



Monumental Discord: Savannah's Remembering (and Forgetting) of Its Enslaved

Brian Carroll

To cite this article: Brian Carroll (2018) Monumental Discord: Savannah's Remembering (and Forgetting) of Its Enslaved, *Visual Communication Quarterly*, 25:3, 156-167

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15551393.2018.1491736>



Published online: 23 Oct 2018.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Monumental Discord: Savannah's Remembering (and Forgetting) of Its Enslaved

A primary port in the slave trade, the city of Savannah, Georgia, has but one public monument to slavery. As a text, therefore, Savannah's cityscape lacks a chapter on enslavement. The lone slavery monument's placement, content, and poetic inscription are the products of what was a bitter, decade-long fight over what to include and exclude, an editing process that activated competing interpretations about how and even whether to commemorate the city's participation in the trans-Atlantic slave economy. This article presents a case study on the ethics of remembering and how dominant authorities and marginalized groups, including Savannah's black community, negotiate even among themselves, for the social construction of local history, collective memory, and its visual representations.

Brian Carroll

The past is never dead. It's not even past. (William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun*, 1959)

Of the City of Savannah's more than 40 public monuments, only one addresses slavery, and even the one that does is ambiguous; the monument's rhetorical power is mitigated by the politics of its making and by geography. Only three of the city's many trolley, bus, carriage, and walking tours give the numerous contributions of enslaved Savannahians any context or substance, despite the centrality of the slave trade in the building and development of the city. Slavery and its long-fingered legacy are, therefore, absent in the physical space and visual landscape of Savannah. As a text, the cityscape lacks a chapter on enslavement, which, more than any other single factor, explains Savannah's existence and historical significance.

The city's lone slavery monument, standing 11 feet tall, was unveiled in July 2002 on a cobblestoned, riverfront street in the touristic heart of the city. The monument depicts a contemporary Black family of four standing with broken shackles at their feet. The monument's placement, content, and poetic inscription are the products of what was a bitter, decade-long fight over what to include and exclude, an editing

process that activated competing interpretations about how and even whether to commemorate the city's participation in the trans-Atlantic slave economy (Wiltout, 2002). This very public debate offers a case study on the ethics of remembering and on how dominant authorities and marginalized groups, including Savannah's Black community, negotiate even among themselves for the social construction of local history and collective memory (Figure 1).

This article examines the ways in which people fashion versions of the past and employ them for self-understanding and in order to win power. This study is important because Savannah's slavery monument offers a look into the city's and even the nation's culture wars, and it offers a lesson in the politics of a city's relationships to the activity of collective memory. It is clear that any attempt to integrate race and slavery into a collective or public memory risks provoking defensiveness, anger, and confrontation. These provocations have played out in so many controversies, from whether to have a National Museum of African American History and Culture, to where in Washington, DC, that museum should be, to controversies over the meaning and appropriateness of the Confederate battle flag and monuments to the Confederacy (Landrieu, 2017).



Figure 1 Savannah's only public monument to slavery, installed in July 2002.

This study is also important because the very local story of Savannah's riverfront memorial offers an opportunity to better understand the historical moment in which important public memory decisions are made, how these acts of remembering become also acts of erasure, and the ways in which groups give voice to their versions of the past and use them for self-understanding. In his classic study, *The Collective Memory*, sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, who legitimized memory as an academic area for study in the 1930s, wrote, "Historians study memory because it has been such an important modern instrument of power" (Halbwachs, 1950, p. 25). Thus, such a study is also an exploration of how power is contested and won. Monuments and memorials have to be conceived of, agreed upon, situated, built, and inscribed, and each of these negotiations is an attempt to remember in particular ways and therefore to forget, or to not remember, as well. Studying these negotiations can teach how historical consciousness is forged and diminished and controlled because commemoration can be seen as a series of political acts controlled by those in power. While strong suggestions about what an individual

monument might mean can be made in what is depicted and signified, ultimately meaning is up to others to determine and contest.

Review of the Literature

For cities, places or sites of memory narrate history. As Martha Norkunas found in her study of public memory in Monterey, California, "The ruling class carefully controls the form and content of historical re-creations and tourist landscapes, legitimizing itself by projecting its own contemporary sociocultural values upon the past" in public enactments of identity (Norkunas, 1993, p. 97). Memoria, as nostalgic reinterpretations, express a social group's power not in terms of physical coercion but as visual rhetoric, and as such, sites of countermemory can challenge the dominant historical narrative and the power that authorized that narrative. The Savannah monument can be understood as just such a site, one that is all the more conspicuous and important because it is the city's only official attempt to mark or note Savannah's involvement in slavery, marking Savannah in sharp contrast to the city to which Savannah likes to compare itself—Charleston, South Carolina. The competition of visions for what such a monument presuming to "remember" slavery should "say" unfortunately diminished that monument's rhetorical power, even as nostalgia.

In exploring this competition's fault lines, this article gives evidence for the findings of Jennifer L. Eichstedt and Stephen Small, who examined at historical sites throughout the South the strategic rhetorics that, in most cases, have consigned to oblivion the system of enslavement and the presence of those enslaved. These rhetorics, they found, are part of a racialized regime of representation that valorizes the White elite of the preemancipation South while generally erasing or minimizing the experiences of enslaved African Americans. They are rhetorics that "tell a story of American history that centers around whites, males, and elites." In so doing, they serve to "erase or minimize the presence, labor, and lives of enslaved Africans and African Americans" (Eichstedt & Small, 2002, p. 4). In this story, slavery and African Americans are presented as almost incidental to the growth of Savannah and the South and by extension the United States. This dominant, exclusionary narrative presents the South as genteel, graceful, romantic, filled with honorable, noble White men.

