.d., Visitor Comment Book 10/2005-05/2006)

They had it good compared to my dad and many others who languished in POW camps enduring slave labor, starvation, beatings, etc. (03/14/18, Visitor Comment Book 09/2017-06/2018).

Yes, it's sad that the Japanese were treated this way and that their rights of Americans weren't thought of, but the U.S. was at war with Japan as well as other countries so they had their reasons. And when you think about it, in WWII, they were pretty well off. This camp, to me, is like a P.O.W. camp with better qualities. They were being kept from planning revolts against the U.S. practically. Yes, they were taken from their homes, but they were given substantial living quarters where they were kept. This is a nice thing, unlike how the Jews and other people had to live in the concentration/extermination camps, also in WWII, where they had to live in worse (way worse) conditions than the Japanese. Yes, what the U.S. did to the Japanese was wrong, but thinking about the situation was with the war, they had it better off than most (4/9/06, Visitor Comment Book 10/2005-05/2006)

All of these comments—along with the rewriting of history discussed earlier—are troubling and potentially dangerous. We see how people still circulate incorrect narratives, dismiss trauma, and possess ideologies could support future injustices. It is difficult to say that these commenters are speaking out of ignorance, given that the Interpretive Center provides ample historical context of the long-standing racism and media-fueled hysteria that pre-dated the attack on Pearl Harbor. Some responses seem defensive, whether that be attempting to explain the government's reasoning or minimizing the camp's conditions. Without background information on the commenters or follow up interviews, it is difficult to fully analyze the responses or determine

motivation. That being said, these comments reveal visitors participating in the meaning-making process. While the absence of Manzanar National Historic Site might suggest many interpretive possibilities, it is already quite “filled in,” so to speak. There is an authoritative narrative embedded within the site that influences how visitors interact in the space and what they take away from their visit. The shock from those anomalous comments reveals that interpretive presence.

Defining Identities

The National Park Service influences visitors’ understanding of the internment camp experience through the ways in which it invokes identity. The organization recognizes that its visitors come from different backgrounds, and it strategically draws upon those social groups to serve varying purposes. In a significant way, institutional choices largely prevent some visitors from identifying with victims at the site. This move is seen in an unassuming line on the interpretive label outside Block 14, which serves as the “demonstration block” complete with a restored mess hall, reconstructed barracks and women’s latrine, and concrete foundations. At the end of the label, it reads: “Imagine what daily life was like for someone like you.” At first glance, it seems that the label is encouraging visitors to think outside of their own experience, engaging them in a thought process common at historical sites. However, the directive on this sign is different. The phrase “for someone like you” requires visitors to stay within their own identity position. As an American-born visitor of European descent, daily life for someone like me probably was not all that different during the war than it had been before. However, for a visitor of Japanese descent, life would have involved control, humiliation, and fear.

Manzanar National Historic Site diverges from other memorial museums that attempt to foster an intimate connection between visitors and victims. For example, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum intended for its identification card program to create personal, emotional, and empathetic connections.¹⁵ The USHMM explicitly states on its website “Handed to visitors at the entrance to the Permanent Exhibition, the Museum’s identification cards help personalize the events of the Holocaust” (“Identification Cards”). On the one hand, this focus on the individual counteracts the mass scale of the event (“Identification Cards”; Landsberg, “America” 77). But on a deeper level, there is a pressing need to sustain an increasingly distant past. Art theorist Kit Messham-Muir argues that Holocaust museums “attempt to answer a question central to their ongoing *raison d’être*: how are post-Holocaust generation visitors supposed to ‘remember’ events they have never experienced directly?” (97). In the United States, the disconnect between visitors and Holocaust victims becomes further complicated beyond temporal issues. Not only did many visitors not live through the Holocaust, but there is a geographic, temporal, and cultural divide from that atrocity.

In denying certain groups of visitors the ability to identify with Japanese or Japanese-American internees, Manzanar National Historic Site does not offer a prosthetic memory experience to its visitors. The site is conspicuously devoid of “mass media technologies” that would help visitors “take on memories of a past through which they did not live” (Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory* 8). The question then arises: Why would the creators want to deny visitors identifying or empathizing with internees, especially since this identification is so prevalent at

¹⁵ For a further analysis of the USHMM’s use of ID cards, see Handler, “Lessons from the Holocaust Museum”; Landsberg, “America, the Holocaust, and the Mass Culture of Memory”; Messham-Muir, “Dark Visitations”; Haig, “Introduction: Holocaust Representations since 1975.”

other memorial sites or museums dealing with distant pasts? Prosthetic memory is not inherently a healthy or harmful way to connect to the past. Depending on the period of history depicted or the relationship of visitors to the event, the experiential nature of prosthetic experiences can be powerful and effective. Of course, there are some problematic examples of institutions attempting to teach visitors “what it was like.” For example, the African American Museum of Iowa has an Underground Railroad event where visitors are invited to “Experience the perils and triumphs of the escape from slavery as you use the stars to navigate, build a fire from abolitionist ‘conductors,’ hide from slave catchers, and encounter farmers and bounty hunters while trying to reach Canada” (“Journey”). But, barring an offensive experience, why else would the creators avoid engaging visitors through prosthetic memory? Or, phrased differently, what does the staff achieve at Manzanar National Historic Site by avoiding this technique? One possibility as to why visitors to Manzanar are denied experiential opportunities and the ability to empathize with internees is because doing so would remove the sense of shame over internment and would limit the social responsibility to never let something like this happen again on U.S. soil. Identifying as victims would eliminate culpability and support the view of American innocence. By not knowing “what it was like,” visitors must select another identity position, whether it be bystander or perpetrator, thus being compelled to reflect on their role in prejudice and discrimination.

A more compelling explanation is that preventing identification with victims actually emphasizes preexisting connections, namely that Japanese internment happened in the United States and that two-thirds of internees were American citizens. There is thus an invisible presence underlying the site. One powerful technique employed at Manzanar, the Interpretive Center’s ID tag program, prevents identification with victims while simultaneously encouraging

visitors to recognize that they are not completely disconnected from internment. Near the beginning of the exhibition, there is a small wall of ID tags next to a photograph. Here, visitors choose from ten ID tags designed to look like the tags people of Japanese descent were, as the wall text explains, “required to attach...to their clothing and baggage during transport to the camps.” Then, visitors find the corresponding tag in the exhibition attached to a particular item to learn more about an individual. For instance, visitors who select the tag for Sue Kunitomi are looking for a desk lamp, while those who have the tag for Kuichiro Nishi are looking for a push mower. Manzanar differs from the USHMM identification card program because visitors are not asked to embody their character, and the purpose is not to discover an individual’s fate. Instead, the museum’s exhibition text notes that the tags “highlight stories” of the selected internees. The deliberate use of a tag instead of an identification card is key in differentiating between the two experiences. The identification card is connected to a Holocaust victim’s personal identity; it marks who they are and where they came from. In contrast, the ID tag is one step removed because it is connected to an object belonging to an internee. In the case of Manzanar, tags were worn on clothing and attached to suitcases. There is still a linkage and an identification, but not nearly to the same level. If the identification card suggests that visitors can temporarily assume the identity of a victim, then the tag lets guests get to know one part of an individual, and it is through an object. Assuming the identity of an internee would suggest a need to form a connection, but by limiting this embodiment, the ID tag program forces visitors to recognize that one already exists.

This preexisting connection between visitors and internees is carried further elsewhere at Manzanar, but gains a more activist bent. In their mission statement, the NPS declares that “the

park stimulates dialog and greater understanding of civil rights, democracy, and freedom” (*Manzanar* 9). One meaning imposed on the site, then, is the fundamental importance of those pillars of American society and, ostensibly, the need to protect them. One way of conveying this understanding is through, paradoxically, an environment that situates non-internee visitors as perpetrators. Put differently, the site enables visitors to see themselves in a position of culpability, an uncomfortable position that will hopefully inspire them to resist such behavior in their everyday lives. As mentioned earlier, the absence at Manzanar requires visitors to mentally reconstruct Manzanar. However, more than “uncovering” the past, this imaginative experience is not necessarily neutral; in one way it enables visitors to think about what it would be like to create an internment camp. This subject position is much subtler than the identification made at the Museum of Tolerance, in which visitors are explicitly told they are prejudiced and, thus, “perpetrators” in their everyday interactions. Through imagining the site as it was during WWII, guests are in a sense *creating* the site again. Japanese American internment occurred on American soil and was perpetuated by Americans less than 100 years ago; it is relatively easy to make that mental connection.

While identifying as a perpetrator might seem problematic and troubling, it is key to recognize that the site does not encourage visitors to become perpetrators. Rather, it sends the message that it is instructive to recognize that potential in oneself, as difficult as it may be. As historian and trauma studies scholar Dominick LaCapra argues in *History and Memory after Auschwitz* about the Holocaust,

The inability to recognize oneself, at least potentially, in Himmler may derive from insufficient insight into the self—from what may be radically disorienting or even

blinding if it is seen. In other words, it may...be due to repression or even to the denial of the other within oneself. But an awareness or recognition of the other, to the extent it is desirable, in no sense entails affirmation or acceptance. On the contrary, it requires vigilance and the mounting of conscious resistance to deadly tendencies that are fostered but never simply determined by certain historical conditions whose genesis should be consorted in every legitimate manner. (34)

If one goal of the site is to never let internment happen again on U.S. soil, it is imperative that visitors understand that it is certainly possible that it could. If internment is in the realm of imagination, or if someone can recognize a negative tendency within themselves, they can more readily fight against injustices that they might see. There is a greater vigilance to fight prejudice within oneself and to call it out when it is seen.

Visitor comments would suggest that the Manzanar National Historic Site succeeds in creating conversation around and understanding of “civil rights, democracy, and freedom,” as well as in encouraging visitors to fight against intolerance. At Manzanar, people apply the lessons of internment to current political situations. Connections between the past and the present—and calls for action—are evidenced in the comment books at the site. This engagement is not a new phenomenon; it has been visible since the opening of the Interpretive Center. For example, visitors in the first guestbook from April 2004 to June 2004, wrote comments such as:

Makes one think about this ‘Patriot Act’ and knee jerk legislation... (05/11/04)

George W. Bush has re-entered us into a time that will be looked back on as even worse than the 1940’s for dismissal of human rights and liberties. (n.d.)

The internment was wrong, Iraq is wrong, Guantanamo was wrong. (n.d.).

In a more recent guestbook from September 2017 through June 2018, visitors likewise brought up current events, especially those related to immigration and persecution of minorities.

Furthermore, there is frequently an activist bent to these comments. For example:

Oh America, how little we learn from history. In the year 2018 we are on the verge of repeating mistakes that led us to the atrocity that is Manzanar. Immigrant fear, racial prejudice, political propaganda, and the cruel side of humanity has once again led our country to a place where we look to punish and turn our backs to people who wish to immigrate here. It is my hope that Americans never again go down this path. I stand with immigrants. Protect our Dreamers. America let's be better. (04/21/18).

Trump needs to visit Manzanar! And hopefully learn from it! We must never go back to this kind of hate. (09/21/17).

May we not sit idly by and watch as history repeats itself. Have we not learned that one cannot judge another based on the color of their skin? There is injustice in silence. (10/2017)

It is up to each of us as individuals to make the choice to be active and present in the betterment of our country. Show up, speak out, call your representatives, have difficult conversations, learn, petition, protest, use your voice to speak for those who do not have one. It is not our leaderships fault alone if we are not active in shouting out our disapproval. Fight and give "em hell." (n.d.).

What is interesting in these comments—and others in the book—is that culpability is both collective and individual. While multiple comments by visitors point to President Trump or the U.S. government as the source of current problems (and the potential perpetrator of another internment), many people call on both individual citizens or America collectively to stand up and do better. There is a clear ability to see the faults in our country and a warning to be vigilant so it does not occur again.

However, identification works differently for Japanese-American visitors; many of these visitors were interned themselves or have relatives interned at Manzanar or the other camps. As one self-identified Yonsei/Gosei visitor wrote in the comment book during the 2018 Pilgrimage,

“I take this day to remember my grandfathers and grandmothers who spent years here. Manzanar is my family’s history as much as it is America’s history” (04/28/18, Visitor Comment Book 09/2017-06/2018). Those without a direct personal connection to internment might still feel a sense of belonging and alliance because the government targeted those in their racial or ethnic community. As another person wrote in the comment book, “As an Asian American, I wasn’t really able to learn the plight of my community until college. I was appalled and startled. How can a country that I call my own do this to my people?” (n.d., Visitor Comment Book 01/2010-08/2010). Even more than this individual experience and empathetic response, there is a profound collective identity that emerges in the act itself of visiting Manzanar. Participants in the annual pilgrimage, especially the founders of the Manzanar Committee, remark about the sense of community that emerges from these visits. As one man remarked in Nakamura’s *Pilgrimage*, “It was not only coming back to Manzanar but I think being with all these people. It is the first time I felt I belonged to a community” (00:11:07-00:11:18).¹⁶ Furthermore, in 2015, the Manzanar Pilgrimage theme was “*Watashi wa Manzanar: Continuing Our Civil Rights Legacy*.” Dr. Satsuki Ina, a psychotherapist born at Tule Lake, gave the keynote address that year, and declared that

Today’s Manzanar Pilgrimage: ‘*Watashi wa Manzanar: Continuing our Civil Rights Legacy*,’ signifies a watershed moment in our Japanese American history. It clearly represents the growing movement over the years, the shifting of our community consciousness from ‘Farewell to Manzanar’ to ‘I am Manzanar!’ *Watashi wa Manzanar!*

¹⁶ This quote was unattributed in the film and the speaker was not pictured.

It means ***WE*** write our narrative, tell our story, using the language of our truth.

We claim our loss, suffering, grief, anger, sorrow. And we claim our strength, resilience, endurance, giri, gaman, gambatte, we are claiming our Japanese heritage as we go forward in our healing.

In this declaration, Ina suggests that Manzanar is a core component of Japanese-American identity. To “be” Manzanar means that internment affected who they are as both individuals and a community. Furthermore, this identity is one of active participation. Some interpret the theme to suggest a more inclusive view of the collective identity. In a blog post about the pilgrimage, Religious Studies professor Anne M. Blankenship claims that the theme “used what linguists call a ‘snowclone,’ a play on a language template constantly reused in popular culture—in this case, to demonstrate solidarity with an individual or group suffering from injustice or other trauma,” à la the “Je Suis Charlie” movement. Furthermore, she argues that that employing phrase “reinforces the increasingly inclusive nature of their pilgrimage” and that doing so “demand[s] that outsiders are in fact one of the victims.” However, I disagree with Blankenship’s claim of unequivocal inclusivity. Admittedly, Ina addressed a diverse crowd at the pilgrimage, and she did have the whole group say together at the close: “Watashi wa Manzanar!” But when reading the whole speech, it is clear that Ina is speaking directly to people of Japanese descent. The closest the pilgrimage comes to creating a collective identity is through its activist bent and the frequent call for participants to protect the rights of others. However, this allyship does not equate sameness, nor does it invite other people—even those facing discrimination and persecution—into the Japanese-American community.

Memorializing through the Body

one hundred ten thousand stories
buried in my skin
one hundred ten thousand stories...
—Nobuko Miyamoto, “Manzanar Bushi”

Absence and presence bear strongly on memorial practices at Manzanar. In a critical way, the site is incomplete without visitors. As we have seen, visiting Manzanar is a profoundly active experience, whether that be performatively reading the landscape or inhabiting different identity positions. Moving through the site creates meaning. Conversely, the physical site itself spurs experiences and memories that would not be possible elsewhere. Even without many material remains, the physicality of the site is crucial to memorialization. In short, bodies fill in absences at Manzanar, but Manzanar’s physicality provides necessary components for memorialization.

The participatory aspect of Manzanar does not merely occur once visitors arrive at the site. Rather, participatory memorialization begins by traveling to the site itself. The journeying is most evident in the Manzanar Pilgrimage,¹⁷ which began in 1969 as part of the activist effort to designate Manzanar and, as Sue Kunitomi Embrey remarked, “led to the creation of the National Historic Site” (qtd. in Bahr 133). Every April on the last Saturday of the month, thousands participate in the Manzanar Pilgrimage, traveling miles to gather at the site. Pilgrimage is often associated with religion and adherents’ desire to pay respects at a significant location, and in many ways the Manzanar Pilgrimage retains this sacred element at the site. The pilgrimage involves an interfaith service held at a white obelisk monument. Inscribed with the phrase “soul consoling tower” in Kanji, the monument is one of the surviving structures from life in

¹⁷ Victor H. Shibata, one of the founders of the annual event, was the first person to call it a pilgrimage (Kathy Masaoka, qtd. in Matsuda, “Manzanar Committee Statement”).

Manzanar, built by “Catholic stone mason Ryoza Kado...in 1943 with help from residents of Block 9 and the Young Buddhist Association” (*Reading*). During the pilgrimage, the crowd gathers around the obelisk, participating in either Christian or Buddhist prayers, then lay flowers on the bases.

Outside of the overt religious definition, though, the pilgrimage transforms Manzanar into a sacred site. The dedicated journey to a specific place sets the site apart from other locations. Moreover, the pilgrimage transforms participants as well. The journey is both physical and metaphysical, the trek shaping identity and building a sense of community. It is a ritual performance--at once directed towards a larger goal and a generative process in its own right--that transforms participants. As Sue Kunitomi Embrey argued, “The most important contribution was that we kept the issue alive, not only with the mainstream public, but also with Japanese Americans” (qtd. in Bahr 133). Even outside the official Manzanar Pilgrimage, there is certainly a pilgrimage-like aspect to visiting Manzanar that works to memorialize the event. According to historian Sarah Farmer, the religious scholar Alphonse Dupront differentiates pilgrims and tourists through this distinction: “the pilgrim, by definition, seeks a fixed, sacral goal, a spiritual summit” while tourists visit a particular site without prioritizing it or selecting “any one point of the journey as the high point before departure” (114). The intentionality that comes from traveling to Manzanar, almost a four-hour drive from Los Angeles, frames the experience differently. Even without participating in the official pilgrimage, the decision to visit and actually travel to Manzanar creates and imparts meaning to the space. Compare visiting Manzanar to the National September 11 Memorial and Museum. As Paul Williams elucidated in a personal conversation we had in 2017, the museum and memorial are in the heart of Lower Manhattan,

and one could just as easily stumble across them as they could deliberately decide to visit. Furthermore, the 9/11 Memorial Museum is touted as a tourist destination, with high rankings on TripAdvisor and included in museum admission bundles like City Pass. This high level of visibility is not to say that the National September 11 Memorial and Museum are any less of sacred sites because so many people pass by or through them, but there is something significant about a space being physically isolated, and, by virtue of this separation, literally and figuratively set apart. As one visitor wrote in the comment book, “The six hour ride here this morning provided time for reflection and feel very moved by the (now) solemnity” (01/14/10, Visitor Comment Book 01/2010-08/2010). The journey itself became a vital part of the experience.

But why does one need to physically travel to and experience the actual site of Manzanar? At its core, place and memory are bound up in one another and have been for centuries. This connection harkens back to the Greeks and their “art of memory,” said to have originated with a poet, Simonides of Ceos. As the story goes, Simonides identified the bodies of dinner guests smashed when a roof collapsed because he remembered their seating arrangements (Yates 1-2). Even today, mnemonic devices frequently employ place, such as the “memory palace” in which individuals visualize what they want to remember in a different areas of a house and then mentally “walk” through it, encountering each object as they go through. More recent scholars also link the two. For example, Maurice Halbwachs emphasized the fundamental importance of place for memory, arguing that “Every collective memory unfolds within a spatial framework... We can understand how we recapture the past only by understanding how it is, in effect, preserved by our physical surroundings” (qtd in Farmer 101). Place is foundational to the formation of our memories, even those that we create. As Paul Williams argues, “It is, arguably, a

sense of place—rather than objects or images—that gives form to our memories, and provides the coordinates for the imaginative reconstruction of the ‘memories’ of those who visit memorial sites but never knew the event first-hand” (102). Place enables us to put ourselves in the past and “remember.”

The “sitedness” of Manzanar does not automatically connect the mind to memory, however. A corporeal physicality is involved with memorialization. Put differently, there is an intimate connection between bodies and memory that comes to bear on the memory-making experience. As Marita Sturken argues, “Throughout history, the body has been perceived as a receptacle of memory, from the memory of bodily movement, such as walking, to the memory of past events in physical scars, to the memory of one’s genetic history in every cell” (*Tangled Memories* 12). Given the association between bodies and memory, it makes sense to have “rituals of visiting” (Williams 5). James Young comments on one such ritual of visiting when discussing Majdanek in Poland, remarking, “It takes nearly twenty minutes to walk this path, an enforced time of meditation, when our eyes remain fixed on the mausoleum and chimney looming even larger into view” (*Texture* 124). While there is not necessarily a specific destination in mind when exploring Manzanar, the slow movement through the space encourages visitors to think about the past and what occurred there. During my visits, I looked at the expanse and tried to imagine row upon row of barracks, guard towers looming day and night, or internees creating lush gardens in a harsh desert. While my visits were certainly meditative, for many personally connected to internment, physically moving through that space is key to the visiting experience. In these cases, there is a sense of power involved with this physical act. As Floyd Cheung argues, “former internees, their descendants and allies increasingly have visited or returned to the sites of

wartime internment camps, and by doing so they have begun to manage the meaning and memory of an experience over which they initially had no control” (147). Cheung argues that going to Manzanar and traversing the space allows the former internees to “reclaim their mobility,” both physically and emotionally (149). During the years of internment their movement was limited and their bodies literally policed, so visiting today and moving freely through the space allows for a physical repossessing of space and a symbolic assertion of power. Movement allows for a new relationship to the past.

Of course, the relationship of visitors to the site or event changes how bodies physically connect to the site. Former internees will connect differently than tourists. Part of this has to do with memories of the site itself; someone the government interned at Manzanar will remember the experience of being physically controlled, so the freedom to walk around the site carries with it a different significance than a tourist who has no conception what that was like. Location itself also plays a role as well. For victims, there is a sensory component that comes alive at the site in question. As Williams explains, “Location affords not only the ability to picture the traumatic episode, but also to reawaken the feeling of an event triggered by ambient textures of sound, light, and smell” (102). While place and memory are vitally important for people who were actually part of an event, the sensory components still play a role that come from being in the place still enables those who did not personally experience something to get a sense of what something was like. Many descriptions of Manzanar by former internees speak of the weather, such as the dusty wind or the winter’s frigid cold and the summer’s blistering heat. Depending on when visitors travel to Manzanar, they could potentially experience that fragment of camp life, connecting the past to the present.

The most profound linkage between place, body, and memory can be seen in expressions of the land and body overlapping. Many Japanese-Americans wrote poems in connection to the pilgrimage, and it is compelling how the physical site appears bound up with personal identity. Take, for instance, the language used in Sansei poet Lawson Fusao Inada's poem "Manzanar": "This is a part of our enduring geography. / This is part of who we are. / No one can take that away." Later, at the end of the poem, this stanza repeats itself three times: "Manzanar. Manzanar. Manzanar. / Is who we are" (15).¹⁸ Here, as in Dr. Satsuki Ina's keynote discussed earlier, Manzanar is seen as a component of the self. The issue of land and identity appears again in another poem in which the land is associated with birth. In reporter Martha Nakagawa's poem "Message from Manzanar," which is about the countless broken dishes found at Manzanar, she writes: "It is still there, lying in that gaping womb. / Fiftysome years of baking in muted silence." This reference to the land as a "womb" is key. In this poem, Manzanar metaphorically "birthed" people here, imparting a new sense of identity. To pilgrimage to Manzanar is, in this sense, to return to a birthplace, to understand where one came from. There is sometimes even an expression that people and land become indistinguishable. In the poem "ghosts of manzanar," co-founder of the Manzanar At Dusk program Jennifer "Emiko" Kuida writes

this morning I met the ghosts of manzanar
walking around the auditorium,
i started to feel a chill
maybe it was the desert wind
maybe it was the air floating through my happi coat

¹⁸ The third time the stanzas are repeated, the last line uses different punctuation and reads: "Is. Who. We. Are."

but i felt them.