This project also owes much to Derek Alderman's study, from the perspective of a geographer, of the politics of remembering slavery among Black

people in Savannah and how these struggles shape the city's commemorative landscape (Alderman, 2010). In some ways, this study, as primarily a visual exploration, could be seen as a companion piece to Alderman's, which focused on the monument's inscription as a contest of textual politics and of how words are at the heart of the struggle to remember and forget the trauma of enslavement. As Alderman points out, the analysis of places of memory is increasingly important for geography, just as it is for a range of fields in the humanities and social sciences, including visual communication. One of the reasons so many disciplines examine collective memory is that it is not a topic that fits neatly within the confines of any one. For this project, collective memory's communicative dimension, in particular its persuasive capacity as a container of visual meaning, is a focus. Artifacts that promote a shared sense of the past can be seen as rhetorical; after all, memory is one of the canons of Roman rhetoric. Public monuments as collective memory attempt to do this work, existing in the world rather than in people's heads, as Barbie Zelizer has pointed out (Phillips, 2010, p. 209).

Historical Background

Established by the British crown in 1733 with the settlement of Savannah, the colony of Georgia was one of the empire's few American colonies to receive direct government support, and the crown expected commercial and strategic advantages in return for that support. Though slavery was initially excluded from the colony, the slave trade was legally embraced in 1752. By 1741, though more than 2,800 settlers had migrated to Georgia, its population was less than half that size; people moved on to other colonies to seek a better future. In dispossessing Native Americans of their land, Georgia's White colonists turned to the enslavement of Africans as the solution to their many economic problems.

By 1750, there were 2,000 White people and more than a thousand Black people; a decade later, Georgia's population approached 10,000, with about 6,000 of those White (Eichstedt & Small, 2002, p. 44). By 1773, sixty people (of a population of 33,000) owned 2,500 acres or more each, with 20 holding in excess of 5,000 acres each, meaning that roughly 5% of Georgia's landowners held half of the colony's available land. By 1860, of Georgia's population of 1.06 million, 591,550 were White, 465,698 were Black, and 462,198 of that Black population were enslaved. Savannah at this time was the state's largest town; only three others (Augusta, Columbus, and Macon) had populations of more

than 3,000. Nationally by this time, there were almost 4 million enslaved people, and it is important to remember that at least one-third of those taken from Africa did not survive the dreaded Middle Passage (Eichstedt & Small, 2002, p. 34).

As envisioned by General James Edward Oglethorpe, Savannah was built in 1733 as a series of wards, each anchored by a central square. Virtually all of the city's 24 squares feature memoria of various kinds, but none of them in any way marks the city's participation in slavery (Russell & Hines, 1992, p. 3). Oglethorpe's first square, named for the first governor of Savannah, Robert Johnson, is anchored by the Nathanael Greene Monument that is a tribute to George Washington's second in command in the Revolutionary War. What is not noted is that Joseph Bryan operated slave yards and a slave trade brokerage business on Johnson Square; his slave "mart" was the largest in Georgia and perhaps in all of the South (Harris & Berry, 2014, p. 61). A few blocks away, the centerpiece of Wright Square is a monument honoring William Gordon, a native Savannahian, former mayor of the city, and founder of the Central Rail Road and Banking Company. A few feet from Gordon's figure, a huge granite boulder commemorates Yamacraw Indian Chief Tomochichi, who, confusingly, is actually buried under the four-columned Gordon memorial rather than under the inscribed boulder.

What is missing from Wright Square is far more important than what is present. Nowhere is there notice that slaves were sold in the square on the first Tuesday of every month during the early 19th century and for 75 years, drawing from the Johnson Square slave yards. Neither the slave yards nor the auction block are mentioned, marked, or noted in any way, and virtually all of the popular Savannah guidebooks fail to include this history in their thumbnail descriptions (see, for example, Morekis, 2012).

Riverfront Memorial

Erected just behind City Hall on one of the Savannah's most trafficked promenades, the lone slavery monument depicts a modern Black family arranged in a tight embrace as if emerging from the bondage of the broken chains that lie at their feet. Sculpted by Dorothy Spradley, at the time an artist on faculty at the local Savannah College of Art and Design, the unprotected monument is meant to "commemorate and honor the contributions of African Americans to the cultural, social, educational, economic, and spiritual life of the Savannah community,"



Figure 2 A snatch of poetry by Maya Angelou was ultimately selected for inscription as part of Savannah's slavery monument, even though Angelou never visited Savannah and even though the words were not written for the monument.

according to its official records archived in Savannah's City Hall. Inscribed on its granite base is a quotation from the poet Maya Angelou (Figure 2):

We were stolen, sold and bought together from the African continent. We got on the slave ships together. We lay back to belly in the holds of the slave ships in each other's excrement and urine together, sometimes died together, and our lifeless bodies thrown overboard together. Today, we are standing up together, with faith and even some joy.

The dream and vision of retired Savannah State University professor Abigail Jordan, the riverside slavery memorial was meant to be "one of the most important monuments in America, because the site where it will be placed is one of the major sites where Africans were brought to America and sold into slavery," Jordan told *Connect Savannah*, an alternative news weekly, in 2001 (Hamilton, p. 5). As the *Associated Press* put it, no one disputed that a slavery memorial was needed, but virtually every aspect of how to memorialize enslavement was contested. Most of the controversy surrounded the proposed Angelou inscription. Black city councilman David Jones told the AP that the description was "a little far out. I myself wouldn't want to be reminded of that every time I look at it" (Bynum, 2001, p. A14). Savannah's mayor, Floyd Adams, also Black, compared the inscription to the former state flag of Georgia that incorporated elements of the Confederate battle flag: "I don't want to polarize this community. I think those words are more divisive than anything" (Bynum, 2001, p. A14). Clifton Jones, Jr., also a

councilman at the time, told the AP that though the inscription is "derogatory," it tells the truth: "They were bound and chained in the bottom of the ships. And if they had to have a bowel movement, or whatever, they had to do it right there" (Bynum, 2001, p. A14). Others objected to any inscription not written by someone from the Savannah area, criticizing the choice of St. Louis-born, Winston-Salem, NC-based Angelou as merely an attempt to gain notoriety (Jamal Toure, personal interview, May 2016).

In resisting Savannah's slave past as a dark void, a lost or shameful epoch, even a paralytic burden better left undisturbed, Adams, Jones, and Jones, Jr., seemed to adopt the first of historian David Blight's five forms of collective memory by which he argues that African Americans face their own past of slavery, emancipation, and the Civil War, and forged stories about their journey in America: forgetfulness (Blight, 2006, p. 25). Abigail Jordan, in sharp contrast, in demanding the monument, seems to subscribe to Blight's third form of public memory, a view of Black destiny that combines Pan-Africanism, millennialism, and Ethiopianism in a tradition or theory that anticipates the creation of an exemplary civilization. This tradition sees emancipation as only one part of a long continuum of largely Christian development. In projecting a contemporary Black family newly freed from its shackles, on its way up and forward, a family determined to forge new and free identities, the message depends in part on a new narrative that naturalizes their hopes and experience and, by extension, those of all of Savannah's African Americans in a society newly open to them.

Jordan's project stalled on this very public battle over words and whether they were a source of healing truth or hurtful insult. More than two years prior, Savannah's Historic Site and Monument Commission approved the monument and its inscription, sending its recommendation to the City Council. The Council approved the sculpture but balked at the wording. Punctuating the interim between these two decisions was a heated "workshop" that gathered the City Council, the Jordan-led African-American Monument Association, and members of the public. Adams abruptly ended the meeting after being called a racist by monument proponent Solana Plaines, who called the Council's Black members "a bunch of weak-kneed Negroes, still enslaved, 400 years behind the times," according to coverage in the *Savannah Morning News* (Wilttrout, 2001, p. A1). The irony of being called slaves for opposing a slavery memorial likely was not lost on the city's first Black mayor.

Jordan, too, used the rhetoric of slavery to chastise the Council and the Site and Monument Committee for what she viewed as obstruction, according to the *Savannah Morning News*: “Look at all these folks sitting up there on that dais, leaving us out here like chattel saying, ‘Yes, master, please go along with this’” (Jordan, 2002, p. A12). After Plaines told councilman Jones that he was headed to hell and that she would be there to hold open the door, Adams shut the workshop down. At issue at this workshop and throughout the process was determining who was and was not authorized to speak for the Black community. As Ira Berlin noted, in this century as in those previous, “The history of slavery mixes with the politics of slavery in ways that leave everyone, black and white, uncomfortable and often mystified as to why” (Berlin, 2006, p. 3). Once a city’s memory becomes physical, as with memorials and monuments, that memory becomes the site of negotiation and conflict as both memory and the past that memory represents is interpreted. When that public memory has to do with an unreconciled and painful aspect of the nation’s past, this negotiation is as likely to tear scabs from old wounds as to heal them.

The name-calling and very public acrimony led one *Savannah Morning News* letter writer to suggest a clean slate and a fresh start on figuring out how to memorialize the city’s role in the slave trade. Resident Joseph P. Morgan III called on Adams to appoint a new committee and hold a national competition for a new design, seeing in the current design and controversy a source of continuing division. For him, the workshop “exposed an agenda which clearly had little or nothing to do with honoring the past, present or future” (Morgan, 2000, p. A10). Thus, in striking ways, the controversy over the slavery monument animated the words of Charles Eliot Norton, a writer and art professor, written more than 135 years prior. Writing in an August 1865 edition of the *Nation*, Norton suggested that monuments designed by committee invite “peculiar difficulties” with respect to aesthetics (Norton, 1865, p. 154). These difficulties arise:

because nearly all these proposed memorials will be built, if at all, by associations; few by private persons. . . . If a city or society employ an artist, without experimenting with a “competition,” they very seldom select the best or even one among the best of the artists within their reach; political influence, private friendship, personal popularity, accidental availability, or temporary popular favor, always interfere to govern the choice. . . . How many

committees of management, or boards of trustees, or building committees with power, contain each a majority of men who understand the complex and many-sided art of ornamental architecture? . . . It is not enough to have “good taste”—to have a correct natural feeling for beauty of form, or to be accustomed to drawings.

The choice of Spradley, who is White, did in fact spark controversy. Jordan defended the choice on the basis of cost, and economics would be a running theme throughout the debates over whether and how to effect a memorial. For Jordan, choosing an out-of-town artist, presumably Black, would have been cost-prohibitive (Hamilton, 2001). With the monument finally erected and the Angelou inscription intact, Jordan wrote to the residents of Savannah via the *Savannah Morning News* that even six months after installation, a University of Georgia study showed that it was attracting “additional tourists” and therefore “additional revenue” (Jordan, 2002, p. A12). For Jordan, the struggle had been “grueling” but, with its closure and success, ultimately “worthwhile.” The sacrifices made by the early ancestors of the city’s African American residents finally had been recognized; however, is one memorial-by-committee sufficient?

As allegory, the monument is a recent and important addition to the nation’s visual vocabulary as it relates to slavery, one that can be traced at least as far back as Josiah Wedgwood’s kneeling slave cameo. Made in England in 1787, the antislavery medallion, with the words, “AM I NOT A MAN AND A BROTHER,” became a popular icon in the British movement for the abolition of the slave trade. As its holder, the National Museum of American History, put it, the medallion “expressed in material form the growing horror at the barbarous practices of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and the premises upon which that trade thrived” (National Museum of American History, n.d.).