Visiting Manzanar, then, becomes a way to connect with those who died there. In this poem, the ghosts are indistinguishable from the wind, and can thus only be felt when returning to the site itself. If Manzanar is part of internees, then they too are part of Manzanar.

It is thus interesting to compare Manzanar to the Japanese American National Museum (JANM) in terms of place and memory, as well as absence and presence. JANM, located in Los Angeles' Little Tokyo, opened in 1992. Its mission is to “promote understanding and appreciation of America’s ethnic and cultural diversity by sharing the Japanese American experience” (“History of the Japanese American National Museum”). JANM contains a dismantled—and reassembled—barrack from Heart Mountain in Wyoming. On the one hand, there is a distinct sense of trying to take visitors to the internment camps through this barrack. This is reinforced through a quote by former Heart Mountain internee Bacon Sakatani in the exhibition that reads: “...by taking a person inside that barrack[s], you can explain what happened to us better. Just talking about it is not enough.” Indeed, compared to Manzanar, visitors to JANM can look at—and be inside the frame of—an actual barrack instead of a reconstructed one. However, what is missing from JANM is the landscape and all that environment entails. There is something vital about being on the land and interacting on the site itself.

Going to Manzanar, however, does not automatically ensure that visitors will participate in a meaningful experience. For instance, in a key way the site enables people to avoid bodily encounters. The fact that visitors can drive the path mediates the visit, inhibiting tactile experiences. A car removes the meditative walking, that “ritual of visiting” the site invites, but it

also creates a literal barrier between visitors and Manzanar. Drivers cannot traverse the interior of the site, thus missing the bulk of the camp, but they also miss potentially difficult to see remnants like the foundations the brochure implores visitors to notice. During a recent visit, as I stood in the old baseball field, multiple cars slowly rolled passed me without stopping. On a more theoretical level, by driving, visitors mentally separate themselves from the camp and, accordingly, what happened there. In some ways, it echoes what Marita Sturken discusses in *Tourists of History*. Sturken details how visitors to Ground Zero bought souvenirs like snow globes and teddy bears in order to avoid grappling with the difficult reality and emotions such a horrifying event brought up. While visitors to Manzanar are not mediating their experience through kitschy memorabilia as they might have at Ground Zero, the car likewise creates a different experience that limits confrontations with a difficult event. As Sturken argues, we live in a “comfort culture” and this culture “functions as a form of depoliticization and as a means to confront loss, grief, and fear through processes that disavow politics” (5-6). There is, of course, a distinct difference between Sturken’s discussion of comfort objects like teddy bears that provide a sense of reassurance that things will be okay in a world where terrorists attack major metropolises and using an SUV to explore a former internment camp. However, there is a similar refusal to fully confront pain and, in the case of Manzanar, shame. Visitors become more passive viewers than active seekers as they drive on the asphalt, shielded from the hot sun and dusty wind in their vehicles.

Conclusion

The present commemoration at Manzanar National Historic Site and its origins as a memorial site intersect. Interested stakeholders participated in its creation, and today the site

remains a site of fervent activism. The Manzanar Pilgrimage transcends purely religious overtones to transform memory into a political tool and its participants into activists. Even the religious elements are highly political. Reverend Run Mizuki filled the prayer and liturgy at the 2018 Pilgrimage I attended with political commentary, ranging from “We remember those forsaken by the government that issued and carried out Executive Order 9066” and “A flaw was mended with the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, which issued an apology and led to reparations, the healing process began for many survivors” to “Gov. Ralph Carr of Colorado advocated for Japanese Americans and fought against the internment. Hooray for Gov. Ralph Carr!” and “No more Manzanar! No more Pearl Harbor! No more 9/11. No more pre-emptive strikes! No more Hiroshima. No more Nagasaki. No more Batann Death March. No more Agent Orange.” This religious ceremony, while evoking and calling to God and Jesus throughout, is peppered with references to historical events and current issues. The prayer at points becomes a call to action, from remembering past injustices and honoring victims to pleading for peace and unity.

Beyond the interfaith service, the Pilgrimage ceremony itself is filled with politics. More specifically, the pilgrimage involves an activist mission connected to protecting the rights of minorities and ensuring internment never occurs on U.S. soil again. For example, the Superintendent of Manzanar National Historic Site, Bernadette Johnson, remarked in 2017 that

Visitors coming to Manzanar today are making connections with this history and what’s currently being observed by them... We have to continue telling the story because the injustice, the stories and perspectives, the advocacy and the relevance—those are just as

important today as they were 25 years ago, probably more so today. (qtd. in Matsuda, “Manzanar NHS”)

At the 2018 Pilgrimage I attended, speakers repeatedly mentioned current nativist U.S. policies and called on attendees to stand up against them.

One consistent theme at the 2018 Pilgrimage was the importance of unity and connecting communities together for an ultimately activist purpose. This cross-community building is particularly evident in the inclusion of Muslim Americans in the pilgrimage. Many Muslim Americans participate in the event every year, and as CAIR National Executive Director Nihad Awad recently remarked, “Japanese Americans have been tireless advocates for civil liberties and stood behind American Muslims time and time again.” As such, he continued, “It is critically important that we learn from their experiences as we strive to be better advocates for civil rights and human dignity” (qtd. in “CAIR”). This connection between the Japanese-American and Muslim American communities is particularly key, rooted in working to protect the rights of Muslims in America post 9/11. The Pilgrimage becomes a show of support and a reminder that the injustices faced by people of Japanese descent in the early to mid-1900s must still be fought. Participation expands beyond honoring Japanese-American internees and begins to affect how citizens engage in American politics. As one visitor wrote in a guestbook entry, “This exhibit inspired me to be more involved in politics (for peace)” (4/29/04, Visitor Comment Book 04/2004-06/2004). People remember what happened at Manzanar and other internment camps in order to make the past relevant and motivate people towards preventing further abuses against groups who are marginalized or discriminated.

This activism at Manzanar National Historic Site is rooted in the site's origins, but it can also be tied to the material absence. James Young contends that

In this age of mass memory production and consumption, in fact, there seems to be an inverse proportion between the memorialization of the past and its contemplation and study. For once we assign monumental form to memory, we have to some degree divested ourselves of the obligation to remember. In shouldering the memory-work, monuments may relieve viewers of their memory burden. (*Texture 5*)

Following Young's argument, it might seem as if the Interpretive Center—which opened in 2004—would threaten the memorialization process. Sue Kunitomi Embrey remarked at the opening ceremony,

People ask me why it is important to remember and keep Manzanar alive with this Interpretive Center. My answer is that stories like these need to be told, that too many of us have passed away without telling our stories. The Interpretive Center is important because it needs to shout to the world that America is strong and it makes amends for the wrongs it had committed and we will always remember Manzanar because of that. (qtd. in Bahr 2)

While Embrey talks about how the Interpretive Center helps “keep Manzanar alive,” her comment makes it clear that the center functions heavily as a memorial of the redress movement. To be sure, the Interpretive Center serves as the site's educational arm and helps remember the internment experience. However, based a close analysis of the site, I argue that the Interpretive Center is more of a jumping off point. Manzanar National Historic Site does not rely on the Interpretive Center, but rather the abundant absences at the site require that visitors “shoulder the

memory-work.” Furthermore, the absence actually allows memory to more readily apply to present-day issues. The site does not merely memorialize the event, but rather allows for a more open meaning-making experience. Interpretation is not limited to internment alone, but rather extends to discussions surrounding related topics such as American values, political leadership, and personal responsibility. If the Interpretive Center keeps Manzanar alive, it is by providing a space for visitors to make their own connections and meanings.

Manzanar National Historic Site provides a unique perspective into how absence and presence play a role in memorialization. In this case, participation becomes a vital part of the remembrance and meaning-making process. Manzanar’s absence is not a detriment, but rather invites individual interpretation and enables new perspectives. While the government dismantled Manzanar in an effort to forget their mistakes, they in turn enabled a deeper level of memorialization that bears heavily on both the present and the future.

CHAPTER 3: THE LEGACY MUSEUM AND THE NATIONAL MEMORIAL FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE

In April 2018, The Legacy Museum: From Slavery to Mass Incarceration and the accompanying National Memorial for Peace and Justice opened in Montgomery, Alabama.¹⁹ The museum, a former slave warehouse transformed into a museum, is dedicated to telling the story of the enslaved, but also the evolution of slavery into new forms of discrimination, persecution, and violence.²⁰ The memorial site is located a few blocks from the Legacy Museum. While the site includes sculptures representing slavery, civil rights protests, and current racism within the criminal justice system, the centerpiece is the memorial on the hill overlooking the city that remembers the over 4,400 lynchings that occurred in the United States from 1877-1950 (“National Memorial”). Both sites emerged out of the advocacy work of the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI), a non-profit founded in 1989 by lawyer Bryan Stevenson, that “provides legal representation to people who have been illegally convicted, unfairly sentenced, or abused in state jails.” The organization also works to “challenge the death penalty and excessive punishment” as well as “provide re-entry assistance to formerly incarcerated people” (“About EJI”).

At first glance, the EJI seems to follow in the footsteps of other efforts to remember atrocities. Like these other sites, the museum and memorial complement one another, the museum providing a more educational experience while the memorial offers a profoundly affective encounter. The founders also incorporated conventional memorialization trends. For

¹⁹ For the museum, the EJI tapped Local Projects, the design firm responsible for much of the 9/11 Memorial Museum. MASS Design Group, a firm whose “mission is to research, build, and advocate for architecture that promotes justice and human dignity” designed the memorial (“About”).

²⁰ A slave warehouse is “where enslaved black people were imprisoned before sale.” John H. Murphy, “founder of the Montgomery City Water Works and Sanitary Sewer Board,” owned the warehouse where the Legacy Museum now stands (*Slavery in America*).

instance, like other notable commemorative sites, such as the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and 9/11 Memorial, the memorial relies on abstract, symbolic architecture while honoring victims by name in a meaningful order. However, while at times using the same conventions, the Legacy Museum and National Memorial for Peace and Justice offer a different type of memorialization experience. This chapter will explore the reasons why the EJI adopted these conventions and, more importantly, explore the effects of adopting such design trends at a unique site or remembrance.

In this chapter, I explore how the nature of the trauma acknowledged at the Legacy Museum, National Memorial for Peace and Justice, and the EJI's accompanying remembrance projects influences memorialization. More importantly, I investigate how the particular demands of memorializing slavery and its legacies necessarily affect visitor participation. The EJI's approach to the visitors' roles in the museum and memorial derives, in key ways, from the demands of remembering interconnected and unresolved traumas. By analyzing the Legacy Museum and National Memorial for Peace and Justice, novel sites in the American commemorative landscape, this chapter seeks to further complicate the understanding of audience participation in making the traumatic past meaningful.

Origins of the Museum and Memorial

Notably absent from the United States' museum landscape are institutions dedicated to the memory of slavery, lynching, and mass incarceration and this absence makes the Legacy Museum an anomaly in the memorial landscape of the United States. There are a few exceptions, such as the Whitney Plantation in New Orleans and the Lest we Forget Black Holocaust Museum of Slavery in Philadelphia. Some museums—such as the National African American History and

Culture Museum—dedicate sections of their exhibitions to slavery and racism, and other institutions are revising their narratives, moving away from celebratory stories of America’s past to more honest and accurate representations. For instance, Owens-Thomas House in Savannah, Georgia recently reopened in November 2018, changing its name to the Owens-Thomas House & Slave Quarters and including an exhibit about slavery (Sisson). Similarly, at Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello, a new exhibit opened in 2018 called “Life of Sally Hemings” that explicitly addresses Jefferson’s relationship with the woman he enslaved (Stockman). Monticello, purchased by the Thomas Jefferson Foundation in 1923, began addressing slavery earlier, as both the Getting Word African American Oral History Project and slavery tours began in 1993 (Urofsky 194; “Milestones”). However, the Sally Hemings exhibition is, according to *New York Times* reporter Farah Stockman, “the culmination of a 25-year effort to grapple with the reality of slavery in the home of one of liberty’s most eloquent champions.” She adds that “The public opening deals a final blow to two centuries of ignoring, playing down or covering up what amounted to an open secret during Jefferson’s life.” There is not a single museum dedicated to lynching, while the Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site’s 2016 exhibition *Prisons Today: Questions in the Age of Mass Incarceration* was the “nation’s first exhibition devoted to the topic of mass incarceration” (Frankhouser). In tackling the nation’s legacy of racial injustice directly, the Legacy Museum breaks new ground.

There are explanations for this paucity in the memorial landscape. Most obviously, these are contemptible elements of the United States’ past *and* present. The United States—and other countries—are increasingly rectifying the silence around shameful events (Doss 257).

Nevertheless, acknowledging the less celebratory elements of a nation’s past is a recent change

and not without struggle. Relatedly, albeit more specific to the United States, slavery unsettles core American identities. Kenneth Foote contends, “To mark the sites of African American resistance to slavery and racism is to call attention to glaring failures of the democratic institutions and egalitarian values in which the nation takes great pride” (322). While Foote specifically mentions sites of resistance, any site that connects to slavery troubles conceptions of America. As writer David Amsden argues in his *New York Times* piece “Building the First Slavery Museum in America,” “What makes slavery so difficult to think about, from the vantage point of history, is that it was both at odds with America’s founding values—freedom, liberty, democracy—and critical to how they flourished.” But shame, and the perspective that the nation needs to adopt a more critical view of its history, only offers part of the explanation for the reluctance to mark sites of racial violence and inequality. These systems and acts are not vestiges of the past. Erika Doss argues that memorializing shameful events and sites “often involves reckoning with the nation’s ghosts, with the specters from the past who continue to haunt the national imagery” (303). While the past certainly bears on the present, it is more that the same racist system still exists. To adapt Doss’ supernatural metaphor, the nation has zombies, not ghosts. Slavery and its different evolutions are not confined to history books.

What one sees is that the Legacy Museum is not an anomaly simply because it attempts to honestly address histories and stories often ignored. Rather, the institution stands apart because it memorializes an ongoing trauma. The museum’s basic premise is that slavery persists in new forms. As their website states: “The formal abolition of slavery did nothing to overcome the harmful ideas created to defend it, and so slavery did not end: it evolved” (“Legacy Museum”). Less obviously, the museum also addresses another form of ongoing trauma: that of

silence and intentional forgetting. As the EJI contends in its report *Lynching in America*, “continued silence about lynchings ‘compounds victimization’ and tells victims and the nation as a whole that ‘their pain does not matter’” (74). This victimization runs parallel to the violence and discrimination itself, albeit no less important.

One could argue that other memorial museums likewise memorialize ongoing trauma. For example, while September 11th was a discrete event, it continues to have ripple effects and consequences, not only in the continued health effects of first responders but also in the residual trauma many still experience. That museum, as I argue, creates narratives to help visitors heal from the trauma of the terrorist attack. In another instance, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial allows for open interpretation, with visitors leaving tokens of remembrance, precisely because the meaning of that war is still unresolved. One could also contend that it is impossible to have absolute closure. But the trauma of slavery persists in a different way. Not only was slavery not a single, isolated event, but its new manifestations—its legacies—perpetuate the oppression. The museum memorializes trauma simultaneously past and present.

When considering the Legacy Museum and National Memorial for Peace and Justice, the question emerges: Why memorialize this ongoing trauma? For Bryan Stevenson, the trauma is inseparably linked to narrative. He contends that

In many ways, you can say that the North won the Civil War, but the South won the narrative war. If the urgent narrative that we’re trying to deal with in this country is a narrative of racial difference, if the narrative that we have to overcome is a narrative of white supremacy, the South prevailed. (*True Justice* 00:31:49-00:32:00)

While the fight over narrative is especially evident in the EJI's headquarters of Montgomery, Alabama, the heart of the Confederacy, the South's rhetorical victory is not geographically contained and is visible through memorialization across the region. As of February 2019, the Southern Poverty Center recorded 1747 Confederate "monuments, place names and other symbols" still on display ("Whose Heritage?"). Only 129 have been removed, with the vast majority—nearly 90%—removed in the last five years. Some states even have laws preventing the removal of Confederate monuments. Legislatures enacted some of these laws—such as Alabama's Memorial Preservation Act—only a few years ago ("Whose Heritage?"). While slavery, lynching, segregation, and mass incarceration go unaddressed, communities across the United States celebrate the perpetrators and symbols of that racial violence, whether that be through schools named after Robert E. Lee, monuments honoring Jefferson Davis, or proud displays of Confederate flags.

It is precisely this triumph in the "narrative war" that the Legacy Museum seeks to overturn. As Stevenson defines it, "The Legacy Museum is a small but important effort to confront our nation's silence and to change the distorted narrative that too many have been taught" (*Legacy Museum*). He repeatedly calls the museum a "narrative museum" and explains that "We call this a narrative museum because on this wall we actually present a thesis, a story, about the history of racial inequality in America" (*True Justice* 01:31:10-01:31:22). The wall Stevenson is talking about is in the main exhibition *Slavery Evolved*. The wall moves from slavery to lynching to segregation to mass incarceration, supporting the argument presented on the wall text that states, "The enslavement of black people in the United States lasted for more than 2 centuries and was justified by an elaborate narrative of racial inferiority. This ideology has

endured beyond the formal abolition of slavery.” Similarly, the National Memorial for Peace and Justice “provides a sacred space for truth-telling and reflection about racial terrorism and its legacy” (“National Memorial”). While the term narrative is not necessarily invoked, the same sentiment supports its purpose.

While the narrative of racial inferiority is the primary story the Legacy Museum seeks to change, there are other related “distorted narratives” that require rectification. Again, Montgomery plays an influential role. While the city was the center of the slave trade and the heart of the Confederacy, it was simultaneously pivotal during the Civil Rights Movement. Individuals can visit both the First White House of the Confederacy and the Rosa Parks Museum. Yet, as Stevenson insists:

The defiant resistance to integration and racial equality that opposed the Civil Rights Movement is often ignored when we discuss that era... We have failed to acknowledge the deeply entrenched views of white supremacy that characterized the reaction to civil rights activism. Instead, we focus on courageous civil rights activists, telling their stories more comfortably and enthusiastically because we have reduced it to a ‘feel-good’ story.
(Legacy Museum)

For Stevenson, the museum does not focus heavily on Civil Rights activism because, as a whole, the nation does not acknowledge the ideology that opposed such activism, the beliefs that persisted following legal achievements, or the backlash to progress. In downplaying the civil rights story, the Legacy Museum contests not only the mainstream narrative surrounding slavery, but the story offered in other African American museums. While many African American museums choose to talk about slavery, there is a particular direction to the representation.

Sociologist Derrick Brooms contends that “Instead of trivializing, deflecting, or erasing slavery from the American story, these black-centered sites frame the institution of slavery and the experience of enslavement within the tropes of survival, resistance, and achievement” (512). Similarly, sociologist Robyn Autry argues that these sites “share a mission to construct and visually represent a metanarrative of black identity formation that explains blacks’ journey from racial subjects—first as enslaved people—to citizens.” She continues, explaining that slavery and segregation “are converted into redemptive accounts of a celebrated past for African Americans” (63). The Legacy Museum rejects this narrative of African Americans overcoming racial violence and discrimination, contending instead that there are new manifestations.

The focus on slavery’s evolution thus counteracts yet another narrative: racial progress. The legacies of slavery—lynching, segregation, and mass incarceration—threaten the idea that the United States has improved race relations. Drawing from a 2011 Gallup poll, political scientist Kevin Bruyneel points out that “one-half to three-quarters of the U.S. population now deems the nation to have become, in whole or in great part, a post-racial society in which racial inequalities and injustices have been resolved and thus the nation’s racial politics and divisions are a thing of the past” (77).²¹ Obama’s presidency further signaled to some that America is a post-racial society, despite the fact that in 2008 “Public opinion and voting behavior...were considerably more polarized by racial attitudes than any other time on record” (Tesler and Sears 5). To acknowledge slavery and its evolution would require recognizing that the United States

²¹ The Gallup poll asked the question: “Thinking back to Dr. Martin Luther King and his dream of racial equality, do you think that dream has now been realized in the United States?” If respondents answered no, they were then asked the follow up question: “Do you think the United States has made major progress toward realizing that dream, minor progress, or no progress at all?” 51% of Americans said that “Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s dream of U.S. racial equality has been realized,” with 23% saying that the “U.S. has made major progress toward attaining it” (J. Jones).

has not made significant progress towards reducing—let alone ending—racism. Holding onto markers of progress only elides the prevalence of continual bias, discrimination, and violence. African American museums likewise adopt a narrative of progress. As Autry insists, “The vast majority of black museums draw on this history to construct a celebrated past to anchor black identity, framed within a narrative of progress that resonates with more conventional representations of American social values and mores” (77). In contrast, for Stevenson, transitioning from slavery to lynching to segregation to mass incarceration does not represent a reformed nation with improved views on race. Rather, society simply found more insidious ways to discriminate and harm.

The narrative battle only provides a partial answer to the question “Why memorialize an ongoing trauma?” Ending silence or offering corrective truths are not sufficient explanations in and of themselves. To fully answer this question, one must consider the museum’s creators. It fundamentally matters that lawyers conceived of the museum. The EJI turned to educational and memorial efforts to support their legal assistance work in 2008 through the Race and Poverty Project, which included “educational exhibitions, community outreach, research, and publications” (*Legacy Museum*). As Stevenson argues, “in thinking about what it would take to move this court and this country to a place of greater resolve when it comes to eliminating bias and discrimination, it became clear to me that we haven’t really talked much about the legacy of racial bias” (*True Justice* 00:04:11-00:04:30). At its core, the museum and memorial emerged because of Stevenson’s desire for legal justice. He sees an intimate connection between historical narratives and the law; in short, alter the narrative and change the criminal justice system.

Stevenson's legal aim helps explain the particular emphasis on lynching in the EJI's public education and commemorative work. Given how Stevenson views the death penalty as a new manifestation of lynching, the act directly connects to the legal work the non-profit team handles daily (*True Justice* 00:43:38-00:43:42). The EJI's 2015 *Lynching in America* report began a consistent stream of other memorialization efforts. The Community Remembrance Project, which includes the Historical Marker Project and Community Soil Collection Project, began in 2015 to acknowledge the widespread impact of lynching and draw attention to racial terror in local communities ("EJI Hosts"). The Historical Marker Project is an initiative in which community groups place markers at the sites of lynchings that "detail the narrative events surrounding a specific lynching victim, or group of racial terror lynching victims, and the history of racial terrorism in America" ("Community Remembrance"). The Community Soil Collection Project emerged from the report because, the EJI explains, "For the first time, research about the locations where lynchings took place has made it possible for community members to discover their local history" ("EJI Hosts"). In short, the project links literal and metaphorical digging as volunteers collect soil at lynching sites across the United States, storing it in jars that are later displayed at the Legacy Museum, the Peace and Justice Memorial Center, or, in certain cases, local communities ("Community Remembrance"). The EJI provides the jars, instructions, and an informational document containing a "narrative summary of the lynching based on surviving documentation," a "contextual discussion about the history of racial terror lynching" and a "description of the lynching location where [they] recommend collecting soil" (*Soil Collection* 4). The non-profit also initiated other museological projects. For example, in June 2017, the EJI released an interactive website produced with Google called *Lynching in America* ("EJI

Launches”). This website includes interactive maps, oral histories, and a film. The website in many ways personalizes the 2015 report and its data, allowing individuals and families affected by lynching or its evolved forms to share their experiences first-hand. Just a month later, the exhibit *The Legacy of Lynching: Confronting Racial Terror in America* opened at the Brooklyn Museum (“EJI’s Lynching Work”).

Legal justice is only one side of the coin, however. It is evident that memorialization motivated Stevenson in a different, even personal way. The exclusion of slavery, lynching, or segregation in the national memory bothered Stevenson. He admitted that “One factor, to be honest, was that we started talking about a memorial for 9/11 victims within five years.” He continued, “It’s not as if we haven’t waited long enough to begin the process of a memorial for lynching” (qtd. in Toobin). Americans not only quickly memorialized 9/11 victims, but did so before acknowledging the victims of racial violence. Furthermore, seeing other countries’ memorialization of atrocities compelled Stevenson. He explicitly acknowledged that “To come back to America and see almost nothing about the history of lynching pushed us to do something” (qtd. in Bunn). Beyond legal justice, ending silence and countering monuments to white supremacy is a way to honor the victims of racial violence.