In 1787, Benjamin Franklin, then president of the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, wrote Wedgwood on the impact of the medallion:

I have seen in [viewers’] countenances such Mark of being affected by contemplating the Figure of the Supplicant . . . that I am persuaded it may have an Effect equal to that of the best written Pamphlet in procuring favour to those oppressed People. (in Kaplan, 1973, p. 236)

As allegory, the medallion and its many reproductions and representations appealed “directly to the heart,” as Philip Lapansky wrote. “The supplicant slave struck a profound and familiar iconographic chord—imagine him bearded kneeling under the weight of a large wooden cross” (Lapansky, 1994, p. 204).

The medallion reappeared as a more affordable copper medallion, was stenciled on pin cushions, and appeared as a woodcut in books. In 1832, William Lloyd Garrison adopted a female version of the symbol with its motto as a running head for the “Ladies Department” of his abolitionist *Liberator* newspaper, and beneath the female supplicant appeared the writings of many early female activists, including African Americans Maria Stewart, Sarah Mapps Douglass, and Sarah Forten. Both male and female versions adorned countless abolition books, pamphlets, newspapers, periodicals, broadsides, letterheads, and printed ephemera, and they were replicated on handicraft goods and even as part of manufactured items such as chinaware, tokens, linen, and silk goods (McInnis, 2011, p. 30).

Jordan’s hope, then, was that as allegory, the modern-day Black family emerging from chains might visually articulate a forward-looking view of that past in a material container of memory experienced in the present. As a dedicated space, the slave memorial offers passersby a signifier that can activate social representation and interpretation (Caliendo, 2011, p. 1150). Jordan maintained throughout the arduous process of winning the riverside memorial that as a site of memory it would validate and authenticate a version of Savannah’s past, one that recognizes the presence and contributions of the city’s enslaved. Thus, the memorial can elicit and influence identity negotiation both individually and collectively by triggering social memory. Officially set aside and dedicated, the riverside space has rhetorical, communicative meaning that is simultaneously political and strategic.

As a physical trace of memory, the riverside memorial is ambiguous, however. The chains are a synecdoche of enslavement and of the enslaved, but as a fragment, they communicate little of the horrors of the slave experience. The modern garb of the statuary figures also mitigates a confrontation with or even awareness of these horrors. When the statue was revealed, local historian Vaughnette Goode-Walker said there was “a collective gasp” in reaction to the clothing of the figures. “Here were some Africans in modern dress, which really confused people,” she said. “Like, ‘Oh, we’ve chained up this modern day family, and now we’ve freed them’”

(Vaughnette Goode-Walker, personal interview, May 2016. Goode-Walker is proprietor of the Footprints of Savannah walking tour of Savannah’s “forgotten footpaths” and director of Savannah’s Ralph Mark Gilbert Civil Rights Museum).

In addition, the absence of slave owners, or buyers and sellers, removes or at least mutes questions of culpability and responsibility. As a process, visual culture involves the social context of both the “seeing” and the “seen,” but it also depends in part on the intentionality of the practices that can connect these moments (Jenks, 1995, p. 16). A trained eye perhaps would notice that the unchained family faces east, or toward Africa, looking out over water that brought so many enslaved to Savannah and by which many advocated returning in the back-to-Africa movement of the 1890s. These connections, however, likely elude most visitors, who are often preoccupied with street performers, pralines, and people watching in the heart of the city’s touristic commercial area.

In presenting four figures standing “before the world,” the Savannah monument is in some ways reminiscent of Frederick Hart’s “The Three Servicemen,” which Hart created in 1984 as a response, even a remedy, to the controversy over Maya Lin’s Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC, that opened in 1982. To Lin, Hart’s soldier figures “standing there before the world” are “trite, it’s a generalization, a simplification. Hart gives you an image—he’s illustrating a book” (Kammen, 2006, p. 5). Conversely, to Hart, Lin’s postmodern, minimalist black wall, which since has become the capital’s most popular memorial, is “elitist. . . . People can say you can bring what you want to Lin’s memorial. But I call that brown bag esthetics. I mean you better bring something, because there ain’t nothing being served” (Kammen, 2006, p. 5). In depicting figures in a symbolically iconic way, Spradley’s monument risks the triteness that Goode-Walker said she and others find objectionable (Figure 3).

As an unprotected monument in a highly trafficked part of the riverfront area, situated adjacent to the embarkation/debarkation point for the city’s ferries, the “seeing” is mitigated by the hustle and bustle of that social context. The monument is set apart, islanded in a public sitting area, but without any sort of ironwork or fencing, it is all too accessible to gymnastic children, who desecralize it as a sort of park-like jungle gym. As a singular, permanent site, the monument flattens or suppresses a complex history to present instead a simplified, generalized image,



Figure 3
Savannah attracts approximately 13 million tourists per year. What are they to make of freed “slaves” in modern dress looking out across the Savannah River?

one ultimately of hope and, therefore, one that looks forward as much as it refers to a past.

As allegory, the riverside monument is an example of Roland Barthes’s mythological discourse, a myth that distills the past into a “digestible touristic presentation [that] eliminates any discussion of conflict; it concentrates instead on a sense of resolution” (Norkunas, 1993, p. 36). Dangerously, considering contemporary events of race conflict, this version of history collapses memory into a symbolizing of “progress” and of the “rightness” of history. Because erecting a monument can be understood as an attempt to stabilize memory or to authorize one narrative over others, the riverside memorial literally carves this flattened past into metal while leaving out all other memories or ways of memorializing (McGeough, Palzcewski, & Lake, 2015, p. 233). That nearby, typically, Gullah and Geechee sweet grass weavers sell baskets and trinkets only serves to aid and abet the monument in taming Savannah’s racialized heritage history into caricature—the once backbreaking labor of slaves becomes just another “selfie” moment.