Memorializing Ongoing Trauma

The Legacy Museum and National Memorial for Peace and Justice raise another question: How does one memorialize an ongoing trauma? The answer to this question closely aligns with the before mentioned purposes of memorializing perpetual trauma. I contend that these sites adopt two interpretive frameworks: a legal model and a memorial museum model. Importantly, these two frameworks directly influence visitor participation at both the Legacy

Museum and National Memorial for Peace and Justice. While both models help the EJI try to achieve its mission, I also argue that, at times, combining these different frameworks leads to confused and bifurcated spaces with competing endeavors. The sites try to simultaneously confront and remember, accuse and memorialize. Furthermore, the ways the EJI asks visitors to participate causes its own dilemmas that require closer consideration.

Legal framework

Lawyers' influence on the Legacy Museum is readily acknowledged in reviews and articles. Some acknowledgements are subtler, as art critic Holland Cotter notes that both the museum and accompanying memorial possess a "uplift-free prosecutorial directness." But most explicitly recognize the legal framework, often noting Bryan Stevenson's influence. Consider this collection of statements:

like a great legal argument, the Legacy Museum relies on both emotion and a precise accumulation of evidence. (Hobbs and Freudenberger)

As an attorney, Stevenson makes his case that slavery and mass incarceration are directly, inextricably linked. (Helm)

The Legacy Museum is clearly the project of an attorney's mind. (Lawrence)

Mr. Stevenson is a very good lawyer, and he knows that the most effective way to make your case—particularly to people who see the world very differently from you—is not with outrage and condemnation but with a slow, thorough accumulation of evidence and argument leading to an inevitable conclusion. (Wegman)

It is not a conventional museum, heavy on artifacts and detached commentary. It is perhaps better described as the presentation of an argument, supported by firsthand accounts and contemporary documents. (C. Robertson)

How, specifically, is the influence of lawyers on this museum evident? Like an opening argument, the main exhibition presents its thesis at the beginning and strives to lead its audience

to the same conclusion through its presentation of evidence. The legalistic framework is visible even in the architectural design, which possesses a profoundly visible logic. The designers clearly arranged the argument, delineating sections in the main exhibition *Slavery Evolved* to build a clear and orderly case. Moving from slavery to lynching to segregation to mass incarceration, each section is filled with material evidence of racism and discrimination. The slavery section includes reproduced auction catalog entries of enslaved persons sold by John G. Winter in 1854, slave narratives published after Emancipation, and newspaper ads for slave auctions. A console with digitized maps representing every verified lynching in the United States occupies the center of the lynching section. Segregation signs, pro-segregation quotes, examples of segregation laws, and pro-segregation videos dominate the “Segregation Forever” section, the racism prominently displayed and projected into the space for all to see. In the mass incarceration section, visitors learn from incarcerated or formerly incarcerated individuals via letters sent to the EJI or from the prison visitation booth videos. The museum uses a variety of evidence, from print media to historical research to physical objects to personal testimony, to support the argument that racism persists, adapting itself throughout the years.

Design techniques at the Legacy Museum bolster the arguments, persuading visitors visually with the claims. The techniques are particularly useful in helping the EJI confront the false narratives surrounding the legacy of the Civil Rights movement. To counteract society’s bloating of positive accomplishments beyond scale, the museum designers literally changed the proportions. This move allows the museum to highlight the painful discourse while simultaneously downplaying more popular, and palatable, history. In the segregation section, there are entire walls of discriminatory signs and laws. A video of white pro-segregationists

projects onto a large screen, their words echoing into the space. In a similar move, quotes abound from opponents to segregation or proponents of mass incarceration of Blacks. The museum does not use them sparingly or tuck them away, but instead displays the words en masse or enlarged. For example, in the mass incarceration section, the back wall includes this quote by John Erlichman, Richard Nixon's domestic policy chief: "Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did." Erlichman made this confession in 1994 to Dan Baum, openly admitting to the writer that the war on drugs was an effort to target both antiwar activists and African Americans (Baum). Conversely, videos of civil rights activism, such as the march from Selma to Montgomery or the Children's Crusade in Birmingham, play on small screens, either silent or requiring visitors to pick up phones to listen. By highlighting the discrimination and minimizing the activism, the museum's creators do not let visitors ignore past actions and the persistent underlying racism. More importantly, emphasizing the comments of racist leaders or pro-segregationist citizens suggests that the remarks are not minor asides or misspoken words. Instead, displaying them so prominently illustrates the pervasiveness of this kind of racist discourse. It is the rule, not the exception.

The legal framework also involves establishing a moral stance. The museum declares its position, framing the content in ways that emphasize that there is no middle ground surrounding racism or its manifestations. For instance, the language in text labels throughout the museum address issues bluntly, never toning down or sidestepping abuse. While the media often employs weak phrases like "racially charged," the museum's text labels repeatedly use the words "trauma" or "traumatized," and other phrases include "horrific conditions," "agonizing journey," and "racial terrorism." By strategically using black and white throughout the museum, the

Legacy Museum's designers visually signify that there is no ambiguity surrounding slavery or its legacies. Gauzy black and white banners hang in the slavery section, with slave records displayed on the white banners and slave accounts presented on the black banners. Similarly, there is a wall in the same section with newspaper ads, split between white panels presenting slave auction information and black panels showing inquiries about lost family members.²² In the section about segregation stands "Racial Justice Timeline" with US Supreme Court cases; the white squares are court cases that upheld racism, while the black squares are court cases that helped further the fight for racial justice. While the colors serve a practical purpose, often indicating the race of a text's author, taken as a whole the color blocking signals the absence of nuance about the issue. It is a visually represented Manichean divide.

More than the design, however, the legal framework influences the museum's approach to its audience. At different moments, the museum asks visitors to play different roles: juror, perpetrator, or victim. The problem is that these roles are inherently competing.

One of the most prominent roles the museum asks visitors to play is that of juror. The goal, as in a court case, is to convince people of a particular argument. Accordingly, the flow of knowledge is decidedly one-way. Referring back to Stevenson's definition of a narrative museum, the EJI defines the space precisely by its presentation of a concrete argument. Vanzetta Penn McPherson, a former magistrate judge, observes that "It's all right there before you, and if you go from the beginning to the end, if you are a reasonable person, you have to be convinced" (qtd. in Soloman). The EJI's rhetorical intentions for the Legacy Museum are clear: it is designed to sway visitors. This view of the visitors' role directly opposes the 9/11 Memorial

²² There is a small, two panel grey section in a middle with rewards for runaways.

Museum's where, according to its director Alice Greenwald, "we acknowledged that our job—for the moment, at least—could not be to attempt to graft historical 'meaning' onto the events" ("Through the Lens" 12). The 9/11 Memorial Museum saw its visitors as co-contributors and abstained from overtly interpreting the event. The Legacy Museum does not see its visitors as co-counsel. At best, in this framing, guests can participate by evaluating the museum's argument.

This view of audiences and flow of knowledge is deliberate. Early mockups of the space illustrate how previous designs included more explicit visitor participation, which is not surprising given the Local Projects connection. For example, at one point a bright red wall presented the question: "What can each of us do to help the nation towards truth and reconciliation?" Furthermore, there was a proposed space where visitors could write a response, complete with a desk providing pens and notebooks opposite a wall that declared "Let's talk about it" ("EJI Museum" 00:02:36-00:02:41, 00:00:55-00:01:04). However, in its current form the Legacy Museum avoids these elements and explicitly does not allow visitors to contribute. In the final version of the Legacy Museum, the question in the early mockup, "What can each of us do to help the nation towards truth and reconciliation?" is answered, in part, by the museum itself as it provides opportunities for visitors to get involved by signing petitions, registering to vote, signing up to receive information about the Monument Placement Program, or connecting with local organizations doing racial justice work. The pivot away from the open-ended question once again limits the flow of knowledge between visitors. Here, the museum answers its own question with prescribed actions rather than allowing visitors to see the ideas from their peers. It is not surprising that the Legacy Museum is not concerned with engaging visitors regarding their

thoughts on slavery's evolution. Some of the types of questions the 9/11 Memorial Museum asks its visitors (such as "Why do you think it is important to remember 9/11?") ask for visitors' opinions and feelings, but this line of questioning at the 9/11 Memorial Museum is antithetical to the museum's goals. The Legacy Museum presents a clear argument, and the EJI is not interested in the museum serving as a platform for discussion.

The EJI's lack of interest in a democratic interpretive experience was evident from before the opening of the museum. Interestingly, the EJI announced plans for the Legacy Museum and accompanying National Memorial for Peace and Justice less than two years before they opened. By the time the announcements came, the EJI already partnered with Local Projects for the museum and MASS Design Group for the memorial ("EJI Announces"). This turnaround is staggeringly fast, but it also reveals a different approach to memorialization than some other institutions. Beyond the museum displaying jars from the Community Soil Collection Project, the EJI seemingly did not include stakeholders in the process. There were no community meetings about the prospect of a museum or memorial, let alone the design process. The EJI's decision to exclude the public makes sense. Other attempts to address racial terrorism or dark history in Alabama were met with flat out refusals (Toobin). Furthermore, the creators kept the projects under wraps because of suspected community pushback (Foretek). Nevertheless, the fact that the Legacy Museum did not incorporate visitor contributions within the completed museum suggests their particular view of visitors and the role they want them to perform.

However, even if the Legacy Museum does not allow visitors to contribute content to the museum space in their role as jurors, being a juror does allow visitors to participate in other ways. For example, visitors participate by listening to victims, which is integral to the Legacy

Museum's larger reconciliatory goals. Stevenson acknowledges listening's importance in this process, arguing in one interview that

You can't do reconciliation work, you can't do restoration work, you can't do racial justice work, you can't create the outcome that you desire to see until there has been truth-telling. And truth-telling has to happen when people who have been victimized and marginalized and excluded and oppressed are given a platform to speak, and everybody else has to listen. (qtd. in McWilliams)

There are multiple opportunities in the Legacy Museum for visitors to "listen" to victims. In the section "The Cruelty of Selling People" found the beginning of the museum, quotes from enslaved peoples' accounts cover part of a wall. The entrance to the slave pen section contains the text "In this space, you hear authentic accounts of actual enslaved people who recorded their experience of being trafficked and sold in this region." The banners in the section "Enslavement in America" include, according to the accompanying text label, "slave narratives published after Emancipation." The center console in the section "Lynching and Racial Terrorism" contains videos by individuals telling their personal stories of lynching. The "Mass Incarceration" section centers on the prison visitation booth videos, as well as the letters from prisoners to EJI staff, which are introduced with the text, "It is impossible to understand mass incarceration without listening to the voices of the incarcerated." Through both text and the written word, visitors "hear" individuals' experiences first-hand.

While listening might seem passive, Kate Crawford—the co-founder and co-director of AI Now Research Institute—argues in "Listening, not Lurking: The Neglected Form of Participation," that many disregard listeners online when, in fact, listening is actually an active,

contributory process (63-64). One could easily apply this argument to memorial museum interactions as well. Listening is a form of participation in this space because, as psychiatrist and trauma expert Dori Laub contends, “For the testimonial process to take place, there needs to be a bonding, the intimate and total presence of an *other*—in the position of one who hears. Testimonies are not monologues; they cannot take place in solitude” (70-71). In the testimonies of formerly incarcerated individuals, they at times acknowledge that somebody is listening. Some individuals thank visitors for listening to their story. Others address the visitor directly. For instance, Diane Jones implores, “So please, take heed to what I’m saying.” Kuntrell Jackson says he “Just wanted to let you know” about being denied educational opportunities while incarcerated. Anthony Ray Hinton asks visitors to consider what it would be like to get wrongfully arrested or to live in a tiny cell, repeating the question “what would you do?” By framing Legacy Museum visitors as jurors, the EJI asks their audience to participate in key—albeit prescribed—ways. They might seem like passive observers, but they engage in unseen ways.

While the juror identity is not a passive position, the EJI does ask visitors to perform a more active identity. At other times, the EJI frames visitors as perpetrators. There is a push for some visitors to recognize their culpability at both the museum and memorial, putting these guests on trial. This perpetrator identity is performed at the National Memorial for Peace and Justice. As individuals enter the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, they encounter slabs of oxidized metal marked with a location, a list of victims, and the corresponding lynching dates. While the memorial begins with the slabs arranged in rows at eye level, reminiscent of headstones, the pathway slopes and the markers raise gradually as visitors walk through the

memorial. For the majority of the memorial, visitors strain their necks to see the slabs collectively suspended in the air. The effect, as some reviewers note, evokes countless lynched bodies and visitors assume the role of the onlooking crowd member (Renkl; Krueger; Cotter).²³ In this moment, as the metal columns become metaphorical bodies, visitors identify as lynching spectators. It is not that the EJI champions this identity. Rather, it prompts visitors to gain a different, even uncomfortable, perspective as they walk through the space. Art historian Anthony W. Lee, speaking about the photograph *Marion Lynching* displayed in the lynching photography exhibition *Without Sanctuary* in 2000, argues that “We refuse to have surrogates in that picture, if by that we mean giving ourselves up wholly to the irrationality of the mob and its violence” (6). Lee contends that modern audiences feel uncomfortable identifying with the crowds in lynching photographs. Viewers resist this connection, even while they themselves look. Conversely, the memorial, through bodily participation, leads visitors into this position. The memorial is profoundly participatory at this moment as visitors walk through the space and look up, completing the monument.

The memorial asks visitors to engage with the perpetrator role in another way. Viewing other visitors interact with the memorial is also a performance. The memorial forces visitors to embody the mob, but it also requires visitors to look at the scene as well, to look at other visitors looking up at the metaphorical bodies. Shawn Michelle Smith, whose scholarship centers on photography, contends that “looking at whiteness, making white bodies bear the burden of the gaze, can become an important critical task” (*Photography* 118). During their visit, white visitors

²³ Stevenson likely intended this interpretation, as he spoke in an interview about the impact of the noose display in the Apartheid Museum, remarking that “when I got to the room with nooses hanging from the roof, it showed me the power of a place to create a kind of impact” (qtd. in Battaglia).

both look and are looked at by others. There is a double viewing, a double identification with the mob.

While it might seem jarring to say that some visitors are culpable participants in racial terrorism or white supremacy, the EJI adopts the idea that perpetrators need to be involved in the reconciliation—and healing—process. Dominick LaCapra discusses the effects of trauma on perpetrators, arguing that “not everyone traumatized by events is a victim. There is the possibility of perpetrator trauma that must itself be acknowledged and in some sense worked through if perpetrators are to distance themselves from an earlier implication in deadly ideologies and practices” (“Trauma, Absence” 723). While perpetrators are not victims, this does not mean they do not experience trauma (Mohamed 1162). This idea of perpetrators experiencing trauma is difficult to accept; society has, as law professor Saira Mohamed elucidates, assigned trauma as the “property of victimhood” (1172-1177). Nevertheless, the deleterious effect on their psyche from committing violent acts still needs healing for the benefit of both groups. Mohamed contends that “Those who suffer the aftereffects of trauma may find it more difficult to admit wrongdoing, feel empathy, or avoid violence in the future. If they, too, are terrorized by their own actions, then there may be no hope for societal reconciliation” (1168). These symptoms of trauma, especially an inability to feel empathy or avoid future violence, have major implications. In their *Lynching in America* report, the EJI discusses how perpetrator trauma only continues to hurt others (70). Involving perpetrators in the reconciliation process is not unheard of. Most famously, the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission incorporated perpetrator’s testimonies into the process.

While the memorial certainly requires some visitors to identify as perpetrators through bodily participation, the Legacy Museum does not employ this positioning. The museum—for all its focus on truth-telling—is devoid of platforms for visitors to share their stories. It is true that the Legacy Museum includes the words of perpetrators through newspapers, quotes, and videos, and visitors listen to these voices as well. But they are not examples of perpetrators, beneficiaries, or bystanders acknowledging their mistakes or complicity. Rather, the EJI features their vile comments to rectify the distorted narrative. At the Legacy Museum, there is no space for visitors to openly grapple with these difficult issues. If the Legacy Museum wants to serve as a type of truth commission, then it needs to involve both victims *and* perpetrators in the truth-telling process. And yet, the Legacy Museum declines to offer this type of engagement.

In continuing to understand how the legal framework influences the visitor experience, the question arises: how does victimhood come into play? On the one hand, the fact that Stevenson believes that racism, especially white supremacy, harms everyone complicates this identity. He claims that

We're not going to move forward on issues like race until we tell the truth about our history. And we're not going to be able to reconcile ourselves to that history until we deal honestly with what that history has done to all of us. Not just people of color, to all of us. ("EJI Confronts" 00:03:21-00:03:38)

This idea counters LaCapra's argument above that trauma does not equate victimhood. American society's silence about its violent, racist past harms citizens, albeit in different ways. However, the EJI does not fully invoke this identity at the Legacy Museum or National Memorial for Peace and Justice. To be sure, it is used as the reason for the memorialization efforts. One could argue

that participating in the Community Soil Collection Project or Memorial Monument Placement Initiative would reveal just how damaged society is because of its failure to acknowledge or atone for racial violence. However, these forms of participation pale in comparison to the others available. Furthermore, the museum once again prevents visitor participation through content creation, as the EJI does not allow any guests to tell their personal stories of how they were victimized by racism. Unlike a more participatory model, whereby visitors could record their personal experiences, guests can only read and hear stories pre-selected by the museum prior to its opening.

The legal framework asks visitors to play different—and at times conflicting—roles. However, the legal mindset restricts the EJI's willingness to invite visitors into the interpretive process. While there are clear instances of participation, these opportunities exist to support the EJI's interpretive narrative. Despite these limitations, however, visitors do maintain agency. The EJI might desire for visitors to look in a certain way, but people are not passive observers; they possess the ability to shift their positionality and perspective. Guests might align with the Legacy Museum's preferred identity, but it is not necessarily a guarantee. People can refuse to listen, or, more problematically, the perpetrator role might affirm a visitor's belief in white supremacy rather than prompt feelings of shame. Nevertheless, it is clear that the EJI is asking visitors to participate in a way that leads to its desired goal.

Memorial Museum Framework

While Stevenson and the EJI clearly intend for the Legacy Museum and National Memorial for Peace and Justice to help their legal work, it is notable that they chose memorialization as the method. The silence surrounding slavery and its legacies did not only

cause problems in the criminal justice system; it also created personal and collective trauma. It matters that victims never received proper acknowledgement. At a Community Soil Collection Project meeting, Stevenson told volunteers that

We're gonna ask you to go to lynching sites and recover a part of this history that has been hidden. We're going to give you jars, and we're going to ask you to go to these sites and to put the soil in the jar and to honor and remember the lives of these victims lost." (*True Justice* 01:23:52-01:24:07)

Similarly, at its core, the memorial—for all its confrontational elements—recognizes the thousands of lynching victims. It gives a name to each person, bringing their name to the forefront rather than only relying on the symbolic, abstract stele.

We see how the memorial echoes not only contemporary design trends but also specific memorials across the world. In fact, Stevenson is quite upfront about the inspiration he drew from other memorialization efforts abroad when creating the Legacy Museum and National Memorial for Peace and Justice. For instance, in a promotional video entitled "EJI's New Legacy Museum," Stevenson mentions the memorialization efforts in South Africa, Rwanda, and Germany (00:01:35-00:01:52). It is not a coincidence, then, that the National Memorial for Peace and Justice's design echoes Berlin's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, a monument that similarly consists of architectural blocks that visitors walk around and through.

However, one museum was particularly key to Stevenson's efforts in building the Legacy Museum: The Apartheid Museum. In an interview with ArtNews about visiting in 2011, he remarks

Going to that museum, where you are given a ticket that requires you to go through a door marked 'white' or 'colored,' with three Swedish lawyers—we were all at the same human-rights conference—and watching them struggle and be uncomfortable... The idea that a space could actually make you feel inequality and injustice was really powerful to me. (qtd. in Battaglia)

Stevenson's comments about the Apartheid Museum reveal a particularly key element of the memorial museum model he adopted. The Legacy Museum and National Memorial for Peace and Justice similarly offer an affective experience that depends on a connection between memory, space, and the body. This intimate connection is a common trend at memorial museums. Paul Williams suggests that memorial museums draw upon understandings of trauma and its physical nature and use this to craft visitor experiences. He argues, "An accent on the physical is in line with the idea, central to the study of trauma, that we remember not so much in a cognitive, declarative fashion, but in one that is bodily and sensory" (98). One provocative example is the Dallas Memorial Center for Holocaust Studies. Here, visitors enter through an authentic boxcar, which is designed to replicate the experience of being in that dark, confined space with other people. While there is a distinct difference between entering a boxcar in a U.S. memorial museum years after the war and being transported to a concentration camp during the Holocaust, the bodily memory is still so strong that some survivors refused to enter and the museum provided alternative entrances (Young, *Texture* 297-98). At this museum and others, the museum designers attempt to have visitors access or identify with traumatic experiences through their bodies; the body becomes a gateway to the past. At other times, architects focus primarily on evoking the emotional effects of trauma. The effort is less about remembering a specific

memory—like the transportation to concentration camps—and more so about prompting more abstract concepts like loss or confusion. Elizabeth Rankin and Leoni Schmidt argue that “the museum as affective signifier is a well-recognized trope within current discourse” (77). They refer specifically to Daniel Libeskind’s Jewish Museum design, whereby the “complex spaces themselves engender a disquieting sensory experience that suggests the fraught history of Jewish presences and absences in Germany” (77). Libeskind incorporated voids into the design, physical empty spaces to symbolize the loss of lives. When visitors engage with those spaces, the environments offer opportunities for affective responses. The Jewish Museum Berlin explicitly declares on their website that “Many visitors experience a feeling of oppression or anxiety inside the Holocaust Tower” (“Libeskind Building”). Another example of this kind of space can be seen at the 9/11 Memorial Museum, where the designers of the Historical Exhibition intended to capture the chaos of the day. In these instances, the design prompts much broader feelings.

It is not surprising that the connection between memory, space, and the body inspired Stevenson. His own personal manifesto of fighting injustice involves “getting proximate.” As he said in one speech: “When you get proximate to the excluded and the disfavored, you learn things that you need to understand if we’re going to change the world” (qtd. in Hubley). Accordingly, the EJI uses bodily experiences to help visitors access others’ experiences or gain emotional understanding. However, while the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in some ways replicates a shade of an experience with its reference to the lynching spectacle scene, the Legacy Museum does not allow any such identification. While the museum emphasizes the physical encounter, the site does not position visitors as enslaved persons or incarcerated individuals, locked in cells or put into confined spaces. One sees this process in action through

interactive technological spaces where visitors get close to storytellers through digital face to face interactions. These interactions expose visitors to first-hand accounts of slavery or mass incarceration. At the slave pens near the beginning of the visit, projections speak to visitors from dark cages. For example, a woman pleads for individuals to help her find her children, a man remembers his own experience being sold, and two children—a little boy and girl—stand together while the boy calls out “Mama? Mama?” and asks: “Have you seen our mother?” Similarly, at the mock prison visitation space, videos of former prisoners tell visitors their experiences while incarcerated. Robert Caston describes working in a field at Louisiana State Penitentiary and how guards’ whistles controlled his life. Diane Jones laments missing out on loved ones’ birthdays while incarcerated. Kuntrell Jackson explains how guards abused their power and how he was denied college education classes because he had too much time on his sentence. Through these encounters, the museum is asking people to acknowledge, recognize, and believe someone else’s pain without knowing what it feels like first-hand.

The form of the testimonies is crucial. The Legacy Museum asks visitors to witness embodied, individual speakers. Compare this technique to the 9/11 Museum, which plays disembodied voices throughout the museum, whether that be the recollections at the exhibit’s entrance or the oral histories in the Historical Exhibit. At the 9/11 Memorial Museum, the spoken memories serve different purposes, whether to provide space for personal reflection, illustrate the widespread nature of trauma, or create unity from chaos. Furthermore, because visitors to the 9/11 Memorial Museum imagine themselves as part of a collective whole, the disembodied voices do not present a problem. However, the EJI is dealing with audiences defined by separation; the museum is confronting a narrative of racial inferiority. At the Legacy Museum,

then, there is a distinct need to see individual speakers. Philosopher Emmanuel Levinas argues that we have an ethical responsibility to an Other. He insists “if you *encounter* the face, responsibility arises in the strangeness of the other and in his misery. The face offers itself to your compassion and to your obligation” (48). At this museum, through the holograms and videos, there are literal encounters with a face that creates a sense of duty. More importantly, visitors must get close to hear some of the stories. These features require visitors to get physically close to hear the voices. The slave pen projections are faint and blurry until visitors walk up to the metal bars, at which point they crystalize and start speaking. The former prisoners in the videos stare out into the space, inviting people to approach. Only after visitors pick up their phone do the individuals on the screen start talking.²⁴

While the interactive, face-to-face opportunities in the museum involve physical movement and agency, another EJI initiative—the Community Soil Collection Project—goes a step further to connect bodies and memory. By digging, volunteers disturb the ground and—accordingly—the past. Unlike Manzanar National Historic Site, which often invokes language of digging and burial to represent forgetting and remembering, thus metaphorically linking memory to the land, the EJI’s memorialization project literally involves shoveling and collecting dirt. Through this tangible activity, volunteers personally connect with an individual, a past, and a history. According to one participant, “I thought that digging on that soil was a poignant way to connect with the time, the event, and, most importantly, the man” (“Community Remembrance Project” 00:01:09-00:01:23). Much like the testimonials in the museum, the soil project allows

²⁴ Every former incarcerated individual except Anthony Ray Hinton and Robert Caston also pick up a phone in their videos. However, they all start talking when visitors pick up their phone.

individuals to get close to one another. As past and present bodies connect, albeit symbolically, volunteers help tell someone's story.

Getting close and connecting physically through the digging process allows for witnessing to take place. Stevenson told a crowd before they went to collect soil, "We're gonna ask you to go to lynching sites and bear witness" (*True Justice* 01:23:47-01:23:51). However, the act does not merely allow volunteers to witness. The collection process—and physically touching the soil—also allows the victims the same ability. Marita Sturken contends, "Throughout history, the body has been perceived as a receptacle of memory, from the memory of bodily movement... to the memory of past events in physical scars, to the memory of one's genetic history in every cell." As such, "Survivors...testify through the very presence of their bodies to the materiality of memory" (*Tangled Memories* 12). If bodies testify, then they are also witnesses. But it is not just the survivor's body that testifies: the deceased body can as well. Stevenson, commenting on the Community Soil Collection Project, remarks that "In many ways, the sweat of enslaved people is buried in this soil. The blood of lynching victims is in this soil. The tears of people who were segregated and humiliated during the time of Jim Crow is in this soil" (qtd. in Couric). Stevenson is talking metaphorically rather than literally. However, he does establish a physical, even bodily connection to the past. By imagining sweat, blood, and tears in the earth, the soil transforms from a ubiquitous substance to a symbolic, meaningful object that helps tell a victim tell a part of their story.

The connection between memory, bodies, and space in the Community Soil Collection Project becomes even more important when viewed as a ritual process. More obviously, it is a way to create sacred space. Here, both the victims and volunteers contribute to the sacralization

process. On the one hand, a place of bloodshed is often considered sacred (Sturken, *Tourists of History* 199). By emphasizing blood in the soil, however metaphorical, Stevenson imbues the dirt with a significance it did not previously possess. This move echoes the transformation of Ground Zero dust from detritus to human remains (Sturken, *Tourists of History* 165, 178-79). More important is the act of going to the site, digging into the ground and collecting the soil. This ritual of traveling to the lynching sites and collecting the soil sets the land apart. As anthropologist Katharina Schramm contends, “sacrality never simply exists in and of itself, but is created, attributed and variously interpreted” (15). This process certainly brings forgotten memories to light, but it also transforms the sites of violence into meaningful spaces.

Digging in the soil goes beyond sacralizes the land. Christina Sharpe contends in her essay “And to Survive” that the soil collection process “is a collecting of matter and grief; it is an act of care, an act of what I have called wake work” (179-80). In her book *In the Wake*, Sharpe engages with multiple meanings of the word “wake.” While she articulates that it can mean a “ritual[] through which to enact grief and memory” or “being awake and, also, consciousness,” one other definition stands out. She explains that

wakes are also ‘the track left on the water’s surface by a ship...; the disturbance caused by a body swimming, or one that is moved, in water; the air currents behind a body in flight; a region of disturbed flow; in the line of sight of (an observed object); and (something) in the line of recoil of (a gun)’ (21)

Given this definition, the hole in the ground at each lynching site is just as important as the collection process or the filled jars displayed in neat rows inside the Legacy Museum. Volunteers disturb the land, leaving evidence of change through this act of memorialization. While the

Historical Marker Project confronts through presence, the Community Soil Collection Project ends silence through disruption.

Despite adopting the memorial museum model, the EJI does depart in a key way. Many memorial museums engage with the desire to heal. They employ interpretive narratives to help make sense of trauma. Like these other memorial museums, the Legacy Museum and National Memorial for Peace and Justice seem to have a similar desire. However, where the EJI differs at these sites is its perspective about healing. More specifically, it rejects a common definition of healing found in American culture. Marita Sturken argues that

American mythology clings tenaciously to the belief that one can always heal, move on, and place the past in its proper context, and do so quickly. The memorial culture of the United States has thus been largely experienced as a therapeutic culture, in which particular citizens...have been seen as coming to terms with the past and making peace with difficult memories. (*Tourists of History* 14)

The impulse behind healing is to alleviate individuals' pain and hurt, but this concept of healing creates an expectation that people should move on from trauma without much work. This perception means treating symptoms rather than the disease itself and equating comfort with healing. These ideas feed into the prevailing assumption that society can heal merely by forgetting its mistakes, which can have deleterious effects.

The distorted narratives that the EJI seeks to rectify through the Legacy Museum and National Memorial for Peace and Justice closely connect to the American beliefs about healing. The narratives constructed around slavery, lynching, and segregation seek to cover up and move on from trauma, not heal from it. Not only does this approach fail to heal trauma, but these

narratives are designed to comfort instead further traumatized citizens. Accordingly, healing at these sites is not about integrating trauma but rather digging it out. Instead of the therapeutic model, people need to get uncomfortable. This silence is like leaving scissors in the body after surgery, a double wounding. To actually heal, both individuals and society need to expose the odious history and dismantle the insidious ideology.

The EJI faces a challenge with their approach. Their memorialization efforts must simultaneously confront both beliefs about racial difference and healing. Consider these critiques by some Montgomery residents about the National Memorial for Peace and Justice: “It’s going to cause an uproar and open old wounds” (Mikki Keenan, qtd. in Levin). “We have moved past it ... You don’t want to entice them and feed any fuel to the fire” (Tommy Rhodes, qtd. in Levin). “We didn’t have nothing to do with that. I think they just need to leave it alone. It’s just stirring up something” (Mary Massey, qtd. in Levin). “It’s gone and won’t happen again” (Jim Massey, qtd. in Levin). By confronting Americans with its history of lynching, the EJI requires people to remember the nation’s dark history. While some resist, seeing the exposure of past racial violence as more damaging, the aim is to actually reduce pain.

While the EJI reframes the concept of healing used at many memorialization sites, at other times its use of the memorial museum model is more problematic. Put differently, while the Legacy Museum and National Memorial for Peace and Justice benefit from other commemorative examples, some burdens exist when adopting models from other memorials or memorial museums without considering their specific contexts. The disconnect of applying this particular model can be seen particularly well at the National Memorial for Peace and Justice. This memorial features an abstract design, and, as Holland Cotter recognizes, draws inspiration

from both the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe. However, drawing inspiration from these memorials is not seamless. Both Maya Lin and Peter Eisenman's memorials are abstract for very specific reasons. As Kirstin Hass argued about the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the unsettled meaning of the war—and America after the war—required an open memorial (39-40). While visitors leaving objects at the wall was an unexpected response, Lin did intend for visitors to take from the memorial, to engage tactilely or to make rubbings of the names (14, 21). For Eisenman, people's behavior at the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe reveals their inner thoughts. Responding to an interviewer's question about the possibility of someone spray painting a swastika on the memorial, Eisenman responds, "If a swastika is painted on it, it is a reflection of how people feel. And if it remains there, it is a reflection of how the German government feels about people painting swastikas on the monument" (qtd. in Hawley and Tenberg). These memorials are abstract not merely for aesthetics, but rather because the design allows for a particular kind of interpretive experience. In these instances, the memorials allow for public expression of feelings. Their designs invite participation.

Conversely, while the National Memorial for Peace and Justice is an abstract design, it is not without a heavily embedded meaning. While the memorial does not go as far as the Apartheid Museum in hanging nooses to represent those killed by hanging, the symbolism is overwhelmingly obvious. Looking specifically at participatory meaning-making, visitors might "complete" the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, but they do so in a highly structured or predetermined way. This memorial is not a platform for competing interpretations, nor a place for contributions. Participation is highly dictated: visitors either walk through and look up at the

hanging memorials or communities place the duplicate monuments in their counties. They cannot leave objects or even touch the names on most of the stele. Even the choice of material echoes this restricted participatory dynamic. While the Vietnam Veteran Memorial's polished black granite reflects, this memorial's monuments are opaque dull metal.

As the above discussion illustrates, the EJI does not merely adopt different memorialization models. Rather, at times the EJI collapses specific traumas with different historical and political contexts. For instance, on one side of the National Memorial for Peace and Justice rests a statue by Hank Willis Thomas entitled "Raise Up." Emerging out a concrete base in a single line are bronze figures of ten Black men, their arms raised above their heads. What is surprising, however, is that the model for the sculpture came from a 1960s photograph taken by Ernest Cole during Apartheid. In that photograph, which depicts a row of naked men facing a wall with their arms raised, Cole captured "miners being subjected to a humiliating group medical examination" (Cotter). As Holland Cotter suggests, "In an American context the same figures suggest police suspects lined up at gunpoint." While Cotter makes a compelling point—and the phrase "Hands Up, Don't Shoot" from the Black Lives Matter protests likely comes to mind when seeing the piece—one must interrogate the transference of one system of racial discrimination to another. We see a similar collapsing with Stevenson's repeated invoking of the phrase "Never again." In one interview, for example, he claims that "Our priority was to create an experience where, at the end of it, a visitor will be moved to say, 'Never again should we tolerate this kind of bigotry and bias'" (McFadden). Using this phrase—which is closely associated with the Holocaust—to slavery and its legacies is not a seamless process. Applying

the phrase to a completely different type of trauma seems, once again, to equate the distinct events.

Of course, similarities in memorial language does not mean that re-reading is impossible. Different contexts can lead to different interpretations. For instance, Stevenson's use of the phrase "Never again" conveys a different meaning in regards to racial terrorism. It is not a plea to prevent a recurrence of the past. Rather, it is an appeal to change the future. There is less a fear of a return of slavery or lynching than a worry of what other forms racial discrimination and bias might arise. Nevertheless, the Legacy Museum and National Memorial for Peace and Justice's adoption of memorial museum frameworks and collapsing of specific traumatic events raises the question of whether society lacks the language to grapple with disparate atrocities. Is the EJI's mimicking of aesthetics or echoing of affective strategies the result of lawyers engaging in grassroots memorialization, or do these choices indicate a broader inability to engage with unique traumas? Does the relatively recent memorial museum boom, or "memorial mania" to use Erika Doss' phrase, create a consistent style or theory of representation that constrains how society thinks about engaging with difficult pasts? This issue extends well beyond the EJI's memorialization initiatives, and must be considered as the world continues to memorialize atrocities.

More crucially, adopting models from other memorials or museums can do more than cause a disconnect between design and intention or potentially erase the crucial differences between events. There can actually be damaging effects from transferring designs into disparate contexts. Again, the memorial brings this situation into sharp relief. It is not hard to see the similarities between the room with the hanging nooses at the Apartheid Museum and the design

of the National Memorial for Peace and Justice. However, the hangings in South Africa happened in a different context and did not invoke spectacle as an additional layer of terror. The South African government hung their political prisoners; it was a form of capital punishment, not extralegal violence (“Political Executions”; Battersby). This is not to say that seeing the nooses hanging in the museum or memorial would not unsettle or provoke visitors. However, the American context complicates this transfer. As I will explore more thoroughly in the next section, some American visitors find that the National Memorial for Peace and Justice replicates historical violence. In this instance, transferring the Apartheid Museum’s approach into the design actually causes additional harm.

Tension Between Frameworks

When Bryan Stevenson talks about the memorialization efforts of slavery through mass incarceration, he simultaneously invokes both the legal and memorial museum frameworks.

Consider these statements:

There is a narrative of racial difference in America that continues to haunt us. The legacy of sustained slavery and perpetuated segregation continues to infect and constrain us. (“EJI Museum” 00:00:34-00:00:45)

I think there’s a kind of smog in the air that’s created by the history of slavery and lynching and segregation, and I don’t think we’re going to get healthy, I don’t think we can be free until we address this problem. (*True Justice* 00:04:31-00:04:47)

I want there to be repair in this country not just for communities of color that have been victimized by bigotry and discrimination. I want it to be for all of us. I don’t think we can get free until we’re willing to tell the truth about our history. (*True Justice* 01:31:41-01:31:58)

Note the words Stevenson uses, often in the same sentence: “Infect,” “healthy,” and “repair” versus “constrain” and “free.” These are two categories of words, one related to trauma and

healing, the other related to freedom. He sees this truth-telling effort surrounding slavery and its legacies as serving two purposes. However, while the two frameworks can complement each other, at other times they compete.

The representation of racial violence—especially lynching—at the museum and memorial illuminates this tension between the legal and memorial museum frameworks. It is important to acknowledge that in and of itself, looking at lynching is problematic because of its entanglement with spectacle. One might argue that all dark tourism, a term developed by tourism experts Malcolm Foley and J. John Lennon in 1996 to describe “the presentation and consumption (by visitors) of real and commodified death and disaster sites” contends with spectacle (198). It is true that people are drawn to sites of the macabre and of death, traveling to sites of war or atrocity in large numbers. While there is no concrete data of dark tourism participation as a whole, statistics from well-known sites help suggest the scope (Sampson). For example, in 2018, over 6.6 million people visited the 9/11 Memorial (A Year in Review) and 2.15 million people visited Auschwitz-Birkenau—the largest number ever (“Auschwitz”). The present fascination with murder podcasts, television shows, and movies further exemplifies this obsession, as people consume endless media centered on violence and death as entertainment. English professor Mark Seltzer argues that this form of consumption illustrates “wound culture,” which he defines as “the public fascination with torn and opened bodies and torn and opened persons, a collective gathering around shock, trauma, and the wound” (3). This fascination illuminates a voyeuristic element in dark tourism or media, and people should be more conscious about this tendency because visiting these sites can exploit victims, especially those already marginalized or disenfranchised.

However, the act of looking presents a particular dilemma at the Legacy Museum and National Memorial for Peace and Justice because, unlike some other dark tourism sites, the distinct historical context makes looking at lynching representations potentially harmful and traumatic. Ultimately, spectacle is a central part of racism. At its very core, whites objectify the Other's body and use looking as a means of control. At exhibition forums like world fairs or museums, whites exerted their physical and ideological power through displays of people. Slavery, lynching, and segregation embodied visual events or signs. Enslavers bought people at auctions and posted advertisements in newspapers for their sale. Some enslavers whipped or beat the enslaved people, visibly marking their bodies with wounds and scars. Segregation physically separated Blacks and whites, providing both tangible and visual markers of division and difference.

While all these forms of racial discrimination and violence invoked power through visual signs, lynching is a particular category of violence known as "spectacle murder." It is not only that lynching involved an audience. Rather, lynching *depended* on spectacle. As historian Amy Louise Wood explains, "The cultural power of lynching—indeed, the cultural power of white supremacy itself—rested on spectacle: the crowds, the rituals and performances, and their sensational representations in narratives, photographs, and films" (3). Photography played a particularly key role in lynching spectacles. As Shawn Michelle Smith contends, "Photography documented lynching but also played a role in orchestrating it. Making a photograph became part of the ritual, helping to objectify and dehumanize the victims and, for some, increasing the hideous pleasure ("Evidence" 16). Circulating photographs, especially through postcards, functioned as a tool of fear, intimation, and control (Smith, *Photography* 121; Hale 229). At

times, a literal exhibition followed a lynching. For example, in *Dusk of Dawn*, W.E.B. Du Bois writes that “Sam Hose had been lynched, and they said that his knuckles were on exhibition at a grocery store farther down on Mitchell Street, along which I was walking” (qtd. in Smith, *Photography* 113). In all of these instances, spectacle was part and parcel of both racist discrimination and violence. This is not to say that spectacle was worse than the physical acts themselves; the actual lynching itself was categorically more traumatic than the onlooking crowd or photographic representations. However, spectacles cannot be divorced from these actions because of how they contributed to fear, violence, control, and racist ideology.

Spectacle worked in another way at lynchings. The violent ritual did not solely objectify the victim, making him powerless to the crowd’s gaze. Rather, the mob also flaunted their ability to enact this atrocity in public. Wood contends that

mobs performed lynchings as spectacles for other whites. The rituals, the tortures, and their subsequent representations imparted powerful messages to whites about their own supposed racial dominance and superiority...Lynchings thus succeeded in enacting and maintaining white domination not only because African Americans were its targets but also because white southerners were its spectators. (2)

White mobs were simultaneously spectator and spectacle. The subjects in the photographs are not anonymous KKK members in their white robes and masks, but rather men in white shirts and slacks or women in dresses with coifed hair. Some even smile at the camera. White mobs and citizens felt power through the lynchings and their presence in the photograph functioned as a vital part of the scene.

The EJI recognizes this historical context surrounding spectacle lynchings. The report *Lynching in America* includes an entire section about public spectacle lynchings, and the authors cite Amy Louise Wood's *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940*. Furthermore, the EJI understands how traumatic viewing these images can be in the present. Stevenson noted in one article that "We've been very cautious about the graphic images of lynching victims because without care they can dehumanize and distract" (qtd. in DaFoe). This understanding—and worry—helps explain some approaches to lynching representation at both the museum and memorial. One clear example is the giant photograph on the back wall of the museum. This photograph only shows a man's dangling feet, while the rest of the photo highlights the faces of the white crowd, many staring directly at the camera. It emphasizes the audience and their gaze, focusing one's attention on the perpetrators rather than the victim. This approach echoes the work of two artists who alter lynching photographs, Ken Gonzalez Day and Kerry James Marshall. In his *Erased Lynching Series*, Gonzalez Day removes the victims from the images, leaving only the spectating crowds. While Marshall keeps the victim in his *Heirlooms and Accessories* triptych, he likewise emphasizes the spectators. In this work, he fades the photo except for the faces of three white women, which he highlights by framing in necklaces. By deliberately moving the emphasis from victims to perpetrators, the representations tell particular narratives about lynching in the United States concerning spectatorship and historical memory. Other representations of lynching in the Legacy Museum avoid the harm of spectacle without highlighting the act. Here, the focus is on recognizing the victims without causing more pain. For example, the EJI uses statistics and maps detailing lynchings digitized in conjunction with Google. Four touch screens with the data—along with some oral histories—

comprise the centerpiece of the lynching section. More symbolically, the museum displays the jars of soil gathered as part of the Community Soil Collection Project. These jars commemorate loss while avoiding any graphic depictions. Christina Sharpe highlights the EJI's attempt to acknowledge harm enacted against Black bodies while working to avoid replicating that violence, contending, "But the fact of them, abstract and material, refuses to repeat the terror of the almost endlessly recirculated image of the brutalized body of the black person" ("And" 179). It is not merely that the EJI avoids the spectacle of violence. The design simultaneously emphasizes the individuality of each death. Sharpe points out that "the soil color and texture are unique; they change from location to location. It is the jars that repeat." This differentiation is key. She continues later, "And even when a line appears in place of a given name or surname or both, this is not the violence of abstraction represented, for instance, in the 'ditto ditto,' or 'Negro woman,' 'Negro man,' 'meagre girl' in the ship manifest and plantation ledger" (179). Abstraction can be harmful in its own way, but the soil collection design both calls attention to the scale of lynchings while resisting the tendency to reduce the deaths to anonymous statistics.

However, there is one section in the museum where the EJI does allow visitors to look at complete lynching photographs. This display is done in a controlled, limited way via a small, tucked away digital screen. The landing page contains the warning about graphic content, and visitors must tap the screen to see the photographs. Each "session" lasts fifteen seconds and rotates through four images that only appear on screen for about 3 seconds. The inclusion of these photographs poses the question: If lynching imagery was so critical to the ritual and continues to have the potential to harm, why does the Legacy Museum show the imagery at all?

Why not rely solely on the cropped image, statistics, maps, or soil to remedy the silence around lynching?

Here, the legal framework comes into a play. These photographs, especially in their unaltered form, function as evidence. This mindset can be seen in Stevenson's contention that "people in the US are often so resistant to acknowledging the brutality of racism that for some, those images must be seen" (qtd. in DaFoe). The photographs function as a form of "proof," not only of lynching's occurrence but also its gruesome nature. The EJI and Stevenson's need to confront the silence and manufactured amnesia surrounding lynching seemingly requires bringing this imagery to light.

Of course, the legal framework cannot completely explain the display of lynching photographs in the Legacy Museum. There are other contexts that come into play as well with displaying lynching photographs. The choice echoes other Black activists who reclaimed spectacles of violence against Black bodies. Take, for instance, anti-lynching activists using the same lynching photographs used to terrorize Blacks and instead employing them to call attention to—and condemn—the practice (Wood 179-221). Or, Mamie Till-Mobley, Emmett Till's mother, purposefully showing his disfigured body to the public through an open casket funeral and the widely circulated photograph (E. Alexander 87). The meaning of an image is neither static or fixed. Display is a way to shift the control of meaning. Choices such as where and when to show images—and to whom—help shape interpretation. Taking ownership of an image's exhibition and circulation signals that the creator does not own a photograph's interpretation. In moving the emphasis from the production to the consumption of the image, the act demonstrates agency and helps disrupt spectacle's unilateral power. Resisting spectacle and counteracting the power

dynamics inherent in spectacle also comes into play as the EJI controls other ways of looking. The Legacy Museum does not allow for a hidden viewpoint. The slave pens and prisoner visitation booths require visitors to make their presence known; it is only through this physical encounter that the projections start speaking. They “know” someone is there by calling attention to their presence. This technique ascribes power to marginalized individuals, those normally hurt by the gaze.

While the tension between the memorial museum and legal framework is certainly evident at the Legacy Museum, it is exponentially clearer at the National Memorial for Peace and Justice. In large part, this tension arises because of the way that the EJI engages with spectacle at the memorial. Discussing the lynching photography exhibition *Without Sanctuary*, cultural historian James Polchin explains that “organisers and curators faced a particular conundrum: how do you display photographs of racist violence without replicating the spectacle of that violence?” (209). If the EJI seemed to ask a similar question about the Legacy Museum, the memorial design asks the opposite question. The participatory dynamic at the memorial, coupled with unresolved accountability for perpetrators, presents a particularly complex situation. In one critique of the memorial, writer William C. Anderson reflects on his visitation experience, noting that “When I came upon a white man taking photos of the columns, I couldn’t help but think, *They’re still taking photos.*” Fundamentally, Anderson critiques the National Memorial for Peace and Justice because it, “intentionally or not, reproduces the opportunity for white onlookers to engage in the spectacle of lynching.” For Anderson, traditional tourist behavior—photography—connects to the history of spectacle murder. Compare Anderson’s response to the common critiques of visitors to Eisenman’s memorial in Berlin. There, observers might consider

picnicking on, jumping between, or running through the columns disrespectful to victims, but they do not claim that behavior echoes the genocide of millions of Jews.

The fact that some visitors replicate the lynching spectacle is not an unfortunate side effect but rather an intentional design decision. The National Memorial for Peace and Justice becomes a performance space as visitors walk through it or take photographs. If Kerry James Marshall or Ken Gonzalez Day's artwork highlights spectatorship, this memorial goes a step further by asking visitors to embody the scene. Like at Manzanar National Historic Site, occupying the position of a spectator can provide an important perspective shift; if visitors presume themselves innocent before visiting, then asking some visitors to identify as perpetrators and confronting them with their culpability can be a powerful shift. For some, this identification process raises problems. As mentioned previously, Anderson critiques the memorial, saying that it "reproduces the opportunity for white onlookers to engage in the spectacle of lynching."