The monument, therefore, might fail at even a basic communicative level; it is easy to overlook, ignore, or dismiss. We cannot test the veracity of the argument that posits that tourists are not interested in or would be unnerved by the greater historical accuracy and scope that could include slavery and its contexts, a belief voiced by current Savannah mayor Eddie DeLoach (Eddie DeLoach, personal interview, May 2016).

There is a great deal of evidence elsewhere that this is not the case at all. John Michael Vlach’s curated exhibition on plantation slavery, “Back of the Big House: The Cultural Landscape of the Plantation,” for example, was organized for exhibition in 1995 by the Library of Congress but was quickly dismantled and put in storage after protests by some of the Library’s African American employees. The nation’s premiere archive and a national symbol of thought, knowledge, and ideas proved unable to display an exhibit that sought to educate its visitors on the complex role of slavery in plantation life, an exhibit from that institution’s own collections. Yet the very same exhibition proved a commercial success at the Martin Luther King Jr. Library, also in Washington, DC, as did a supplementary exhibit that ran concurrently at the Historical Society of Washington. This interest, even enthusiasm, was evidenced in the reactions of audiences at 18 different sites from Boston to Baton Rouge. The Library’s response, therefore, was the aberrant one. As Vlach wrote,

Collectively, most black respondents from Washington, D.C., voiced an interest in learning more about the onerous and taboo aspects of their history. Armed with credible visual images and direct verbal testimony about the awful days of slavery, most of them manifested a desire to learn and to endure. (Vlach, 2006, p. 72)

Savannah’s former mayor Adams also expressed reluctance to remember slavery in any official sense, afraid to take on White

representations of southern history. Adams surprisingly gave legitimacy to displays of the Confederate stars-and-bars by suggesting that struggles against it were polarizing (Alderman, 2010, p. 98). Jordan countered that it was for precisely this reason that the memorial was needed, to counter the message of White supremacy inherent in Southern memorials, especially in the pantheon of Confederate monuments that dominate Savannah's visual geography and, in that dominance, present a ratified collective memory for the city that, if not erroneously, then in a conspicuously unbalanced fashion translates into an accepted history. After the Civil War, the South created more monuments to its defeat than any other civilization in history, Shackel found (2001, p. 662). The approach seemingly advocated by Adams and, to a lesser extent, by Deloach, of hiding some history deemed too problematic, has been called "Savannah-tizing" by local Black historians (Vaughnette Goode-Walker, personal interview, May 2016). Black history tour operator Jamal Toure, who also teaches history at Savannah State University, said it is common for tourists to the city to grow weary of the showhouse tours and come to his Day Clean Journeys tours for "the true sense of what happened in Savannah," he said.

A family of non-African-Americans, all Caucasians, told me, "Jamal, we're so tired of hearing about rich white people and their furniture. . . . We know Africans were held in captivity here, but they never said anything about slavery on the [show home] tours. We want to see the other side." (Jamal Toure, personal interview, May 2016).

(Toure was the human model for the male figure in the riverfront memorial; Jordan was the model for the female.)

Jordan insisted that she was proposing "an innovative monument" that "fills in the void created by Confederate memorials; a monument that provides the channel for discussions and healing" (Alderman, quoting Jordan's unpublished memoir, 2010, p. 98). As such, Jordan sought an important response to the machinery of "Lost Cause" memoria that, with the support of groups such as the United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Sons of Confederate Veterans, has established a Confederate tradition and narrative that for Savannah is largely the official public memory. In Savannah as elsewhere, what art historian

Freeman Henry Morris Murray feared in 1916 in fact occurred, which is that public monuments to the Civil War would celebrate only its White "heroes" and great military battles, erasing slavery from the national memory. As a contesting of that national memory, any reference to slavery or subordination Adams and Deloach saw as embarrassing, shameful, or provocative, which invokes for Savannah's Black residents yet again a sense of powerlessness against the city's elites, even its Black elites.

The disagreement in Savannah over what due attention to the role of slavery might look like is strikingly reminiscent of the city of Richmond, Virginia's, struggle over how to remember tennis great Arthur Ashe, the only Black man to win the singles title at Wimbledon. Richmond's City Planning Commission controversially decided in 1995 to place his statue in the Confederate historic district of Monument Avenue, alongside Robert E. Lee, rather than in a historically Black section of the city. As Marie Tyler-McGraw described the decision,

The ongoing effort to interpret the Civil War in Richmond with due attention to the role of slavery and the perspectives of black and white leads to one overriding conclusion: heritage tourism cannot be a pilgrimage to an unchanging shrine, and sites are going to be forums, not temples. (Tyler-McGraw, 2006, p. 167)

Richmond was at one time the capital of the Confederacy.

For Americans who see their history as a freedom story and themselves as defenders of that freedom, "The integration of slavery into their national narrative is embarrassing and can be guilt-producing and disillusioning," wrote James Oliver Horton and Johanna C. Kardux (2004, p. 52). The anguish of the past encourages efforts to forget or alter that past. As countermemory, the Ashe statue and Savannah's riverfront slavery monument put on dramatic display how attempts to integrate race and slavery into the collective memory of a city, especially one dependent on tourism, risk provoking defensiveness, anger, and confrontation. According to Deloach, Savannah attracts 13 million visitors per year, tourism that generates \$2.5 billion in revenues annually (Eddie Deloach, personal interview, May 2016).

Memoria as Countermemory

As countermemory, these public memoria are also communicative acts, rhetorical acts of remembrance, because public memory lives "as it

is given expressive form”; it exists in the visible world and not in any one person’s head (Browne, 1995, p. 248). Importantly, the riverfront monument promotes a hopeful sense of the past, even a historical progression, and in that promotion seeks to persuade. As a rhetorical act of remembrance, the monument’s making was an active process in which Jordan, Plaines, and others fought for and won agency. By force of will, endurance, and persuasion, Jordan strongly influenced Savannah’s remembering and helped to shape a prominent appearance of that memory. Albeit in fits and starts, her vision for the riverfront memorial guided the process of cultivating and “containing” a version of the city’s past, presenting a material urging to remember Savannah’s enslaved and their contributions. Existing at the nexus of presence and absence, however, the monument leaves the particularities of that remembering up to individuals.

As Sturken (1991) argued of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial wall in Washington, DC, the riverfront monument acts a dual-purpose screen in that it both projects memories for visitors while filtering other aspects of memory out, such as the lived experience of Savannah’s enslaved. For Goode-Walker, who is also director of Savannah’s Ralph Mark Gilbert Civil Rights Museum, it is a great disappointment that the monument does not have a name and that none of the city’s many enslaved are given identity or a particular history. The monument is about forgetting as much as it is about remembering, therefore, which is inevitably true of any collective memory act (Schudson, 1995, p. 346).

As a mechanism of recollection, the monument seeks to influence public sentiment and to persuade, but mainly by calling attention to a larger problem with respect to commemoration and recollecting slavery as a historical fact, which is that there is so little public memory to draw on, to inference, or to which to refer. National consciousness on this topic is hazy at best. “The simple truth is that most Americans know little about the 300-year history of slavery . . . and almost nothing of its effect on the majority of white Americans,” according to Berlin (in Horton & Horton, 2013, p. 4).

Whether this makes the monument a success or a failure, then, is contingent on what happens next, both for the city at large and for the individual tourists who pause long enough to listen to something of what the monument has to say. Collective remembering, therefore, is a complex series of acts that in their complexity and contingency resist stability. Unlike history, for

which adjectives such as “accurate,” “reliable,” and “authentic” might be apt, public memory is mutable and ephemeral. Though fabricated in metal and, therefore, solid and seemingly stable, the riverside monument, as one set of rhetorical acts in the larger activity of public memory, is fluid, unstable, and ambiguous, obscuring as much as it reveals. The memory it contains, therefore, is not so much controlled, or even articulated, as much as it is evoked. Norkunas’s description of public memoria as nostalgia, then, seems accurate; memoria like the riverfront monument obliterate history in creating mythology as much as and at the same time as they remember any discernible past—holding out or reaching a hand to the place that once was or, in the case of Spradley’s and Jordan’s vision, to the country the United States could be.

The Weeping Time

Any discussion of Savannah’s commemorative landscape with respect to slavery should include mention of the city’s Weeping Time marker erected by the Georgia Historical Society and the City of Savannah in 2007. The marker notes a public auction of enslaved so large it had to be moved from Wright Square by Joseph Bryan to the Ten Broeck Race Course two and a half miles west of the city, one of if not the largest such sales in U.S. history (“American Civilization Illustrated,” 1859, p. 5). The “weeping time” is the name given to the sale by those enslaved in order to refer to the tears produced in separating husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters. According to the *Savannah Daily Morning News* of March 4, 1859, the sale trafficked 436 people, “sold mostly in families, to the highest bidder for [a total of] \$300,205—being an average of a little over \$716 a head” (*Digest and Index of the Newspaper Record of Events and Events*, 1937, p. 220). Coincidentally, also in 1859, “a movement started to erect a monument to General Oglethorpe,” and city leaders “unanimously resolved to repeal all laws against the importation of Africans and to re-open the Slave Trade” (*Digest*, 1937, vol. VI).

The 105-word marker is situated on a road median along Augusta Avenue on what was an outlying piece of the race course, itself a monument to the palmy days of pleasure, torn down to make room for Interstate 516. The marker’s placement is defensible geographically and historically. However, situated more than two miles west of the historic city center, the Weeping Time marker is not on the routes of any of the mainstream touring companies. To see it, a visitor would have to book one of two chauffeured Black history tours, Johnnie Brown’s

Freedom Trail or Toure's Day Clean Journeys, neither of which are able to match the mainstream tours in frequency or in advertising exposure. Thus, the telling of history is largely segregated, marginalizing "Black history" as a subset of Savannah's history in special tours and separate places and, therefore, limiting the exposure visitors can have to this knowledge. The marker is omitted from many of the standard tour guides. Such segregation reinforces the norm of learning only a White-centric view of history, which, as Eichstedt and Small found, is the default in plantation and house tours throughout the South. The private spaces of the White elites have become the sites of official public memory, often sanctioned and supported by local government through historical preservation efforts (Roberts & Kytle, 2012, p. 672).

With limited time and budgets, visitors are forced to make a choice between the mainstream trolley and walking tours and the handful of Black history tours. Savannah could ask itself whether every visitor to the city should come away with at least some knowledge of enslavement, which is to question how segregated tours and narratives ensure that only those who self-select into learning about enslavement will take away anything of value about the institution and the people who lived under it. What is missing from most of the South's tour sites, Eichstedt and Small found, is sustained dialogue about who performed the labor that made possible the lifestyle of the master-enslavers. Savannah's visitors can learn more about fire screens, portraits, mantels, and furniture than they can of the presence, labor, and lives of the city's enslaved. Across all of the sites Eichstedt and Small studied, furniture was mentioned 31 times as often as enslaved people (2002, p. 83). It is no small irony that the riverside monument sits near cobblestones and brown bricks fashioned by the city's enslaved.