Anderson's critique does highlight an important point: African American visitors do not see the memorial independent of this performance. While the participatory ritual might confront white visitors with their culpability in sustaining white supremacy, this same act recreates a painful scene for Black visitors. Nevertheless, there is a notable difference between looking at abstract monuments and participating in an actual lynching ritual. It unfair to compare visiting a memorial to participating in a gruesome, deadly act.

This dynamic over audiences and participation raises important concerns about the tension between the legal framework and memorial framework. The dual systems bring up this overarching question about the capabilities of remembrance: Can one confront and memorialize simultaneously? If the memorial's design is intended to confront some visitors with their

culpability and personal responsibility, can it simultaneously serve as a commemorative space for those—or other—visitors? Stevenson has acknowledged that “People want to express their grief” (qtd. in Battaglia). But are people able to mourn when they see visitors replicating scenes of spectacle?

Memorials can confront. The *Stolpersteine* or “stumbling blocks” in Germany that mark the last residence of Holocaust victims center around this idea, drawing people out of their everyday lives to recognize Nazi acts of genocide. Yes, *Stolpersteine* honor victims, but their placement in the pavement, while subtle, is jarring. In the midst of unassuming streets, the small markers jolt keen observers from their daily rhythm, reminding them of the horror of the Holocaust. However, the National Memorial for Peace and Justice is much more direct and even accusatory. The tension between confronting and memorializing becomes even more complicated when considering how the memorial asks visitors to participate. Anderson critiques this dynamic of the memorial, arguing that “A collapse of historical culpability occurs when I, the relative of a lynching victim myself, am tasked with looking up at these symbolic hangings, surrounded by white spectators.” Of course, there is never a singular audience. Every visitor comes to a memorial with her own background and interpretive framework. Nevertheless, the way the memorial asks visitors to complete the memorial’s meaning as they walk through the space, looking up at the hanging slabs, does implicate African American visitors. Even if the designers did not intend for Black visitors to associate themselves with the spectacle of lynching, for some guests the affective response is the same.

This tension between frameworks raises another issue about the possibilities of memorials. The National Memorial for Peace and Justice might confront visitors, but that

confrontation does not equate to reparations or even formal acknowledgement of wrong-doing. Except for the Monument Place Program, which works to hold communities accountable, visitors to the memorial are not held responsible for their actions. The international memorial models that inspired Stevenson emerged after official truth-telling and justice efforts. For example, the Apartheid Museum opened in 2001, over five years after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, while the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe was built in 2005, sixty years after the Nuremberg Trials. These memorial efforts, then, are not trying to accomplish multiple ambitious goals at once. Furthermore, while valuable, memorialization is not a cure-all; Holocaust memorialization does not eliminate anti-Semitism, neo-Nazism, or even Holocaust denial. The EJI is trying to use remembrance to help achieve legal and historical justice concurrently, but one must question the limits of memorialization or consider how memorials can engage people in new ways.

Mobilizing Memory for Social Change

If the two frameworks cause tension, or even potentially traumatize further, why combine the two? Why would a lawyer feel that memorialization is the best course of action to change the justice system? Bryan Stevenson approaches memorialization as action-oriented and future-focused. Consider this remark in the HBO documentary *True Justice: Bryan Stevenson's Fight for Equality*: “For me, it is about truth-telling in a way that is designed to get us to remember. And not just remember for memory’s sake, but get us to remember so that we can recover, we can restore, we can fight, to claim a different future” (01:28:26-01:29:08). The Legacy Museum’s website echoes this view, contending that “the *Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration* is an engine for education about the legacy of racial inequality and for the

truth and reconciliation that leads to real solutions to contemporary problems” (“Legacy Museum”). Of course, memory is always meaningful; to remember is to give importance to something. But Stevenson’s comment to “not just remember for memory’s sake”—and the Legacy Museum’s linear mission—is telling. The EJI’s public memory projects must work in service of change. Consider the name of the memorial itself. It is not the National Memorial *to* Peace and Justice. Rather, it is the National Memorial *for* Peace and Justice. That title suggests that the EJI intends for the memorial to serve a larger purpose than remember the victims of lynching.

A focus on the future—and the close connection between memorialization and social change—is not unique to the EJI. For many memorial museums, the underlying mantra is either “Never forget” or “Never again.” The guestbooks at Manzanar National Historic Site are filled with the oft-repeated—albeit misquoted—mantra by George Santayana: “Those who do not learn history are doomed to repeat it.” Those visitors believe in the importance of learning about or remembering past atrocities like Japanese-American internment to prevent their reoccurrence.

It is hard to say that memorialization at these institutions is having much effect, however. As Williams argues in his analysis of global memorial museums,

all-manner of post-Holocaust events cited in this book were not prevented by the formative memory practices associated with that event. What is it that now encourages us to surmise that a slew of new institutions might overturn this auspicious legacy of repeating the past? (155).

Speaking of internment specifically, the Trump administration’s treatment of immigrants—including locking refugee children in cages at the border—demonstrates that the U.S.

government will repeat its mistakes regardless of learning about history or remembering the past. Education or memorialization are not a preventative measure. Too often people say the circumstances differ when, in fact, the same damaging philosophies support similar events.

What is the EJI doing to connect memory to social change? How are they trying to mobilize memory in a more effective way? Near the end of the Legacy Museum visit, which follows the reflection space, is a hallway lined with photographs about different issues related to racism, the justice system, and memorialization. Each topic includes a guiding question, such as:

Should the US Supreme Court formally acknowledge its role in authorizing and sustaining the enslavement of black people and apologize for overtly racist rulings?

Should state governments execute some incarcerated prisoners?

Do churches and people of faith have a special obligation to address the history of racial inequality?

In this space, visitors encounter present-day problems that reflect the legacies of slavery, whether that be police violence, biased sentencing, or dehumanizing prison policies. Notably, eleven out of seventeen questions—almost two-thirds—are “Yes or No” questions. At first glance, this kind of framing does not seem to require deep thinking nor promote change. However, posing these questions prompts visitors to begin thinking about critical issues. While the Yes/No questions the museum asks, such as “Should any child be sentenced to die in prison?” appear largely rhetorical, they raise awareness of issues visitors might not be aware of and could trigger a desire for advocacy.

The dominance of Yes/No questions, along with the absence of space for visitors to write or record their answers to questions, does raise an important consideration. In mobilizing memory, the Legacy Museum, perhaps unexpectedly, must depart from the conventional

memorial museum model. Many other museums invite visitors to engage in a dialogue with the museum or other visitors, and in the process, the answers become a part of the exhibition. These opportunities shift the interpretive dynamic from the museum to the visitors themselves. But at the Legacy Museum, there is no space for visitor responses. In the EJI's approach, there is not a way to learn from fellow patrons. People must keep their thoughts to themselves or only engage in discussion with their companions. If these questions are intended for visitors to speak out, the designers do not provide the opportunity to do so inside the museum.

This absence makes one ponder: Why would the EJI not want visitors to respond to the questions inside the museum? Several possible explanations exist. First, the legal framework provides a likely explanation. As Stevenson made clear with his definition of a narrative museum, the museum presents a strong thesis, and its purpose is to convince visitors of this thesis. A participatory space with differing viewpoints undermines this clear presentation of the argument. Second, it appears that the EJI seeks to encourage visitors to translate their thoughts and feelings into tangible actions. The Legacy Museum prompts visitors to get involved both locally and nationally by providing direct access to pre-existing opportunities. A touch screen at the end of the visit poses the question: "What do I do now?" and provides a myriad of options for people to pursue. Some choices are possible to do right in the moment, including registering to vote or signing petitions to amend both the 13th Amendment and the Alabama state constitution. Other options are volunteer opportunities with organizations in one's state related to issues in the museum. The tablet provides links to the organizations' websites, allowing visitors to find or even sign up for opportunities. Not only does the Legacy Museum highlight organizations already doing the work that need support, but it allows visitors to directly tackle pressing issues.

This approach—offering select opportunities to get involved with relevant causes or organizations already leading racial justice work—is perhaps an attempt to avoid the pitfalls of other memorial museums’ injunctions to act. Some ask visitors to commit to social change in more open-ended ways. For instance, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum provides Take Action! pledge cards that ask the visitor: “What will you do to help meet the challenge of genocide today?” This overwhelming question puts the onus on visitors to generate their own solutions, but the openness of the prompt can stymie activism and lead to weak resolves. For instance, pledges from visitors include “I will never forget,” “I will pray for the cause,” “I will read the newspaper more often,” and “I will not remain silent when something needs to be said” (“Pledge Wall”). These are just a few samples, but one can glean from them the difficulty in confronting a complex issue. In the face of such a daunting question, visitors often offer responses that are too vague, offering no concrete actions, or are too focused on changing personal behavior in ways that do not address the problem. While it might be beneficial to become more informed by reading the newspaper, for instance, that act does nothing to prevent or stop genocide.

Another pitfall the EJI seems to avoid is the tendency to place the onus of social change on individuals. Of course, the Legacy Museum is directly asking individuals to act. Again, the question posed at the end is “What do I do now?” But looking closer at the options available, the Legacy Museum offers community-based solutions. A visitor might sign a petition or register to vote or volunteer with an organization, but that act joins hundreds, thousands, or millions of others. The guiding questions the Legacy Museum poses to visitors seem to support this view of community-focused change. At first glance, the questions seem to shift blame away from

individuals because the queries do not connect either historical perpetrators or public officials to present-day citizens. Questions about the criminal justice or political systems appear to offer visitors a way to distance and absolve themselves from personal actions because they do not address personal bias, prejudice, or racism. But it is precisely these systems and institutions the EJI seeks to change. The museum wants to persuade visitors of the persistent racist ideology and calls upon individuals to help address both prejudicial beliefs and the systems they uphold. Recognizing one's culpability works in favor of these larger societal changes.

The push to connect memorialization and social justice through community involvement is even more explicit at the National Memorial for Peace and Justice. Through the Monument Placement Initiative, the EJI asks individual and communities to participate in the memorialization process in a novel way. More than simply asking for a duplicate monument, counties wanting to claim a memorial must do preparatory work and partner with the EJI. As the instructions for program state:

Coalitions from counties with a Memorial Monument that are interested in claiming their monument should prioritize local efforts that begin a process of community readiness involving public education, community engagement, and raising awareness about the local history of racial terrorism and its present-day legacy in that area. (Memorial Monument Placement Initiative Team)

In this initiative, erecting memorials alone does not challenge dominant, whitewashed narratives; the preparatory work is essential to the process. Accordingly, the monument does not solely commemorate victims of lynching, but rather reflects how a community changed.

Both the monument placement and soil collection projects emphasize collaboration and dialogue. These are not solitary projects undertaken by a single motivated individual. Guidelines for both projects state the need to include African American voices (*Historical Marker 4*; *Soil Collection 5*). However, what is particularly key is that those who weaponized silence participate as well. As President and Director-Counsel of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, Sherrilyn A. Ifill, contends,

when the community is the victim, a reconciliation process should not focus only the perpetrators who were active participants in the violence. The beneficiaries of this violent white supremacy, who by their silence and acquiescence offered tacit approval of the violence, must also be key participants in the reconciliation process. (125)

Many people avoid taking responsibility for racial violence. Work by those in the perpetrating community—including memorialization or political activism—can help mend the relationship with the victimized community. The participatory process inherent in the projects requires communities to come together and listen to one another. Memorialization honors victims, but the form it takes is focused on resolving collective trauma and working to prevent future violence.

Conclusion

It is too soon to measure the success of the Legacy Museum and the National Memorial for Peace and Justice. As of this writing, the EJI is still finalizing its protocols for the Monument Placement Initiative, although the city of Alexandria, Virginia, is currently working with the EJI to claim its monument (Daniels; “Equal Justice Initiative’s Community Remembrance Project”). However, the competing legal and memorial museum frameworks raise questions about how to even measure the success of both the Legacy Museum and National Memorial for Peace and

Justice. Under the legal framework, the museum and memorial need to change public opinion in such a way that we reduce bias from the justice system. Governments would need to eliminate mass incarceration, life sentences, and the death penalty. But one must ask: Is the museum's value tied up in this effect? Would people consider the Legacy Museum or National Memorial for Peace and Justice a failure if mass incarceration persists or the death penalty remains on the books in certain states?

The memorial framework requires evaluating success differently. The museum might increase public knowledge surrounding slavery's legacy without changing laws or policies. Even if locals work together to acknowledge lynchings in their communities through the Monument Placement Initiative, courts might continue to convict African Americans disproportionately. One recent example illustrates how memorialization does not necessarily eradicate prejudice or racism. In October 2019, Tallahatchie County, Mississippi, installed a bullet-proof memorial for Emmett Till, the fourth memorial since 2008. The first was stolen, and the two others were shot (Epstein). However, these potential scenarios (and real-life example) do not mean that the Legacy Museum or the National Memorial for Peace and Justice would be considered fruitless endeavors. Beyond Stevenson's vision of memorialization, commemorating racial violence serves other purposes independent of societal change. It honors victims' lives. It acknowledges loss. It provides people a place to mourn. It rectifies a damaging societal narrative.

The success of the EJI's endeavors perhaps hinges on the degree to which people participate in the memorialization efforts. The EJI could certainly place the duplicate monuments in each county where a lynching occurred. Their staff could collect the jars of soil. But at its core, these memorialization efforts are as much about healing relationships as they are about

remembrance. The way people engage with trauma through the EJI's initiatives centers around building connections and gaining new perspectives. It matters that museum visitors listen to slave narratives or stories told by formerly incarcerated individuals. It is crucial that members of each community collaborate in claiming a monument. The EJI's process rebuilds trust and repairs fractured relationships, and this healing occurs only when everyone participates.

CHAPTER 4: CARTHAGE JAIL

In the quiet little town of Carthage, Illinois, whose population numbers less than 3,000, sits an unassuming building of great significance to members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.²⁵ Built in 1839, Carthage Jail served as a county jail for a little over 25 years (Enders 255-56). It is famous as a commemorative site for its place in LDS history, memorializing an event known as the martyrdom in which a mob killed Joseph Smith, prophet of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and his brother Hyrum.²⁶

While this dissertation begins with one of the most well-known memorial museums, an institution premised on the idea that visitors continually create the meaning of the atrocity, it ends with this small, little-known site with a heavily managed, top-down interpretation. While Carthage Jail might seem like an outlier in this study, its dynamic with visitors reveals important insights about meaning-making. This chapter examines the progressive unification and solidification of the meanings of Carthage Jail and the martyrdom, exploring the process by which diverse individual interpretations gave way to an overarching institutional one. It also explores the role visitors play in remembering and making sense of Mormonism's founder Joseph Smith, his death, and the site itself. Even when visitors help support the Church's narrative, I consider how their contributions serve as a form of participatory meaning-making. By examining what I argue is a successfully integrated trauma, this chapter adds another dimension to the study of the relationship between memorial museums and visitors.

²⁵ The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is perhaps most commonly known as the Mormon Church. Throughout this dissertation, I will employ various other terms to refer to the church, the religion, or its members, including LDS, Mormon, and Mormonism.

²⁶ To clarify, any uses of the last name Smith alone will refer to Joseph Smith.

The Martyrdom

The murder of the LDS Church's leader and his brother arose out of long-standing tension between Mormons and non-Mormons in Nauvoo, Illinois, and surrounding towns in Hancock County. The Mormon Saints moved to Nauvoo after getting pushed out of Missouri in 1838, and the city served as the headquarters of the church before Salt Lake City, Utah ("Nauvoo, Illinois"). Tension grew for many reasons, including the Saints' role in politics. As historian and scholar of Mormonism Richard Bushman elucidates, "the Mormons' growing electoral power and their vacillation between political parties made enemies" (*Rough Stone* 427). The inciting incident that led to their deaths, however, was the destruction of the *Nauvoo Expositor's* printing press and newspaper copies by the Nauvoo marshal (Oaks 876; Leonard 365). The *Nauvoo Expositor* was a newspaper started by William Law, a former member of the Church's top leadership, the First Presidency, who was excommunicated from the LDS Church on April 18, 1844 (Cook 47, 60). Law contended with Smith and the Church over the issue of polygamy and ultimately decided to "publicize[] the nature of the Prophet's polygamous teachings and practices" (68). In response to the newspaper—and believing he was legally protected to do so—Smith ordered the destruction of the press ("Nauvoo Expositor"). However, the press's destruction led to a judge in Carthage issuing a warrant for Smith and others in the Nauvoo city council for riot charges (Oaks 864). While acquitted of those charges, tensions between Mormons and non-Mormons escalated and Smith, mayor of Nauvoo, "declared the city of Nauvoo under martial law in view of the reports of mobs organizing to plunder and destroy the city" (Oaks 864-865). Despite the acquittal, the Smith brothers stood trial again for the riot

charges in Carthage, and it was while in custody that they were charged with “treason against the State of Illinois for declaring martial law in Nauvoo” (Oaks 866).

In the early evening of June 27, 1844, as they awaited trial, an armed group descended on Carthage Jail. The Smith brothers—along with the two companions who had joined them for support, John Taylor and Willard Richards—were staying in the jailer’s bedroom on the second floor when the mob rushed the building. In the chaos that ensued, someone shot Hyrum in the face through the wooden door, and he died almost instantaneously. John Taylor received bullet wounds in his leg, hip, and wrist. Willard Richards’ only wound was a graze to the ear. Smith, however, was near a window when he was shot four times and fell onto the ground outside (Leonard 396-97).

History of Martyrdom Memorialization

Over the years, interpretations shifted about both Joseph Smith’s death and the meaning of Carthage Jail. To contextualize this transformation, it is helpful to first examine initial responses. Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints lamented the Smiths immediately after their deaths, the mourners’ responses illustrating raw grief. One witness, Dr. B.W. Richmond, recalled this scene as he observed the bodies on route to the Mansion House, Smith’s residence:

women broke out in lamentations at the sight of the two rude boxes in the wagons, covered with Indian blankets. The weeping was communicated to the crowd, and spread along the vast waves of humanity extending from the Temple to the residence of the Prophet. The groans and sobs and shrieks grew deeper, and louder, till the sound

resembled the roar of a mighty tempest, or the low, deep roar of the distant tornado. (qtd. in *The Historical Record* 574)

After their bodies were prepared for public viewing, “thousands of Latter-day Saints visited the Prophet’s remains” (Brown 299). Dan Jones, who had spent the night with the Smith brothers the night before they died, wrote that

On, on in solid columns the moving throng moved steadily to and off the solemn scene to take the last long look on those they loved most dearly—like the inexhaustible current of the mighty ‘Fathers of waters’ as it for ages flows to the ocean appeared the passing current of mourning friends. (109)

While those scenes demonstrate a public outcry of grief, others memorialized the deaths in private journal entries. Those entries likewise illustrate the initial emotional response to the murders. For instance, one member, Warren Foote, wrote in his journal the day after the martyrdom that “We all felt as though the powers of darkness had overcome,” and “we mourned ‘as one mourns for his only son’” (qtd. in Bitton 3-5). Another man, Benjamin F. Cummings, wrote, “In vain would it be for me to attempt to describe the feeling of consternation, dismay, and anguish that the sad intelligence produced. Never did man feel a greater sorrow for the loss of human friends that [than] we felt for these two men” (qtd. in Bitton 5). These initial responses, both individual and collective, echo the immediate responses after other tragedies or atrocities.

While the above responses are profoundly visceral, there were more formal attempts to make sense of the deaths. Through poetry, some Latter-day Saints expressed their grief while simultaneously trying to provide meaningful frameworks to understand the murders. Even with the frameworks, the poems cannot hide the freshness of the trauma. Eliza R. Snow, a poet who

was also one of Smith's plural wives, published the poem "The Assassination of Gen'l Joseph Smith and Hyrum Smith" mere days after the brothers' deaths. Snow from the very beginning associates the brothers with the early Christian martyrs (Martyrs 303). She prefaces the poem with verses from Revelation where John sees "the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held" (*Authorized King James Version* 6.9). This connection is repeated through the poem, with verses such as "For never, since the Son of God was slain / Has blood so noble, flow'd from human vein" and "You've slain the prophets of the living God." For Snow, their deaths are second only to Jesus. Nevertheless, Snow's interpretive frameworks cannot hide her palpable anger and pain. She freely calls the perpetrators "wretched murderers! fierce for human blood," a "brutish clan," and "men with hatred." Furthermore, she directly expresses the sorrow felt by the Saints, exclaiming "Now Zion mourns—she mourns an earthly head" and "All hearts with sorrow bleed, and every eye / Is bath'd in tears—each bosom heaves a sigh / Heart broken widows' agonizing groans / Are mingled with the helpless orphans' moans!" Snow's poem lays bare her thoughts and feelings as she works through the Smith brothers' deaths. She simultaneously tries to fit their deaths into a meaningful structure by couching them in theological terms, but unbridled emotions pervade. Composer William W. Phelps wrote a poem entitled "Joseph Smith," later turned into a well-known LDS hymn called "Praise to the Man." The song, published in the Mormon newspaper *Times and Seasons* on August 1, 1844, similarly sacralizes the deaths by comparing Smith to early religious figures, although Phelps does not go as far as to compare Smith to other Christian martyrs. For example, two lines read "Faithful and true he will enter his kingdom, / Crown'd in the midst of the prophets of old." Also like Snow, Phelps condemns the death and directly mentions blood, with verses such as "Long

shall his blood, which was shed by assassins, / Stain Illinois, while the earth lauds his fame” and “Earth must atone for the blood of that man!” However, Phelps’ memorialization of Joseph Smith speaks more to the leader’s legacy in a way that is reminiscent of heroic figures. He not only calls Smith a hero directly, but includes lines such as “Hail to the Prophet,” “Praise to his mem’ry,” “Honor’d and blest be his ever great name,” and “Great is his glory.” If Snow’s poem is more a sorrowful condemnation of the murders, then Phelps’ poem is principally a laudatory dedication to the prophet. The two poets’ different interpretive frameworks demonstrate the multiplicity of meaning immediately after Smith’s death. Individual interpretations circulated as people grappled with the tragedy.

Given the weight of this largely emotional reaction in the weeks and months after the murders, the overarching significance of the site remained largely limited to Mormons. Still, Church leadership did not immediately treat Carthage Jail as a reverential or religious site. The jail remained in the county’s possession until 1866, when attorney Bryant F. Peterson purchased the site (Bateman et. al 709, 712). Peterson sold the site to James M. Browning in 1871, who lived in the renovated jail with his family. Following Mr. Browning’s death, his wife, Eliza M. Browning, sold the building to the church in 1903 (712). However, the atrocity that occurred there still set the building apart. Curious tourists—both church members and not—regularly visited the site. In the late 19th to early 20th century, some tourists mentioned in their accounts the bloodstained floorboards even when covered by carpet (Piercy 96; Jenson et al. 270; F. Mitchell 9; Esplin 53-54). Carthage thus existed in a liminal space between forgetting and remembering, common and unique.

Despite these personal interest visits, however, the institutional church formally ignored the physical site.²⁷ Leaders spoke about the prophet's death, but not at the building itself. Some references to Carthage Jail exhibit visceral pain and anger. Consider these excerpts from public addresses three different church leaders gave once the members settled in Utah. Brigham Young exclaimed in 1855 that

If they had had the power twenty or twenty-five years ago, they would have slain the Prophet Joseph as readily and with as much rejoicing as they did when they massacred him in Carthage Jail, in the State of Illinois. (320)

John Taylor contended in 1858 that

Joseph and Hyrum, with myself and Dr. Richards, were cooped up in Carthage jail by mere mob violence under the immediate eye of the Governor. We made a strong protest against the proceedings at that time. Yet he left the prisoners there to be butchered by a mob, and he knew they were coming upon them to kill them. ("People" 122)

and George A. Smith argued in 1871 that

It is said that the men who slew the Savior believed they did God service, and it is probable that the ministers, professors of religion and others, who, with blackened faces, surrounded Carthage jail and murdered, in cold blood, the Prophet and Patriarch of the Church, Joseph and Hyrum Smith, thought they also were doing God service, although

²⁷ Throughout this chapter I use the "Church" as a collective abstract actor. In some ways this is a shorthand, given the multitude of decision-makers at Church headquarters. More importantly, for all intents and purposes The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints functions as a collective actor. While different departments (e.g. History, Missionary) make decisions, the top leadership (principally the First Presidency, consisting of the President and his two counselors) gives all final approval. When policy is released to the public, members refer to "the Church" making a decision.

they were guilty of the most brutal and disgraceful murders ever perpetrated on the earth.

(215)

It is clear that the martyrdom pervaded leaders' thoughts (and presumably members') even if they did not commemorate at Carthage Jail. But if church leaders spoke about the site and invoked the event publicly, why did the institution not memorialize the physical site?

The Church's neglect of the jail in the immediate aftermath of the martyrdom can, on a basic level, be explained pragmatically. The Saints continued to struggle in Illinois, and they did not have the luxury to commemorate either Joseph or Hyrum Smith's deaths in the state. Not only did their leader die, which led to the question of prophetic succession, but members faced continued persecution. Joseph and Hyrum Smith's deaths did not resolve the relationship between Mormons and non-Mormons. Church members lost the political power they held in Nauvoo. Not only did Smith serve as the city's mayor and lieutenant general, but more importantly, the city charter was repealed on January 24, 1845 (Leonard 464, 467).²⁸ Anti-Mormon rhetoric persisted, which escalated to violence as "vigilantes began burning homes of Mormons at outlying farms and made calls for a total Mormon removal" (Reeve 80). This continually devolving relationship ultimately led to the Mormon exodus west as early as February 1846 (80). Once the Mormons migrated to Utah, Carthage Jail could not become a commemorative site because members were simply were not in the region. Once settled in Utah, Mormons by and large isolated themselves from the rest of the United States up until the late 1800s. (Neilson 7, 14-15).

²⁸ The Nauvoo Charter established the city of Nauvoo in December 1840. This charter "authorized the creation of a city council, consisting initially of a mayor, four aldermen, and nine council members; and a municipal court with jurisdiction over local cases and the power to issue writs of habeas corpus. The charter also included provisions for a university and a local militia." ("Nauvoo Charter").

While these practical concerns no doubt played a role, there are more compelling explanations as to why the Church ignored the physical site of Carthage Jail for many years. First, the Church's leadership structure amplified the personal grief associated with Carthage. Joseph F. Smith, who was Hyrum Smith's son and Joseph Smith's nephew, served as the LDS Church's sixth prophet. In 1906, he visited Carthage Jail and, according to his traveling companion Preston Nibley, remarked, "I despise this place. It harrows up my feelings to come here" (qtd. in Cannon 6). According to historian Brian Q. Cannon, "These feelings may help explain the Church's initial failure to develop the site after it was purchased" (6). Indeed, it was not until 1903—almost 60 years after the martyrdom—that the Church even purchased the site (6). It follows that if Joseph F. Smith felt so negatively about Carthage Jail, he would not allocate funds for its development. Second, that the Church did not develop Carthage as a memorial site arises from the institution's relationship with history. The Church initially did not consider the physical historical sites—violent or not—associated with the early religion and its founding to be significant. Geographer Michael Madsen argues that "Historical memory remained an important element of Mormon identity; but most within the faith apparently felt little need to commemorate that sacred history in place, and acquiring important historical sites was not a high priority for Church officials" ("Sanctification" 232-33). In some ways, this was a byproduct of physical distance. As Madsen explains elsewhere, "the lack of physical access to these sites for such a long period of time contributed to an emphasis on the 'what' of Mormon history as opposed to the 'where'" (*Mormon Meccas* 6). Essentially, the martyrdom event was important, but the location where it occurred was not.

In the late 1930s, the Church finally pursued renovations of Carthage Jail. Almost 100 years later, the Church came to care deeply about Carthage, signaling a dramatic transformation. What spurred this change in focus regarding the site? This shift is part of a larger change in how Church leaders viewed historical sites. While an emphasis on the spiritual significance of the sites arose from LDS leader Gordon B. Hinckley's influence, especially after he became President of the Church in 1995, the importance of historical sites emerged from a desire to use the locations for missionary purposes (Madsen, "Sanctification" 234, 237-40). Like the Church's other historical sites, the restorations corresponded with efforts to use Carthage for proselytizing purposes. In 1934, missionaries led tours of the jail for the first time, and in 1938, restoration efforts began (Cannon 7-8). Over time, visitation increased, and as a result, the Church constructed the visitor's center, dedicating it in 1963 (10-11).

The transformation of Carthage into a proselytizing site points to the Church repairing its relations with American society as a whole. Other exhibitionary events helped, in part, to improve this relationship. The LDS Church participated in "world's fairs and expositions to further promote a positive Mormon image" (Madsen, "Sanctification" 233). The expositions were key for Mormon rebranding efforts and "lessons learned through active involvement in over a dozen American world's fairs and expositions paved the way for the Church's twentieth-century visitors' centers and exhibits program" (Neilson 11). The purchase and development of historical sites arose out of those events. By and large, these events were a success. Historian Thomas Alexander argues that by the 1930s, the LDS Church and its members had successfully integrated into American society, having previously lived in "relative isolation" (307-308). There was greater—and certainly more civil—interaction. As Alexander continues, "Mormons could

now freely reflect upon both the similarities and the differences between their beliefs and those of others. Gentiles too were interested in the development of the Church and could read about and work with their Mormon neighbors with much less rancor than had existed before” (310). Accordingly, the Church transforming Carthage Jail into a missionary site and restoring it a few years later points to a dissolving of tensions.

Efforts to proselytize and, at a larger level, improve the Church’s relationship with non-Mormons continued in later years. For example, at the dedication of the visitor’s center in 1963, Howard W. Hunter, the prophet at the time, announced that “there has never been any hatred on the part of the Mormons toward the people of the Carthage community” (qtd. in Cannon 11). It is categorically untrue that the Mormons never expressed negative or hateful feelings towards those in Carthage. Eliza R. Snow in the before-mentioned poem calls the mob “wretched murd’rers” literally days after the brothers’ deaths. More significantly, “Mormon anger at times took the form of oaths of vengeance” (Brown 290). In just one example, one member, Allen Smith Stout, said that “I there and then resolved in my mind that I would never let an opportunity slip unimproved of avenging their blood upon the enemies of The Church of Jesus Christ...when I see one of the men who persuaded them to give up to be tried, I feel like cutting their throats” (qtd. in Brown 290). There is clear, overarching evidence that members of the Church harbored negative, violent—and indeed, hateful—feelings. However, Hunter buried the hatchet, so to speak, even if it meant misrepresenting the past.

Integrated Trauma

It has now been 175 years since the murder of the Smith brothers, and by all accounts, their deaths no longer traumatize members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. If

people previously felt negatively toward the site, those emotions remain in the distant past. Carthage Jail is a popular Church history site, especially given its close proximity to Nauvoo—the two places are only about 20 miles apart. Looking through visitors’ Instagram photos of Carthage Jail between 2013 and 2018, reactions contrast strongly from those in the late 1800s and early 1900s before the Church bought the site or instituted its formal programming. Not a single person called Carthage Jail close to “hateful” or “cursed” as they did in early visits (Cannon 2, 4). There are those who still expressed sadness, posting observations like “It is still sad after all the years gone by” (jillgollaher) and “It has been a solemn morning” (kathleencardon). Overall, however, these somber expressions are few and far between. People recorded other, more positive responses. Some are undoubtedly vague, whether noting their visit was indescribable, such as “Words cannot express the feeling you get upon walking these grounds and within these walls” (mslarkin1) or just commenting on a change in feeling experienced during the visit, such as “This jail has a very overwhelming feeling when you walk into it” (Mallory N., qtd. in illuminate_trips) and “Definitely an emotional place—I could feel it as soon as we turned the corner and the building came into view” (shansummer). Other visitors are more precise, noting that they felt peace, were on sacred or hallowed ground, or noticed the presence of the Holy Spirit at the site. As a whole, visitation at Carthage Jail is remarkably different from those early years. While there is a range of expressions, the feelings are rather general or coalesce around spiritual impressions. More importantly, the site is no longer a trigger of acute pain or even vengeance. There might be sadness, but there is not sorrow.

Carthage Jail’s transformation into a proselytizing hub, leaders’ rewriting of historical narratives, and visitors’ lack of grief seems surprising given the early responses to Joseph

Smith's death. The shift, however, signals that the Church made sense of the death of Joseph Smith. It was only possible by closing the wound and changing the meaning of both the event and the site. Other sites discussed in this dissertation commemorate traumatic events not yet healed; they are still open wounds causing people significant emotional pain. The 9/11 Memorial Museum in particular illustrates how the memorialization of the September 11th terrorist attacks is an attempt to structure traumatic memories into narratives to help visitors make sense of the trauma, moving from senseless pain to a manageable past. However, Carthage Jail provides an alternative perspective. Given this powerful shift in perceptions, important questions arise: How did the LDS Church make meaningful sense of the trauma at Carthage Jail? What limitations result from fitting trauma into interpretive, narrative frameworks? How can visitors participate in the meaning-making process when there is so much institutional control, and what does this dynamic reveal?

Theologized Trauma

Scholars offer two broad explanations of Mormon historical site development that can help explain The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' efforts to integrate the trauma of the martyrdom at Carthage Jail into a meaningful narrative. Both relate to community and the desire to belong to—and connect with—a particular group. In the first view, memorializing Church history sites helps bolster a sense of collective Mormon identity (Madsen, "Sanctification" 229-230).²⁹ For example, the "pilgrimage" to eastern and midwestern church history sites in New York, Vermont, Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois creates a relationship to one's heritage—whether that is through physically engaging with the space or metaphorically

²⁹ See also Kathleen Flake's article "Re-placing Memory: Latter-day Saint Use of Historical Monuments and Narrative in the Early Twentieth Century."

connecting to religious forebears. Such ritual practices are somewhat common in Mormonism. For example, the pioneer trek that Mormons between the age of 14 and 18 participate in during the summer is a strong effort to create a connection to one's religious heritage. Youth are supposed to "walk in the pioneers' footsteps" to inscribe the past with one's body.³⁰ In the second view, the Church framed its history (and, later, memorialized its historical sites) in such a way to help assimilate into mainstream American society (Foote 254-55). As Kenneth Foote argues, "By drawing parallels with other groups that came to America to flee religious persecution, the Mormons could frame their past in quintessentially American terms as the pursuit and defense of religious freedom" (254-55). In other words, even violent tragedies can be transformed into the fight for religious freedom. Through this meaning-making process, members' Mormon and American identity merged.

When Carthage Jail is viewed as yet another Mormon history site, one can explain the integration efforts using these two explanations of the Church's memorialization process. Carthage Jail becomes an example of the fight for religious freedom or, more broadly, the site of a significant event for members related to their founding prophet. But there is a more important way in which trauma in the LDS Church is integrated into a meaningful narrative, which is to theologize the past and its traumatic content.

³⁰ In many ways, there is little difference between LDS conceptions and commemorations of both trauma and triumph. Trauma is frequently framed in terms of triumph, evidenced by the assertion that exaltation follows after enduring "adversity" and "afflictions." Matthew Bowman contends that God's answer to Joseph Smith's pleas in while in Liberty Jail "invested Mormon suffering with meaning: rather than stymie God's will, tribulation revealed it... Through an act of imaginative will, suffering became deeply ingrained in the Mormon identity" (64-65). Mormon heritage is often a story of persevering through persecution and struggles. There is little difference in feelings towards Palmyra, NY where Joseph Smith had the First Vision and Missouri where the government issued an extermination order because they both illustrate God's hand in the church.

In one sense, theologizing history means infusing the past with religious meaning or suggesting heavenly influence. Reflecting on one's life might involve pointing out "God's hand" in fortuitous events, thus attributing success or protection to divine providence. There is an overarching sense that God plays a role in how things play out rather than events transpiring by random chance. In another sense, theologizing history involves connecting religious doctrines to key events. We see historical theologizing in Christianity as a whole. Certain core events matter for Christian doctrine—the Immaculate Conception, the Virgin Birth, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection. They create the belief in a human God—Jesus—who died for people's sins and rose again to save humanity in the next life from eternal damnation. But for some Christians, beliefs do not rely on their literal occurrence. Certain stories might teach core values, but these adherents do not consider the narratives historical events.

As part of this larger tradition, Mormonism likewise links history and theology. But in this case, there is arguably an inescapable connection between the two. Adherents' beliefs crucially depend on an event's literal occurrence. Mormon Studies scholar Terryl Givens argues that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has a "history-based theology" wherein "LDS doctrine as a whole is rooted inescapably in history; its claims to divine authority and restored truth is entirely dependent on the narratives of LDS origins" (222). While the story of the religion's founding contains core doctrines, Mormonism's reliance on its history means that, as Givens contends, "challenges to orthodox accounts of the Church's past strike at the very heart of the faith" (222). Mormonism hinges on the historicity of the First Vision: If God and Jesus did not visit Joseph Smith in 1820 and tell him that the one true Church was not on the earth, then an angel did not come to him and reveal where the Golden Plates were hidden, and if the Golden

Plates were not real, then the Book of Mormon—which is believed to be a translation of the plates—is not divine scripture. Certain fundamental beliefs link together like upright dominoes: if one tenet falls down, they all do.

More importantly, the Church’s founding story links to a larger history: biblical. As historian of religion Stephen Taysom explains, “A central tenet of the Mormon faith was the doctrine of ‘restoration.’ Smith believed God had called him to restore the true ancient religion” (117). For members of the LDS Church, it is not merely that past biblical events inspire doctrine; rather, it is that Joseph Smith restored the Christ’s church from ancient days. Mormons believe doctrines like priesthood authority were lost from the Great Apostasy and were brought back in the modern day through Joseph Smith. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, then, sees itself as a continuation of the original church rather than a new institution. In this continuation, Joseph Smith became written into a divine historical narrative. As Richard Bushman explains,

Joseph Smith’s revelations...made new sacred narratives that were themselves the foundation of belief. The visions of Enoch and Moses were added to similar visions of Nephi and Ether in the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon throughout is composed of happenings wherein God directed, reproved, punished and redeemed his people. To all these were added Joseph Smith’s own experiences, the discovered and translation of the Book of Mormon, the First Vision, the restoration of the priesthoods, and a series of visions and revelations thereafter. (*Joseph Smith* 187)

Not only do the Book of Mormon and the Bible connect, but Joseph Smith’s life and prophetic work expands the narrative.

This entanglement between history and theology helps explain the specific components of the Church's present-day interpretation of its historic sites. Places like the Sacred Grove (the location of Joseph Smith's First Vision) and the Hill Cumorah (where the Golden Plates were purportedly hidden) are significant for their role in the founding of the religion, while other sites like Martin's Cove in Wyoming (associated with the pioneers) provide opportunities for faith-affirming stories that demonstrate divine providence or religious sacrifice. These historic sites "serve not only to connect Church members worldwide to a shared history but, as sacred space, to a shared theology and worldview as well" (Madsen, "Sanctification" 230). When one visits these historic sites, the tours emphasize spiritual elements or use secular topics to teach certain religious beliefs. For example, at the blacksmith building in Nauvoo, the missionary guide demonstrated horseshoe making, but used the process as a metaphor for God shaping people through trials. This is a minor example—and the blacksmith building was not the site of any significant Church history events—but the same principle holds true across Church owned properties. The institution uses history to strengthen members' spiritual conversion by drawing upon core beliefs or testifying of certain doctrines.

The Church extends this historical theologizing to violent and traumatic events. Persecution and attacks against Joseph Smith are heavily discussed and arguably a significant part of Mormon history. For example, an oft-related story is when a mob dragged Smith out of his house in the middle of the night, tarring and feathering him. Besides framing the story as one showing persistent persecution against the prophet, the story is also used as an illustration of Smith's character—the next morning he gave a sermon at church where some members of the

mob were in attendance. The Church approaches Liberty Jail, a site in Missouri where Smith and several companions were imprisoned on charges of treason, in a similar way.

The Church desires members to draw from Smith's time in Liberty Jail the messages, quite simplified, that we receive divine assistance during challenges and that suffering is an opportunity for growth. In short, suffering becomes meaningful. To accomplish this goal, church leaders, somewhat ironically, decontextualize the relevant scriptures in order to present a widely applicable message. For all the Church's emphasis on history, this decontextualizing is not an uncommon practice. Smith's pleadings in Liberty Jail were concerned, as historian Matthew Bowman explains, with the "repeated failures of Zion." It was not about his current conditions or continual personal struggles, but rather, "Why...had God allowed the work to fail?" (64). But this specific context is completely elided in addresses by Church leaders. By detaching the revelation from the specific context, the event becomes useful to members.

Church leaders present these current narratives through public addresses in the semi-annual global meeting called General Conference. With one exception, these particular narratives regarding suffering appeared in LDS leaders' messages in the 1960s, which aligns with the establishment of Liberty Jail as an official church history site.³¹ Previously, when leaders mentioned Liberty Jail in their public addresses to members, they frequently focused on the Priesthood or, beginning in the 1920s, on the idea that revelation continued even in the bleakest circumstances. In these more contemporary addresses, leaders often extrapolate Joseph Smith's

³¹ This exception is LDS apostle and U.S. senator Reed Smoot's address in 1902 in which he contends, after quoting D&C 122:7, "I believe with all my heart that our trials are given us for the same purpose. We are to be a tried people. We are to be thrice tried, as the Saints of old. I believe that all trials are given to us for experience, just as the Lord permitted them to be given to Joseph in the early days of the church" (19-20).

experiences in the jail to individuals' various struggles and frequently quote LDS scripture Doctrine and Covenants 121:7-8, which reads "My son, peace be unto thy soul; thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment; And then, if thou endure it well, God shall exalt thee on high" or Doctrine and Covenants 122:7, "all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good."

Some of the Church's didactic exhibitions are better at providing historical context. A recent online exhibition *Light in the Darkness, Liberty in a Jail* posted in 2017 provides historical background to the imprisonment and the state of the church in Missouri. At several points, the exhibition even mentions the difficulty in creating "Zion." More importantly, it connects Smith's prayer with his concerns about the project. Still, there is a more expansive interpretation. For example, one takeaway message for God's response to Joseph is stated on the website as "Light in the darkness. Liberty in a jail. Through this revelation, God blessed Joseph Smith with courage to endure. He declared to His faithful children that He would never forget them—that He would always be with them in their trials." Furthermore, the Church emphasizes the harsh conditions and Smith's suffering there. Near the top of the website are large pictures of the jail with its straw floor, thick walls, and small, iron-barred windows. Users can read firsthand descriptions of the jail's conditions, found under headings such as "Liberty Jail was Grim," "Liberty Jail Was Dark" and "Liberty Jail Was Cold." Repeatedly, violence against Smith is used to show his resilience in the face of opposition and to illustrate God's presence, even in one's darkest moments.

Another site of violence—Hawn's Mill—is similarly theologized. In 1838, a Missouri militia descended upon a Mormon community, attacking a blacksmith's shop and killing

seventeen people in what became known as the Hawn's Mill Massacre (Rogers 248). In some ways, it is odd that the Church memorializes Hawn's Mill. It is true that innocent people died, but the Missouri militia repeatedly warned the community to move away ("Blessings"). Smith knew of the danger and told members to leave, but Jacob Hawn did not deliver the message (Lloyd). Despite the fact that the deaths were arguably preventable and the site provides an instance in which the Mormons did not prevail, the Church found a way to make sense of the event and use the tragedy for other purposes. In 1997, LDS leader Henry B. Eyring gave an address titled "Finding Safety in Counsel" in which he used the massacre to teach about following prophetic counsel. He prefaces the story by arguing that "authorized servants are always charged with warning the people, telling them the way to safety." After explaining that Hawn did not communicate Joseph Smith's directive, Eyring concludes that "In our own time, we have been warned with counsel of where to find safety from sin and from sorrow."

Abstracting the tragedy at Hawn's Mill into a message about following Church leaders again demonstrates that the Church theologizes traumatic events as a way to heal. More than imbuing the story with religious meaning, however, Eyring also de-historicizes the event in order to theologize it. What important context did Eyring leave out to teach about following Church leaders? That Jacob Hawn was not even a member of the LDS Church (Lloyd). Beyond this glaring omission, the story of the massacre can be reduced to a simple message devoid of historical details—as long as it helps convey the linking of doctrine and history. As a whole,

Church sites and accompanying stories become useful when they are boiled down to simple takeaway messages that teach certain doctrines or values.³²

In some ways, then, it is surprising that the Church could theologize the trauma at Carthage Jail so effectively. Smith did *not* escape the persecution of his enemies as he did so many other times. Smith was *not* protected, despite following God. In fact, the event counters the message at other LDS historical sites that God protects us or that we can make it through difficult events by turning to heavenly sources. But the Church did not need to grapple with death in and of itself. Rather, it was specifically the troubling issue that a mob successfully murdered the *prophet*—the founder and leader of the religion—at Carthage Jail that the Church needed to find a way to make Smith’s death meaningful. As historian Samuel Brown argues,

For Smith to die at the hands of a mob threatened the entire edifice of Mormonism. The charismatic prophet who had revealed an all-encompassing plan of death conquest had been killed by a band of possibly inebriated vigilantes in a frontier jail. No echelon of angels had intervened; no act of nature had interfered. The prophet had died. (287-88)

The Church certainly could not ignore the violence at Carthage, nor could it merely mourn Smith’s death. There had to be a larger purpose behind the tragedy to justify the loss.

Given the potentially faith-shattering event at Carthage Jail, the Church made sense of the martyrdom in a way that made it essential to Mormonism. In other words, instead of collapsing

³² Not surprisingly, violence is only useful to members of the LDS Church when it aligns with a victimhood narrative. When Mormons are the perpetrators, events resist theologizing. The most prominent example is the Mountain Meadows Massacre, a bloody atrocity in 1857 in which some Mormons in southern Utah killed over a hundred people en route to California (Walker et al. ix). This massacre was completely unjustified (Turley 14). In handling this shameful massacre, the Church turned first to obliteration and later to designation (Foote 261). While the Church erected a memorial in 1999 and issued a formal apology in 2007, it is certainly not highlighted by the Church or included in itineraries for most Mormon tourists. Mountain Meadows is a trauma that resists religious explanations or justifications.

the religion's belief system, the death came to support its tenets. The transformation in meaning occurred as the martyrdom became a "founding trauma" for the religion, which Dominick LaCapra defines as the "trauma that is transformed or transvalued into a legitimating myth of origins" (*Writing* xii). Other founding traumas include, according to LaCapra, biblical stories like the Fall or Jesus's life and crucifixion, or collective events like the American Revolution and September 11th (xiii). These traumas can be closely linked to both personal and social identity. As LaCapra explains, founding traumas "paradoxically become the valorized or intensely cathected basis of identity for an individual or a group" (23). In the case of the martyrdom, trauma affected the social identity of the church and its members. As the group dealt with the extraordinary event, it worked to define itself. It helped develop what it means to belong to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, what claims it holds to possess divine truth, and what position the religion maintains in relation to the rest of society.

In some ways, the martyrdom supports a pre-existing origin story—the First Vision—and accordingly the Church's view of its religious authority and divine legitimacy. From this origin story, Mormons believe that they possess the "fulness of the gospel" and that they belong to the Church that Jesus established because Joseph Smith restored it in modern times ("Restoration" 136). The martyrdom feeds into the narrative of the Church's founding because it conveys the message that Smith died to witness its truth. Accordingly, the death of the prophet is used to legitimize key beliefs in Mormonism—such as the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon or Joseph Smith's prophetic mantle. We see this legitimization in official LDS materials that continually emphasize the necessity of the martyrdom. In some religious instructional materials used to teach religion courses to college-age students in the LDS Church's education system,

there is an explicit declaration that Joseph Smith's teachings are true precisely because he was killed. For example, in the 1981 Doctrine and Covenants teacher's manual, it argues that "pretenders' do not generally lay down their lives for a false cause. Martyrdom, in addition to sincerity and honesty, stamps the martyr's cause with truth" (Church Educational System, *Doctrine and Covenants* 108). Other manuals argue for the necessity of Joseph Smith sealing his testimony through death. In a 2001 Doctrine and Covenants student manual, it argues that "A testator is one who leaves a will or testament. The will is valid only after the testator's death" (Church Educational System, *Church History* 350). The First Vision and martyrdom become intertwined with one another as Smith's death verifies the Restoration for members.