The Weeping Time marker's remoteness and the riverside slavery monument's ambiguity and mythic meaning underline the symbolic annihilation and erasure in evidence in Savannah's tours, sites, memoria, and visual geography. By largely ignoring the institution and experience of slavery, symbolic annihilation as a rhetorical strategy is powerful, particularly when it is wielded by government and official institutions (Tuchman, 1978, p. 8; Gerbner, 1972, p. 44). Eichstedt and Small found this to be true in the plantation sites they visited (Eichstedt & Small, 2002, pp. 106–118). By allowing symbolic annihilation to occur by ensuring that slavery and the enslaved are either completely absent or are mentioned in only negligible, fleeting,

euphemistic, or perfunctory ways, Savannah's memoria suggest that enslavement and the contributions of the enslaved—even their presence—are not important enough to warrant historical care or considered context.

Conclusions and Implications

A fuller, more inclusive, and therefore more stable collective memory would require a commitment to accepting the existence of multiple, sometimes even competing, recollections rather than a single, unified collective memory. Visitors to Savannah's sites could be provided with information about the ways in which slavery operated in narratives that demonstrate some investigation into the lives of enslaved people. As it is, Black-run sites and tours have to contest the dominant narratives.

Johnnie Brown, proprietor of Johnnie Brown's Freedom Trail, for example, takes tourists to, among other places, the Weeping Time marker; Laurel Grove South Cemetery, which is devoted to Black people, including its "whipping tree" scarred by whips in the lashing of slaves; First African Baptist Church on Montgomery Street, with balcony pews built by enslaved people, and itself a stop on the Underground Railroad; and the Civil Rights Museum on Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard (see Alderman, 2006). Brown's tour is, therefore, organized around struggle, resistance, and resilience in the face of inhumanity, which is to say it is organized on a very different set of valorizations than those of any of the mainline tours. As such, Brown's tour is a corrective to the distortions of those popular tours, as are Toure's and Goode-Walker's, as well. To learn anything of the experience of cruelty and degradation that often included sexual abuse and rape, whippings and deprivations, punishment and torture, visitors to Savannah interested in learning anything of the city's enslaved must locate, establish connection to, and book one of these Black-run tours, each of them single-proprietor. On these tours the enslaved are named, which is to speak to individual histories and stories. Such bookings often require negotiating a time and rendezvous point, and none of this is possible unless a visitor is even aware such tours exist.

Savannah's attempts at public memory and counter-memory are important, even vital, because public monuments are also a form of civic education. Collective remembering has an ongoing connection with contemporary identity negotiation, implying that the past is not simply "received" by the present. The present is "haunted" by the past," as James Wertsch

described it, in contrasting the work of collective memory with history as it is traditionally understood (2009, p. 238). Historians warn against inventing or reconstructing the past in service of the present, but this is what collective remembering is or does. Historians explore complexity and contingency, whereas collective memory simplifies, often distilling complex events from a “single, committed perspective,” as historian Peter Novick put it (Wertsch, 2009, p. 238).

Mythic archetypes, like the modern Black family on River Street, are the reductionist stuff of myth and collective memory, which has implications for identity negotiation. In learning the narratives of the past crafted by public memoria, Savannahians come to know and believe things about who they are today. Grand homes and historic squares with moss-draped oaks might be important, but as dominant features of a cityscape that presents tourists with but one monument to slavery, an institution without which there is no South as either an idea or a region, and with only a single marker merely noting perhaps the largest auction of human beings in American history, they conspire to emphasize pleasure and escape in service to tourism at the expense of a richer, more inclusive, more ethically defensible cityscape (Miles, 2015, p. 17). Control of public memory’s sites, forms, and inscriptions is control of the meaning of local history, thus this more inclusive project of memoria is and will remain largely a possibility for mainly the city’s governing elites (Tyler-McGraw, 2006, p. 157). The right to participate in public discourse is at the heart of claims to public space like that represented by the Savannah’s slavery memorial and, perhaps, public memoria of the city’s enslaved yet to come.

This study is, of course, limited. As a single case study, this analysis of the battle over Savannah’s riverfront memorial offers a thick account of a single phenomenon, but one that cannot be generalized. What we learn in particular can sometimes be transferred to similar situations (Erickson, 1986, p. 199), but it is the reader not the researcher who must determine what can apply to his or her context. How Savannah negotiates its past and the memory of that past—which is not at all to suggest a monolithic, shared experience—is and will be very different than the way Charleston or New Orleans or really anywhere else remembers. Thus, this study cannot offer representativeness. Accounting for, including, and explaining difference offers rich opportunity for future research.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank Diane Land, Allie Crain, Stan Deaton, Paul Pressly, Jamal Toure, Vaughnette Goode-Walker, and Johnnie Brown for their help with this study.

References

- Alderman, D. (2006). Naming streets for Martin Luther King, Jr.: No easy road. In R. H. Schein (Ed.), *Landscape and race in the United States* (pp. 213–236). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Alderman, D. (2010). Surrogation and the politics of remembering slavery in Savannah, Georgia (USA). *Journal of Historical Geography*, 36(1), 90–101.
- American civilization illustrated: A great slave auction. (1859, March 9). *New York-Daily Tribune*, p. 5.
- Berlin, I. (2006). Coming to terms with slavery in twenty-first century America. In J. O. Horton & L. E. Horton (Eds.), *Slavery and public history: The tough stuff of American memory* (pp. 1–17). New York, NY: The New Press.
- Blight, D. (2006). If you don’t tell it like it was, it can never be as it ought to be. In J. O. Horton & L. E. Horton (Eds.), *Slavery and public history: The tough stuff of American memory* (pp. 19–33). New York, NY: The New Press.
- Browne, S. H. (1995). Reading, rhetoric, and the texture of public memory. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 81, 232–265.
- Bynum, R. (2001, February 10). Slave statue splits city. *Washington Post*, p. A14.
- Caliendo, G. G. (2011). MLK boulevard: Material forms of memory and the social contestation of racial signification. *Journal of Black Studies*, 42(7), 1148–1170.
- Digest and Index of the Newspaper Record of Events and Events*. (1937). Abstracted from the files of the *Savannah Morning News*, vol. X.
- Eichstedt, J. L., & Small, S. (2002). *Representations of slavery: Race and ideology in southern plantation museums*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Erickson, F. (1986). Qualitative methods in research on teaching. In M. C. Whittrock (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teaching* (3rd ed., pp. 119–161). Old Tappan, NJ: Macmillan.
- Gerbner, G. (1972). Violence in television drama: Trends and symbolic functions. In G. A. Comstock & E. Rubinstein (Eds.), *Television and social behavior, vol. 1: Content and control* (pp. 27–187). Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.
- Halbwachs, M. (1950). *The collective memory*. New York, NY: Harper and Row.
- Hamilton, L. (2001, February 2–8). City finally approves African-American monument. *Connect Savannah*, p. 5.