But the martyrdom, as a founding trauma, also created another myth of origin. LaCapra explains elsewhere that "a crisis or catastrophe that disorients and may devastate the collectivity or the individual may uncannily become the basis of an origin or renewed origin myth that authorizes acts or policies that appeal to it for justification" ("Trauma, History" 395). If the First Vision was the origin of the religion itself, the martyrdom not only sustains that myth but also helped usher in a new era in which the Church survived beyond its founder. It is true that the martyrdom "threatened the entire edifice of Mormonism" and the question of prophetic succession led to splinter groups, but the majority of members stayed in the original organization (Brown 287). That the religious institution survived the martyrdom demonstrated to members that their religion was not man-made, but divinely appointed.

Coding Blood

A key part of theologizing the martyrdom came from how the Church interpreted over time the spilled blood. This is especially true of Carthage Jail, although the blood extended to

both brothers' blood staining their coffins as they laid in repose. The coding of the blood today is not as one might expect. At many memorial museums, objects—including human remains—are crucial tools. As Paul Williams explains, "Memorial museums...are acutely aware of the role of primary artifacts, not only because they give displays a powerful appeal, but also because in many cases they exist as tangible proof in the face of debate about, or even denial of, what transpired" (25). There is an overarching "idea of objects 'revealing the truth'" (27). The objects at the 9/11 Memorial Museum are an especially pertinent example of this use of objects. In the face of conspiracy theorists, the museum packs their exhibits with twisted metal and dust-coated remnants.

Given the importance of artifacts, it is compelling that the LDS Church completely ignores the blood that spilled out of Hyrum Smith as he lay dead in Carthage Jail. On a practical level, there does not seem to be visible blood on the floor boards anymore, despite early claims that "the wood in the jailer's bedroom was stained too deeply by blood to ever be washed clean" (Cannon 10). Furthermore, the Church does not use Carthage Jail to persuade people about martyrdom; there is not a denial movement. However, the de-emphasis on the traces of blood was not always the case. As Brian Q. Cannon explains, some visitors soon after the martyrdom "went out of their way to see the bullet holes and bloodstains" (3). Seeing the blood (and other traces of violence) did not merely fulfill a morbid curiosity. For some, the site served as an evidentiary witness. For instance, one missionary, David M. Stuart, wrote to Brigham Young in 1876 about his experience visiting the jail, telling him "Mr. Ferris was with us and pointed out the ball holes in the door, the window from which Smith fell, and the well where he expired; all stand as witnesses of the dastardly deed. A chill of horror past over me the while I

remained in the blood stained place” (4-5). Here, Stuart’s comments align with Williams’ argument about the power of objects in truth telling.

Blood also served in some ways as a warning to the perpetrators. While grief was understandably the initial reaction to the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum Smith, especially to his family and friends, that was not the only emotion swirling around the site. Anger and vengeance were strong responses following the event as well. As Brown argues,

Spilled blood and its capacity to mark or accuse a particular place became a sustained metaphor in Mormon discussions about the meaning of martyrdom and God’s response to it... With blood as a witness, the bereaved hoped that their cries for Providential intervention would meet with success. (291-92)

Returning to Eliza R. Snow’s poem, we see that she repeatedly warns the nation that it will pay for the prophet and his brother’s death. For instance, she declares “Once loved America! what can atone / For the pure blood of innocence, thou’st sown?” and “Shades of our patriotic fathers! Can it be, / Beneath your blood-stain’d flag of liberty; / The firm supporters of our country’s cause, / Are butchered men, defam’d by hellish lies.” The theme of divine retribution appears forcefully in the final stanza, where she announces “Ye Saints! be still, and know that God is just — / With steadfast purpose in his promised trust:/Girded with sackcloth, own his mighty hand, / And wait his judgement on this guilty land!” There was an overarching belief that God would not let the martyrdom stand without retribution. The blood, the saints believed, would “incite[] God to vengeance” and they proclaimed this message to the public (Brown 289, 92).

Over time, though, the blood assumed a more important role beyond tangible evidence. Leaders used blood to sanctify Joseph Smith, and, to a lesser degree Hyrum Smith, coding the

blood in a way that theologized the prophet and his brother's deaths. It is true that the sanctification of Smith's death occurred without references to blood. Some leaders compared the prophet to Jesus himself. For example, less than thirty years after the martyrdom, leader George A. Smith gave the before-cited address in which he compared the mob to those who killed Jesus (215) and John Taylor similarly compared the murders to Christ's crucifixion ("Object" 92). However, as a whole, blood played a significant role in the process. There were two key meanings coded onto the blood to accomplish this goal. The first was a theologizing of blood that closely resembled veneration. As Christopher Blythe, a scholar of American religious history, argues, "With his death, a cult of the prophet quickly emerged" (7). Creating relics—including those related to blood—was one key way this veneration occurred. Blythe explains that "Bloodstained wooden planks from the 'rough oak boxes' that transported their corpses from the assassination site in Carthage, Illinois back to Nauvoo were fashioned into so-called martyrdom canes" (12). Like relics in other Christian sects, such as vials of Mary's blood or pieces of the cross, some people believed that the bloodstained objects contained special powers. For example, LDS Church leader Heber C. Kimball proclaimed about the martyrdom canes that "the day will come when there will be multitudes who will be healed and blessed through the instrumentality of those canes, and the devil cannot overcome those who have them, in consequence of their faith and confidence in the virtues connected with them" (qtd. in Blythe 12). The idea that bloodstained objects could be relics also applied to artifacts from Carthage Jail. Some visitors took bloodstained pieces of wood home with them (Cannon 4). For example, Helen Mar Whitney—one of Smith's plural wives—visited Carthage Jail with some companions and recorded in 1883 that "As we stood by the well-curb where Smith fell, Horace picked up a small chip

covered with blood, and which he still had in his possession, though the blood is hardly discernible” (255). Relics allowed Smith’s religious importance and power to continue beyond the grave.

The veneration supported by the bloodstained relics served an immediate purpose for the Church. Not only did people believe that the objects provided services like healing for the living, but Blythe also argues that the relics “served as physical memorials to the prophet’s charisma” and that they “were part of the larger project of preserving Smith’s influence and associating an individual or organization with him” (12). By and large, this connection to Smith was linked to the issue of prophetic succession (12-13). Theologizing blood helped in the transition process and worked to legitimize the LDS Church when it was at an unstable crossroads. There was an immediate need to make the Prophet’s blood meaningful. But this particular meaning of the blood did not last, and relics are far removed from contemporary Mormonism that emphatically rejects veneration. Admittedly, some members and leaders called Carthage Jail a shrine even in the late 1930 and early 1940s. For example, Joseph McRae, who restored the site for the Church, said that “A few years after the martyrdom, it was abandoned as a jail and left as a shrine for the death of the martyrs” (34). Likewise, leader Stephen L. Richards argued that “Carthage Jail is a shrine like unto Calvary” and that “the day will come when the righteous of the earth will look to it and make their pilgrimages to it in worshipful veneration of the ‘man who communed with Jehovah’” (48). However, the religion became defiantly anti-shrine, even to the point of being condescending toward other faith traditions (Madsen, “Sanctification” 235). In 1966, for instance, LDS leader Bruce R. McConkie stated that “shrines play no part in true worship” and argued that members do not go to their places of worship “because some holy being once stood

there, or because a bone or hank of hair of a dead person has been exhumed and is there displayed” (qtd. in Madsen, “Sanctification” 235). Church leadership abandoned this theologizing of the blood because it contested the religious institution’s later belief system.

However, the second form of theologizing of blood that coded it as a symbolic witness was much more lasting. As we have seen, members from the very beginning often compared Smith to early Biblical martyrs. For instance, in Doctrine and Covenants, a verse written mere months after their deaths reads: “He lived great, and he died great in the eyes of God and his people; and like most of the Lord’s anointed in ancient times, has sealed his mission and his works with his own blood; and so has his brother Hyrum” (135.3). The sanctification through blood occurs most obviously through the frequent use of the idea that Joseph Smith “sealed his testimony with his blood.” In fact, the chapter in the Doctrine and Covenants dealing with the martyrdom mentioned above, Section 135, begins with this line: “To seal the testimony of this book and the Book of Mormon, we announce the martyrdom of Joseph Smith the Prophet, and Hyrum Smith the Patriarch” (1). This verbiage is used one other time in the chapter, in verse 7 which reads:

their innocent blood on the floor of Carthage jail is a broad seal affixed to ‘Mormonism’ that cannot be rejected by any court on earth, and their innocent blood on the escutcheon of the State of Illinois, with the broken faith of the State as pledged by the governor, is a witness to the truth of the everlasting gospel that all the world cannot impeach.

In this coding, blood became a marker of an innocent sacrifice. Not only was Smith sanctified through this connection to Biblical prophets, but the spilled blood itself worked to testify of

certain religious beliefs. The blood was not evidence of death but instead used as evidence of truth.

Over time, the coding of the blood as a symbolic witness was so important that the theological narrative it created became more valuable than the artifact itself. As such, the emphasis on the blood's materiality fell by the wayside as the focus switched from the martyrdom itself to the legacy of Joseph Smith. As discussed earlier, Howard W. Hunter dedicated the visitor center at Carthage Jail and announced that the site was "not [a] reminder[] of a crime," thus dismissing the significance of any physical evidence (qtd. in Cannon 11). To put the nail in the coffin, Loren C. Dunn, as head of the Nauvoo Restoration Inc., gave an address in 1989 wherein he expressed that "Smith's testimony of the Savior found on the monuments leading to the Carthage Jail is more significant than the stain on the floor that some think is the blood of Hyrum" (qtd. in Cannon 15). Dunn's comment is somewhat odd, given the oft-repeated refrain that Smith sealed his testimony with blood and that it was necessary for him to do so. But the remark seems to suggest that the sacralization of the space was so successful the literal blood—the focus of the meaning-making effort—is not even necessary anymore. During tours today, guides do not mention the blood. While visiting Carthage Jail in October 2017, blood in the room came up twice during five tours, but both were prompted by visitors. In one instance, a child asked the missionaries giving the tour about the blood, and the missionaries simply responded that somebody cleaned it up—directly countering past assertions about the impossibility of removing the stain. The other instance involved a mother pointing to some spots on the ground and asking her kids, "Do you see the blood there and there?" These were minor instances, however, and did not figure significantly into the tour.

Visitors seem to follow this focus on Smith's life over his demise. The most common photograph posted by Carthage Jail visitors on Instagram is the statue of Joseph and Hyrum Smith outside the jail. The statue, called the "Brothers Statue," was designed by Dee J. Bawden and erected in 1989 following a renovation of the jail and visitor center complex ("LDS Church"). The statue depicts Hyrum Smith standing slightly behind his brother, gripping his arm, while Joseph Smith holds the Book of Mormon in his hand. To be sure, many visitors probably take their photograph by the statue because it is centrally located and is more easily photographable because it is outdoors, not in the cramped building. But it is staggering just how many people took photos of the statue versus subjects related to his death. For example, when analyzing 632 Instagram photos tagged of the jail posted between August 8, 2013 and November 27, 2018, I recorded 185 photos of the statue (29%), 127 photos of the exterior of Carthage featuring the window Smith fell through (20%), 82 photos of the window from inside the jailor's bedroom (13%), and 75 photos of the bullet hole door (12%). Interestingly, the trend indicates that the more the subject directly relates to violence, the less people photograph it.

As a whole, the successful recoding and the dismissal of the physical evidence of death—especially the blood—suggests a healing of the emotional wound. When the two leaders died, their blood was central to the memorial and meaning-making process. But as time went on and physical trauma was sacralized and integrated into a theological narrative, reducing the pain of Smith's death. To not even mention the blood at the jail—a 180-degree reversal from earlier practices—illustrates a transformation in how members feel about Smith's death.

Forgetting Strategically

Through the coding process, the theological meaning of blood became more important than the physical stain. This coding process is in some ways part of a larger process of intentional forgetting at Carthage Jail. All memory—let alone memorialization—involves both what is remembered and what is forgotten. Strategic forgetting is part of the memory process. As Marita Sturken argues, “The ‘culture of amnesia’ actually involves the generation of memory in new forms, a process often misinterpreted as forgetting. Indeed, memory and forgetting are co-constitutive processes; each is essential to the other’s existence” (*Tangled Memories* 2). At a base level, in order to remember, we need to forget. More importantly, remembering—and forgetting—is a process of *creation*. As Sturken explains, “memory is a narrative rather than a replica of an experience that can be retrieved and relived.” In this narration, “cultural memories are constructed as they are recollected,” and memory functions as a “form of interpretation” (7). This construction of memory serves, she contends, “important needs for catharsis and healing” (17). At Carthage Jail, the Church created a memory of the martyrdom that helped people heal from the trauma of the prophet and his brother’s deaths. Sturken explains that, according to Sigmund Freud, “forgetting is an active process of repression, one that demands vigilance and is designed to protect the subject from anxiety, fear, jealousy, and other difficult emotions” (8).

What was forgotten at Carthage Jail in order to heal? What anxiety or fear was the Church protecting itself against, and why was it necessary? By and large, it was the important context—the destruction of the *Nauvoo Expositor*—that led to the brothers’ deaths. The larger context draws into question the preventability of the martyrdom. In order to create—and perpetuate—a narrative that Smith died an innocent man, the Church largely elides the legal

events that preceded the imprisonment. As Kenneth Foote insists, to frame Mormon history as an American story means that the Church had to “shade over the fact that Joseph Smith and his Latter-day Saints had in many ways induced their own persecution, not just on religious grounds, but also for some important political, economic, and military reasons” (255). Indeed, the site is devoid of important historical context that would explain other motivations for the martyrdom, and instead frames the tragedy as entirely predicated on religious persecution. It is not even that leaders are unaware of this context. In fact, Dallin H. Oaks—a leader in the LDS Church—even argued, along with historian Marvin S. Hill in *Carthage Conspiracy*, that “The murder of Joseph and Hyrum at Carthage, Illinois, was not a spontaneous, impulsive act by a few personal enemies of the Mormon leaders, but a deliberate political assassination, committed or condoned by some of the leading citizens in Hancock County” (6). This expanded context, however, prevents the Church from linking Carthage Jail to a narrative of innocent sacrifice for the sake of one’s beliefs because it complicates the story of religious persecution.

The claim of innocence also relies on strategic forgetting. The missionary guides argue that Smith was arrested on false charges. This is not completely false, given that a judge in Nauvoo acquitted him of the original rioting charge, but it certainly bends the truth (Oaks and Hill 16). Smith was awaiting trial for treason when killed in Carthage Jail because he had put Nauvoo under martial law. Simply being imprisoned while awaiting trial does not justify murder. Nevertheless, the missionary guides depict Smith as unjustifiably imprisoned. By framing Smith this way, visitors once again see him experiencing religious persecution and allows for a Manichean depiction of the martyrdom; it is a story of righteousness vs wickedness, Mormonism

vs. the world. For this representation to work, Smith needs to be innocent. As a whole, his death needs to support the belief that he died for his testimony.

The framing of the site in later years also involved strategic forgetting. Howard W. Hunter's before-mentioned 1963 dedication elides the animosity Mormons held towards those in Carthage and dismisses physical evidence of violence. In this process, he creates a fundamentally different historical memory and codes the site as a tribute to the prophet and his brother. But why forget the historical animosity between the Latter-day Saints and the residents of Hancock County, Illinois? On the pragmatic side, the Church needed to forgive and forget in order for the two groups to move forward. This is especially pertinent for the Church's proselytizing and larger reconstructing efforts in the area. On the more conceptual side, the memory of persecution—and the wound it created—cannot co-exist equally with monumental stories of Smith's life and legacy. The victimhood narrative contradicts the message of continued relevance and power. Furthermore, if it is true that Smith had to die, then the Church could not be angry with the Carthage community for fulfilling a preordained mission. In short, to present its desired narrative, leaders had to discard others.

Controlling the Narrative

In order to maintain the theological narrative at Carthage Jail, the Church heavily controls the site from all angles. It is true that people toured the jail before the Church's ownership and restoration, but lay members of the Church had—and have—no say in the official approach to the site. This differs from both the 9/11 Memorial Museum and Manzanar National Historic Site. The 9/11 Memorial Museum was caught in contentious debates among the public, and it now actively strives to incorporate visitor memories of the event. Manzanar became a National

Historic Site largely because of grassroots activism. Paul Williams argues that “museums serve as surrogate homes for debates that would otherwise be placeless,” and that “the experiences of everyday people, or the quality of emotional hurt, often now find themselves translated into deliberations about the building and refurbishment of memorial and museums, and the medium and message of their displays” (130). In other words, it is not merely the content of memorial museums that matter; the process of creating the museum is as vitally important. But the Church provided no such outlet to members. Top leaders decided when it was acceptable to restore the jail and to what end. This refusal to include members in the conversation about—or restoration of—Carthage Jail illustrates how the Church did not intend for members to work through the trauma of Smith’s death on site. The jail serves a purpose for the Church that relies on a lack of debate or personal interpretation. Admittedly, the Church was able to perform this hierarchical meaning-making without backlash because, in addition to a general hierarchical structure of leadership, most members do not have a personal connection to Carthage Jail. As we move farther and farther away from the martyrdom, fewer and fewer members are directly related to the Smith family, let alone the persecuted saints in Illinois. Unlike other memorial museums or sites of trauma—as we saw with Ground Zero—there were not competing levels of powerful stakeholders. But even for those directly affected, there was no room for their voices. The Church certainly did not hold press conferences, public workshops, or focus groups to collaborate on how to best memorialize the martyrdom on site.

One key way the Church executes this narrative control is through language.

Anthropologist Hildi J. Mitchell explains that there exists “Church control over texts which are linked to particular places, and thus Church attempts to influence the particular reading of a

place” (147). By and large, the Church connects Carthage Jail to the First Vision account, solidifying the jail’s importance and sacrality. The use of texts to associate Carthage with this founding event is evident from the very start of the visit. Leading to the jail, there are six plaques. On the first two plaques are excerpts from Smith’s 1838 account of the First Vision. Once inside the visitor center, a set of scriptures lies open to the first chapter of the Epistle of James, with the fifth verse underlined. As a fourteen year old, Joseph Smith read this biblical passage, prompting him to go into the nearby woods to pray. Put simply, this scripture served as the catalyst for the First Vision. A more heavy-handed coding likewise occurs in the visitor center. Before the introductory film, the missionary guides briefly recount the First Vision. During one tour, one missionary remarked that Smith’s persecution began with that vision and “would come to an end here in Carthage.”

Carthage Jail is also closely associated with the Book of Mormon, and, much more broadly, the narrative of divine truth. The introductory film—which involves a video reenactment of the martyrdom—is centered around an address given by LDS leader Jeffrey R. Holland entitled “Safety for the Soul” that connects the martyrdom at Carthage to the Book of Mormon. He exclaims:

As one of a thousand elements of my own testimony of the divinity of the Book of Mormon, I submit this as yet one more evidence of its truthfulness. In this their greatest—and last—hour of need, I ask you: would these men blaspheme before God by continuing to fix their lives, their honor, and their own search for eternal salvation on a book (and by implication a church and a ministry) they had fictitiously created out of

whole cloth?... They were willing to die rather than deny the divine origin and the eternal truthfulness of the Book of Mormon.

Including this address emphasizes the Church's long-time association between Smith's death and his testimony. This speech is yet another iteration of the idea that Joseph Smith sealed his testimony with his blood.³³ The visit to Carthage, then, is framed as evidence of "the eternal truthfulness of the Book of Mormon" because the Prophet died for it. This focus on Smith's testimony before the tour even begins is interesting for a deeper reason, namely that it belies the context of the deaths. The brothers did not die because of the Book of Mormon. As discussed, there were more complicated reasons for their murders. Furthermore, it is not as if they were given an opportunity to recant their beliefs; the martyrdom was already set in motion while they sat in jail.

The Church provides missionary guides at Carthage Jail with a script, although they are allowed to add additional information if they so desire. However, one missionary noted that there are a lot of "untrue" claims out there. On one level, this small comment aligns with members' general approach to Mormon history; trusted materials only come from the Church itself, as there is a longstanding fear of anti-Mormon literature. However, in the context of Carthage Jail, this means that—once again—the Church directly controls the narrative of the martyrdom at the site. Furthermore, the physical script itself is confidential; I could not obtain access to a physical copy of the script, despite the fact that the tour is public.

³³ The phrase, which sanctifies Joseph's death, is a frequent refrain in Mormonism. In the LDS scripture the Doctrine and Covenants, a verse written mere months after the deaths reads: "He lived great, and he died great in the eyes of God and his people; and like most of the Lord's anointed in ancient times, has sealed his mission and his works with his own blood; and so has his brother Hyrum" (135.3).

It is not just official Church texts that affect the meaning-making process at Carthage Jail. The missionary guides heavily influence interpretations by including personal explanations and feelings alongside their presentation of historical information during the tours. For example, during one tour, the missionary made what felt like personal assumptions. He noted that “the jailor very quickly came to know that they were here on false charges and these were good honest men,” that the jailor allowing the Smith brothers and their companions to sleep in his bedroom “goes to show his belief in Joseph and Hyrum being good men, because you wouldn’t normally, never ever, do that” and that some actions Joseph took the night before the martyrdom “tells me so much of who Smith is.” As he continued, “Here he is hours away from his own death, which he knows is going to come soon, and what does Joseph do? What Joseph always does: bringing peace, solace, calm, to those people that are around him.” The tour goes beyond historical details and focuses on Smith’s personal character. In fact, the inclusion of anecdotes designed to illustrate Smith’s character was consistent between tours, even if other details were omitted or certain points differed.

These missionaries help support the Church’s narratives through an emphasis on feeling, both emotionally and spiritually. Affect is a common tool employed at both memorials and memorial museums. As we saw at the 9/11 Memorial Museum, the museum designers intended to influence visitors’ emotional experiences to lead patrons to adopt a victimhood narrative. What is interesting at Carthage Jail is that the affective component turns into an active component of the audience’s engagement with the site. The site curators crafted an experience designed to prompt an emotional reaction, with the missionary guides often signaling and exhibiting the intended response. Not only does the tour end with a moment of silence “to ponder

what you've heard and felt here," but the missionaries sometimes visibly express emotion.³⁴

During one of my tours, the missionary leading the group cried several times. She teared up talking about Smith comforting the other men with him in the room, as well as when she talked about Willard Richards seeing a deceased Joseph Smith and saving John Taylor. Visitors do, in fact, have emotional responses. I saw multiple people on different tours wiping tears from their eyes.

The emotional response at Carthage Jail, especially in the jailer's bedroom where the Smith brothers met their fate, requires closer examination. Why are the missionaries and visitors crying? What, exactly, does the Church gain from prompting an emotional response? The feelings prompted at Carthage Jail are particular. There is certainly emotion, but it is not the types generally associated with memorial sites, whether that be sadness or anger or even shame. When visitors are told that there will be a moment of silence, it is not necessarily designed as a mournful reflection or moment of respect. Rather, following in LDS tradition, it seems more intended for visitors to have a period of spiritual reflection. While many memorial sites are considered "sacred spaces" in the sense of being set apart—especially because of lost lives—Carthage reflects the original religious definition. The site emphasizes the presence of the Holy Ghost, also known as the Spirit or the Holy Spirit. As discussed earlier, emotions are increasingly linked to knowledge—in this view, "cognition is embodied, sensate, interested, and invested" (Doss 58). But in certain religious circles, the Holy Spirit is similarly affective, embodied, and linked to knowledge. The Spirit "testifies" of certain truths to believers. In The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, revelation comes through the Holy Ghost, and it is

³⁴ Not every guide during my visits cried, and it is certainly not a requirement.

often felt physically. Many describe spiritual revelation as a “burning in the bosom,” a phrase drawn from the LDS scripture Doctrine and Covenants, chapter 9 verse 8, which members believe was a revelation from God to Joseph Smith to explain the process of translating the Book of Mormon.³⁵ Others describe feeling calm or peaceful. Religious studies scholar Douglas E. Cowan explains the process this way, saying,

there is a clearly established process for affective confirmation of the truth of LDS teachings. That is, potential converts to the LDS church are not asked to make their decisions on the basis of a cognitive assent to LDS doctrine but on an emotional response to what they regard as the truth of church teachings. (132)

While Cowan specifically mentions the conversion process, this same “affective confirmation” is used by current members of the LDS church. These physical or affective manifestations of the Spirit—“feeling the Spirit”—are a critical element in legitimizing LDS doctrine at Carthage Jail. Given this context, I argue that when visitors are moved to tears, their emotional response is not grief over Joseph or Hyrum Smith’s deaths—as it was when early members visited—but a display of spiritual confirmation that the experience generates.

There is evidence of the Church’s success in prompting a spiritual response that legitimates certain religious beliefs. On Instagram, some visitors to Carthage Jail posted their religious experiences and beliefs after their visit, with a few emphasizing the importance of being at the site itself. For example, some selected responses include:

A beautiful morning spent at Carthage. This is a place where I truly gained my own testimony of the gospel. (allymccullough)

³⁵ The entire verse reads: “But, behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right.”

Carthage has had a completely different spirit than any other church site we've been to these last few days. It wasn't until we were in the final room of the jail, the room where the prophet was shot, that I realized why that spirit was so different. I wasn't only feeling the spirit of the place and the historical significance—I was feeling the powerful spirit of the prophet Joseph Smith. (Ellie W., qtd. in illuminate_trips)

As I was sitting outside Carthage Jail, looking to where the prophet Joseph Smith was martyred...I felt the spirit strongly testify to me. Joseph Smith was (and is) a prophet of God. He brought the true church and the gospel to the earth again. (Avery T., qtd. in illuminate_trips)

Our first stop today was Carthage Jail, where the Prophet Joseph Smith was killed. It was a holy experience where the Spirit was strong and my faith increased. (benily)

It was an amazing feeling to stand on this sacred ground. My testimony of Joseph Smith is so important to me and it was definitely strengthened. (csfrancom).

I love coming to Carthage. It just builds on my testimony of the calling of Joseph Smith as the Prophet of the Restoration! (czarbryce)

If we interpret these captions using Stuart Hall's theory of communication, these responses illustrate the "dominant hegemonic position," whereby "the viewer takes the connoted meaning...full and straight" (171). Put simply, the consumer subscribes to the producer's intended meaning. In the case of Carthage Jail, these captions illustrate a close alignment between the Church's intended meaning and the visitors' interpretations. The site focuses on Joseph Smith and his importance, and the responses echo that message.

Many members seem to believe that Carthage Jail is inherently sacred. The Church's production of meaning is so successful that many do not consider how interpretations of Carthage Jail shift over time, a change often influenced by the institutional leadership's decisions. Captions like "So grateful to visit this sacred place" (benandria), "The spirit was so strong there" (rememberjesustoday), and "I stand on hallowed ground" (melissfry) suggest that visitors actually believe in a preexisting sacredness that they merely perceive, not create.

Furthermore, in some instances, decoding the meaning of Carthage Jail differently from what the Church's intends leads to members judging others for a perceived lack of spirituality or perceptiveness. One missionary told our group that one man left when they said the audio was going to play in the martyrdom room, remarking that he was the only person who was not spiritually moved. The comment suggests that feeling the Spirit is the default experience, and it is abnormal to feel otherwise. This response problematically elides the constructed nature of current interpretations of the jail and, more significantly, ignores individual, personal meaning-making.

However, visitors may potentially play a role in meaning-making, albeit in highly contained and prescribed ways. During one of my tours, the missionary guide remarked that people "bring [the] Spirit in there with them." This seemingly offhand statement opens the door for individual meaning-making because it implies that the space is not inherently sacred nor spiritual; rather, visitors help create that environment. This idea of visitors constructing a sacred place has a precedent in historical visits to other Church sites. As Keith A. Erekson, the director of the Church History Library, argues concerning early 20th century visitors to Smith's home in Sharon, Vermont,

Joseph Smith's birthplace was not sacred to these visitors because of past events, but rather because of the fact that they themselves had journeyed there in the present...For turn-of-the-century Latter-day Saint visitors to Joseph Smith's birthplace, the sanctifying of historic sites occurred as visitors in the present affirmed their belief in the past. (81)

These two instances are interesting because they reject the notion of inherent sacrality. This idea of individual, in-the-moment sanctification supports before-mentioned comments by Church

leaders who dismiss the shrine mentality. Nevertheless, despite this opening for visitor meaning-making, the Church's invitation to participate only goes so far as to uphold the established narrative.

Despite all the control and even subtle manipulation during the tour to interpret Carthage Jail in the Church's intended way, some visitors do decode the site differently and move away from viewing Carthage Jail solely as a sacred place that affirms LDS doctrines. A couple non-members on Instagram found the site interesting outside of its religiosity. One commented that

I learned a whole lot about Joseph and Hyrum Smith this weekend. I don't know anything at all about religion & I don't really believe in a 'God', but I am eternally curious & I love history so I found it all to be fascinating (onecolorfulness)

Here, this visitor focuses on the historical value of the site. The martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum functions independently of its religious meaning, although they acknowledge that interpretation.

In a similar way, another visitor captioned their post:

Carthage Jail the tiny town is famous for this jail built in 1839. it was apparently the place where Joseph Smith, leader of The Church of Latter Day Saints, was killed by a mob. I personally find much more interesting, the geology, in this area. The sandstone is local and you can see the chisel marks in each if [sic] the large blocks.
(360degreesoftexas)

Here, the geological value of the site overshadows the religious element. In fact, the jail is valued even more as a physical structure than as a historical site. These comments, again using Hall's model, take a more negotiated position. While these visitors acknowledged the jail's significance to members, they did not accept the Church's doctrines proselytized by the missionaries. The historical narrative remained separate from its theological interpretations or, in the second example, subservient to other physical aspects.

Some people did not engage in interpretation at all, simply posting descriptive captions or leaving no caption at all. Other times, even members seem to reject the narrative of sacrality or legitimization, posting silly pictures with the statue of Joseph and Hyrum Smith through selfies or posing like the brothers. The “misuse” of a memorial site is not an anomaly unique to Carthage Jail. For example, the Tumblr “Selfies at Serious Places” posted submissions of individuals posing at dark history sites, whether it be duck lips at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial or a selfie inside an Auschwitz gas chamber. The now defunct website *Yolocaust* superimposed concentration camp photographs into the background of pictures of people “misbehaving” at Holocaust memorials when visitors scrolled. A smiling selfie or a photo of two men jumping on the slabs at the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe became images of gleeful individuals standing on mounds of dead bodies (Sommer). These images are in a different vein than the photographs taken at Carthage Jail. There is a marked difference between the Holocaust or the Vietnam War and the events that occurred in Illinois in 1844, whether that be in scale or ideology. Furthermore, what these visitors at Carthage Jail reject is not merely the normative behavior for all memorial sites but rather sacrality in the religious sense. In other words, those visitors do not uphold the spiritual nature of the site. However, in all these instances of visitor “misuse,” individuals depart from a shared sensibility. Of course, these posts cannot wholly reveal the interior thoughts of visitors, and a goofy picture outside the jail does not preclude someone from having a meaningful or faith-affirming experience during the tour. Still, these posts are important because they reveal that despite all its efforts, the LDS Church cannot completely control the narrative at Carthage Jail and that visitors still find ways to shape their own interpretations.

Conclusion

Because of the ways in which the Church molded and utilized the memory of the martyrdom, Carthage Jail became, to some degree, another “sacred place” in Mormonism. Despite being a site of violence and death, it is lumped in with other Joseph Smith-centric sites such as Joseph Smith’s birthplace in Sharon, Vermont or the Sacred Grove in Palmyra, New York. It is merely another physical site associated with the larger narrative of the founding of the LDS Church. As explained in one LDS Church History essay, “More than two dozen Church-owned sites...celebrate the Restoration of the gospel and the commitment of Latter-day Saints to establish God’s kingdom in our day.” Furthermore, “They bear witness to the Restoration and remind us of God’s blessings and the faith, commitment, and sacrifice of His people” (Lund). In some ways, then, Carthage Jail loses its individual significance as the Church theologizes violence to make sense of—and integrate—trauma. Through this theologizing, violence becomes less painful, but also abstracted. Violence is not important because of the act itself, but because of a generalized and widely applicable message that is drawn from it. In short, Joseph Smith’s death is not what makes Carthage Jail sacred; rather, it is the role the martyrdom serves in the religion that does.

Carthage Jail is not the only LDS site of violence, suffering, or persecution where an emphasis on the location’s spiritual significance overshadows the presentation of historical information. Michael Madsen describes a scene he observed in 2001 at the John Johnson home, where Smith was taken by a mob and then tarred and feathered. He writes that “The Historical Department representative told the missionary that, when the Johnson Home reopened, the tour would change its focus from the dramatic tar-and-feathering to Smith’s receiving Doctrine and

Covenants 76, which details the multi-kingdom Mormon concept of the afterlife” (“Sanctification” 243). When the guide contested, he was told that they needed to direct their time to “the spiritual aspects of this place” because “The Church would not have spent the money to restore this building if it were just to be used as the setting for the tar and feathering incident” (qtd. in Madsen, “Sanctification” 243). Likewise, as mentioned earlier, Liberty Jail focuses on Doctrine and Covenants 121, the revelation Smith received while incarcerated, and its applicable lessons. If Carthage Jail has specific scriptures associated with it, it is both Doctrine and Covenants 135, which announces the Smith brothers’ deaths and talks about their legacies in grandiose terms, and Joseph Smith History, Smith’s canonized recounting of the First Vision story. The Church cannot let these historical sites exist merely as educational opportunities. However, they are coded so heavily in religious terms that the sites become secondary to the scriptures rather than significant locations in and of themselves.

A perhaps unforeseen effect of closing the wound is visitors being light hearted about the bloody murder of Joseph and Hyrum Smith. At times, a purely touristic impulse seems to take over despite members undoubtedly revering the Church’s founding prophet. A particularly illustrative example is photographs of the bullet hole door. Depending on the angle, the bullet hole perfectly frames the window through which Smith fell. Some visitors take photographs of themselves or their families through this hole. During my visit, for example, a mother asked her children “Do you want a picture through the hole like we’ve seen?” Interestingly, she subsequently questioned this action, following up with the comment “It is a little sacrilegious, huh?” Other visitors do not seem quite so reflective about the action, as some even smile and pose. It is a little jarring to see these photographs because even after all this time, two men died

in that building. The specific use of the word sacrilegious is notable, as well. Because the Church theologized Carthage Jail, the woman's concern was not about whether it was inappropriate to use a violent artifact to compose an artistic photograph; it was whether it was irreverent behavior in a sacred place. Hers was a profoundly religious concern, not an ethical one. Again, trauma becomes secondary to the place of Carthage Jail in Mormonism's history and its connection to Joseph Smith's role as a prophet.

Overall, Carthage Jail provides an example of what can happen when the traumatic past is no longer actively painful or impossible to grasp. What is interesting about Carthage Jail is that trauma, although healed, is still remembered and serves a purpose for a group of people. In fact, it is precisely because it is healed that it can serve the current role it does for members. Painful, open wounds can certainly be made useful. As I discussed in an earlier chapter, the Legacy Museum in Montgomery, Alabama, draws on the painful history of slavery and lynching to address current racial and political issues. The museum connects this traumatic past to the present day, hoping to use this witness to effect social change. Furthermore, there is a danger in healing trauma if society forgets the past and moves on. But Carthage Jail demonstrates that a scar can be just as useful and powerful; the jail is still a site of active remembering and meaning-making 175 years later. The Church did not forget about the martyrdom when they made it a monument to Joseph and Hyrum Smith because it remained a site of pilgrimage. Visitors, albeit often working with a set narrative, help keep the memory alive.

However, there are limitations and downsides to the integration process. Accordingly, the Church's use of memory is, perhaps, changing. In a 2016 national study, the Next Mormons

Survey,³⁶ 31% of respondents cited “I did not trust the Church leadership to tell the truth surrounding controversial or historical issues” as their reason for leaving Mormonism (Reiss 224). This finding reveals something intriguing: it was often not a specific historical issue that drove people away or caused their faith crisis. People did not leave simply because of Joseph Smith’s polygamy (ranked 16/30) or his purported use of seer stones to translate the Book of Mormon (ranked 27/30) (Reiss 223-224). Jana Reiss, the sociologist and religious reporter who conducted the survey, argues that historical issues are important, but “in the context of a person’s whole journey out the door, several issues work in combination, making them more likely to choose an overall loss-of-testimony option...rather than isolated historical or doctrinal issues” (223). However, there is more to the situation than multiple problems coalescing. The Church must grapple with the issue of trust in leadership regarding historical topics. This issue directly affects historical sites. Using Carthage Jail as a missionary tool might have previously served the Church well, but eliding critical historical contexts like the *Nauvoo Expositor*’s destruction to create a whitewashed, faith-promoting memory could threaten its goals. In a twist, the trauma of the martyrdom is not Smith’s death so much as its presentation by the Church in the present-day.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints might have recognized the problems it inadvertently created in its construction and employment of religious memory. Recently, the Church has made significant efforts to become more open and transparent about less than flattering elements of its past. For example, in 2018 they released the first volume of *Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days*. Unlike some previous historical sources

³⁶ The Next Mormons Survey is the project of Jana Reiss and Benjamin Knoll. It is a “major national study of 1,156 Mormons and 540 former Mormons” (Reiss 7).

produced by the LDS Church, this volume acknowledges failings of early members and leaders, including Joseph Smith himself. More relevant, Church leadership also transferred stewardship of the historic sites from the Missionary Department to the Church History Department. While this transition is still in its infancy, it will be vital to see how this new management shifts interpretations of the event and employs the memory of the martyrdom. Given individuals' concerns of trust and transparency, perhaps a more strictly historical approach would actually help the Church maintain its membership.

However, even if the Church provides a more historical rather than devotional narrative, the issue of hierarchical knowledge production does not address the concern about trust. The limitation of integrating the trauma of Joseph Smith's death into a narrative is not that it became meaningless. Rather, it is that members now question the Church's knowledge production. Carthage Jail becomes a story about institutional remembering, forgetting, and the use of memory. Conversely, incorporating an overtly participatory dynamic would help counteract this issue. Turning Carthage Jail into a participatory memorial museum would invite personal meaning-making and eliminate a top-down assumption of authority. Ironically, inviting visitors into the knowledge production and memorialization process might actually strengthen the Church's mission.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation only begins what I hope is a more audience-focused approach to memorial museums. With memorial museums themselves being a relatively new genre, it is not surprising that many scholars focus on analyzing the museum itself, whether tracing the history of its creation, emphasizing its architectural design, or analyzing its purposes. However, we cannot understand how memorial museums function if we exclude visitors from the analysis. Amy Sodaro notes that her study of global memorial museums “is not intended to explain or address how visitors experience and perceive the museums but instead focuses on the intention behind their creation” (6). However, an analysis of intention is incomplete without understanding how intention is filtered through the visitor experience. Accordingly, this dissertation emphasizes the visitor’s role in relation to a memorial museum’s intentions. What does the museum want visitors to learn, feel, or do? How does the museum shape the experience to accomplish those goals? How do visitors interact in or respond to the site? Do visitors engage in preferred ways, and do their interpretations align with the museum’s, or are there instances of resistance? How do visitors’ experiences and interpretations feed back into the museum? All of these questions aim to capture the interpretive dynamic between museums and audiences.

The focus on the memorial museum’s intention brings up a complementary concern about the usefulness or success of memorial museums. Paul Williams posits that “the memorial museum is promoted as an effective apparatus for producing a wide range of desirable social responses...Unfortunately, there is a lack of critical writing that establishes how—or even whether—they are effective in this regard” (22-23). A memorial museum might have every intention to help people work through a traumatic event or to inspire them to prevent future

atrocities, but we need to see whether those missions are fulfilled. There are overtly practical purposes for this knowledge: if a memorial museum is not accomplishing its goal, what needs to change?

While a legitimate concern, we must also consider whether it matters if a memorial museum is effective in achieving its goals. Put differently, is there a more useful way to evaluate memorial museums and their role in society? Reevaluating the museum/audience relationship by blurring the lines between producer/consumer can help us to expand our interpretation and look beyond a designer's intention. Speaking of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Kristin Hass argues that "The restive memory of the war changed American public commemoration because the memory could not be expressed or contained in Maya Lin's powerful and suggestive design alone" (2). Hass' comment raises this consideration: just because a memorial cannot contain memory does not mean it is unnecessary. Lin's design, a reflective scar cut into the landscape, is neither devoid of memory nor meaning. But that does not mean that it is sufficient. This idea of necessary but not sufficient underlies my discussion of memorial museums and visitors. What if the larger purpose of memorial museums is not to accomplish the institution's aims but to provide a space for collective memorialization and meaning-making?

In considering this question, I want to return to Nina Simon's foundational work on participatory museums. Simon contends that museums build structured experiences—what she calls scaffolding—to help foster participation. She argues that without scaffolding, visitors are less inclined to participate, and when they do, the results are less satisfactory (12-13). Scaffolds embody the tension between control and agency. They certainly direct how visitors should engage, but they are designed to increase knowledge production. While Simon is speaking

specifically about scaffolds in relation to participatory activities, such as clear instructions for a video recording booth, we might expand the concept of scaffolding to the museum as a whole. People bring their thoughts, assumptions, and memories to the memorial museum. Memorial museums can serve as a platform for people to work through or make sense of traumatic events. The institution's narratives, rhetorical techniques, or participatory opportunities might influence visitors, but they might also provide opportunities for individual meaning-making, facilitating a flow of memories, feelings, and interpretations. Evidenced by the number of people who flock to memorial museums, the institutions answer a vital need.

As an initial turn to the museum-audience relationship, this dissertation begins to focus on audiences and their role in the meaning-making process at memorial museums. To continue the work I began in this dissertation, two primary levels of research and analysis will strengthen my study of memorial museums. This additional research will also help remedy some of the unevenness in methodology I addressed in the introduction.

First, I plan to engage more fully with each site's visitor-produced content. In some cases, this requires additional data collection. Most pressing, since the 9/11 Memorial Museum denied my research request for archived Signing Steel responses and *Reflecting on 9/11* video responses, future research on that site will require in-person data collection. This will include systematically photographing Signing Steel responses over a sustained period of time, as well as taking more detailed notes of the *Reflecting on 9/11* videos on display. Furthermore, to provide a consistent type of source across all my research sites, it would be helpful to gather public social media (e.g. Instagram) responses to each site. After I gather this additional visitor-produced material, which will join the previously collected guestbook comments from Manzanar National

Historic Site and Instagram posts from Carthage Jail, I intend to conduct content analysis on the data. Content analysis will allow me to move beyond illustrative examples and enable a deeper understanding of the ways visitors make sense of the memorial museum site and the meaning of the traumatic event commemorated.

Second, while analyzing some user-generated materials can provide useful information about visitor participation, a study of memorial museums would greatly benefit from an ethnographic analysis. Many studies of audiences in media and cultural studies employ ethnography as the primary tool to garner a sense of audience meaning-making. For example, one sees such usage with David Morley's *The Nationwide Audience*, Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance*, Ien Ang's *Watching Dallas*, and Henry Jenkin's *Textual Poachers*. However, in museum studies literature, this type of audience research is surprisingly scant. One notable exception is Richard Sandell's *Museums, Prejudice, and the Reframing of Difference*. Sandell, in addition to analyzing written responses from guest books and visitor cards, employed "open-ended, in-depth interviews to generate and capture the conversations and accounts of visitors" and well as engaged in participant observation of visitor behavior (17, 198). This approach offers insight about the museum's impact, as well as how individuals exercise their interpretive agency.

A particularly glaring gap in memorial museum research that ethnographic research could help answer is how affect influences meaning-making. Scholars need to study how visitors feel at the site. Paul Williams points out that "While surveys of visitor responses to museum services are widely conducted, much less common are those that seek qualitative information about visitors' emotions (146). Considering the close connection between affect and knowledge-production, this kind of information is essential to understanding how people make sense of the

traumatic past. Research on affect must also acknowledge the intimate connection between body and mind. Studies must include a focus on visitors' physical encounters and bodily responses, which is overwhelmingly ignored. Williams contends that

the idea of bodily awareness has been little investigated in museum studies...The gravity of what occurred at memorial museums located on sites of atrocity tends to produce a high degree of self-consciousness about one's movements and actions. How swiftly should I move between galleries? Can I take photographs? Ask questions? Was I polite to the staff members who greeted me? Could he or she be a survivor? How long should I stay? (144)

These concerns about the body are another form of meaning-making about the memory of an atrocity. How one should behave connects to interpretation. As Alison Landsberg argues, "When we are moved or touched or made to feel uncomfortable, we are prodded to think and make sense of that experience" (*Engaging* 15). Furthermore, she continues, "affective or bodily provocations can lead to new thoughts, ideas, or historical insights" (16). Speaking from personal experience, I felt that I could not ask any questions in the martyrdom room at Carthage Jail because the visit ended with a moment of silence. Asking questions about the blood stain felt inappropriate because the guides framed the event religiously rather than historically. Conducting surveys or interviews with visitors would be crucial in gathering insight about audiences' emotional and mental states at memorial museums.

My analysis of participation at memorial museums derives from my own experience conducting on-site research. I simultaneously went through the sites as both a regular visitor and as a researcher. My experience at each site inherently reflects a visitor's perspective of going

through each memorial museum. At the 9/11 Memorial Museum, I felt overwhelmed going through the Historical Exhibition with a crowd of people, pushing forward to hear snippets of news clips. I wrote a response at the Signing Steel and waited to see my words join others on the projected map. At Manzanar National Historic Site, I spent hours walking in solitude through the interior landscape, trying to picture baseball games and church buildings. At the annual Pilgrimage, I joined with others in laying a flower at the Soul Consoling tower, participating in the collective ritual. At the Legacy Museum, I felt incredibly angry during my visit as the museum laid bare the brokenness of the criminal justice system. I walked through the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, my own neck craning upwards to see the hanging slabs of metal. At Carthage Jail, I felt uncomfortable not crying when other members of my faith visibly expressed emotion throughout the visit.

This personal experience is not a drawback. However, while my own experience as a researcher provides valuable insight, but it is an inherently limited perspective. While at times I acknowledge the different groups who visit the memorial museums, I admittedly rely on the general term “visitors,” which can problematically default to my own myopic perspective and obscure different interpretations. Qualitative ethnography through the form of surveys or interviews would add needed perspectives, grounding the analysis in first-hand experiences beyond my own and move beyond speculations about others’ experiences.

Admittedly, there are logistical reasons that complicate an ethnographic approach. The primary obstacle are some museums’ rules and regulations that prevent ethnographic research at the museum itself. For example, at least one of the sites included in this dissertation, the 9/11 Memorial Museum, prohibits researchers from “administering surveys or questionnaires within

the museum and on the plaza” (“Scholarly Research Request Application”) and notes that “due to the unique somber nature of these locations, not all visitors wish to be photographed, videotaped, recorded or bothered in any other manner” (“Visitor Guidelines”). This prohibition does not prevent an ethnographic study of a memorial museum’s visitors off site. This delayed research would lose in-the-moment reactions and reflections. However, it might be able to offer other valuable insight about how visitors interpreted their experience. Williams, speaking about a rare survey conducted at the Yad Vashem about visitor responses, contends that “it is very difficult to determine whether such sentiments stayed with the person and came to bear on any of his or her later ideas and actions. What then should we make of the link between visitor response and social action that forms the often-stated *raison d’être* for memorial museums?” (146). This kind of research would be critical in understanding the lasting impact of memorial museums.

Ultimately, researching participation at memorial museums helps interrogate the memorialization process. The focus on visitors’ agency opens up new perspectives about common topics connected to remembering trauma, such as absence, witnessing, and healing. The emphasis on agency also prompts people to think about their personal involvement in memorialization. Engaging with difficult memories matters. These memorial museums require people, both as individuals and as a community, to keep visiting and contributing and creating meaning. More than keeping memories alive, the visitation process also impacts audiences. It matters that visitors record their remembrances at the 9/11 Memorial Museum, pick up the phone at the prison visitation booths at the Legacy Museum, imagine what Manzanar looked like during WWII, or describe spiritual experiences at Carthage Jail. Through these participatory

experiences, visitors possess the opportunity to gain new insights and recognize their responsibilities in the present.

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