- Harris, L. M., & Berry, D. R. (Eds.) (2014). *Slavery and freedom in Savannah*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press.
- Horton, J. O., & Horton, L. E. (Eds.) (2013). *Slavery and public history: The tough stuff of American memory*. New York, NY: The New Press.
- Horton, J. O., & Kardux, J. C. (2004). Slavery and the contest for national heritage in the United States and the Netherlands. *American Studies International*, 42(2–3), 51–74.
- Jenks, C. (1995). The centrality of the eye in western culture. In C. Jenks (Ed.), *Visual culture* (p. 16). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Jordan, A. (2002, December 5). Struggle for monument worthwhile for participants. *Savannah Morning News*, p. A12.
- Kammen, M. (2006). *Visual shock: A history of art controversies in American culture*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Kaplan, S. (1973). *The Black presence in the era of the American Revolution, 1770–1800*. Norwalk, CT: New York Graphic Society.
- Landriau, M. (2017, May 23). We can't walk away from this truth. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/05/we-cant-walk-away-from-this-truth/527721/>
- Lapansky, P. (1994). Graphic discord: Abolitionist and antiabolitionist images. In J. F. Yellin & J. C. Van Horne (Eds.), *The abolitionist sisterhood: Women's political culture in antebellum America* (pp. 201–30). Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- McGeough, R. E., Palzcewski, C. H., & Lake, R. A. (2015). Oppositional memory practices: U.S. memorial spaces as arguments over public memory. *Argumentation and Advocacy*, 51, 231–254.
- McInnis, M. D. (2011). Representing the slave trade. In M. D. McInnis, *Slaves waiting for sale: Abolitionist art and the American slave trade* (pp. 27–54). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Miles, T. (2015). *Tales from the haunted south*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- Morekis, J. (2012). *Charleston & Savannah*. Berkeley, CA: Perseus Books.
- Morgan, J. P., III. (2000, January 31). Start over again on installing monument. *Savannah Morning News*, p. A10.
- Murray, F. H. M. (1916). *Emancipation and the freed in American sculpture: A study in interpretations*. Washington, DC: Murray Brothers.
- National Museum of American History. (n.d.). Antislavery medallion. Retrieved from http://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah_596365
- Norkunas, M. K. (1993). *The politics of public memory: Tourism, history, and ethnicity in Monterey, California*. New York, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Norton, C. E. (1865, August 3). Something about monuments. *Nation*, 1, 154–156.
- Phillips, K. R. (2010). The failure of memory: Reflections on rhetoric and public remembrance. *Western Journal of Communication*, 74(2), 208–223.
- Roberts, B., & Kytly, E. J. (2012). Looking the thing in the face: Slavery, race, and the commemorative landscape in Charleston, South Carolina, 1865–2010. *The Journal of Southern History*, 78(3), 639–684.
- Russell, P., & Hines, B. (1992). *Savannah: A history of her people since 1733*. Savannah, GA: Frederic C. Beil.
- Schudson, M. (1995). Dynamics of distortion in collective memory. In D. Schacter (Ed.), *Memory distortion: How minds, brains and societies reconstruct the past* (pp. 346–347). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Shackel, P. A. (2001). Public memory and the search for power in American historical archaeology. *American Anthropologist*, 103, 655–670.
- Sturken, M. (1991). The wall, the screen, and the image: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial. *Representations*, 35 (Special Issue: Monumental Histories), 118–142.
- Tuchman, G. (1978). The symbolic annihilation of women by the mass media. In G. Tuchman, A. K. Daniels, & J. Benet (Eds.), *Hearth and home: Images of women in the mass media* (pp. 3–38). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Tyler-McGraw, M. (2006). Southern comfort levels: Race, heritage tourism, and the civil war in Richmond. In J. Horton & L. Horton (Eds.), *Slavery and public history: The tough stuff of American memory* (pp. 151–167). New York, NY: New Press.
- Vlach, J. M. (2006). The last great taboo subject: Exhibiting slavery at the Library of Congress. In J. Horton & L. Horton (Eds.), *Slavery and public history: The tough stuff of American memory* (pp. 57–73). New York, NY: The New Press.
- Wertsch, J. V. (2009). Collective remembering. *Semiotica*, 173, 233–247.
- Wiltout, K. (2001, January 21). City council workshop grows heated. *Savannah Morning News*, pp. A1, A11.
- Wiltout, K. (2002, July 28). A dream comes true: Savannah celebrates its newest monument. *Savannah Morning News*. Retrieved from <http://old.Savannahnow.com/stories/072802/LOCMonumentUnveiling.shtml>
- Dr. Brian Carroll is professor of Communication and chair of the Department of Communication at Berry College in Mount Berry, Georgia. He is author of *When to Stop the Cheering? The Black Press, the Black Community, and the Integration of Professional Baseball*; *A Devil's Bargain: The Black Press and Black Baseball, 1915–1960*; and *Writing and Editing for Digital Media*, now in its third edition. He earned his PhD from UNC Chapel Hill in 2003. E-mail: bc@berry.edu