

KING'S RETURN TO THE MALL: PUBLIC MEMORY AND THE
RHETORIC OF THE MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.
NATIONAL MEMORIAL

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ABSTRACT

In recent years many scholars have taken up the rhetorical study of sites of memory, observing how museums, memorials, and other commemorative sites function to cultivate public memory. This study situates itself in this field of research by examining the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial located on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. Through a multi-faceted rhetorical analysis of the site's visual and textual components, surrounding landscape, and supporting texts, this study reveals multiple critical, popular, privileged, and vernacular interpretations of the site and King's memory. I contend that the Memorial and its related texts, notably including its dedication ceremony, help universalize and institutionalize King's memory, creating a contentious rhetorical battleground where various people contest the "ownership" and use of King's memory.

This study complements the field of memory studies, as well as scholarly knowledge on King's public memory. In Chapter Two, a review of public memory literature details the study's theoretical framework. Chapter Three's historical-contextual analysis recounts the Memorial's history and collects many official and critical interpretations of the site. Chapter Four presents my own critical interpretation of the Memorial's visual and textual elements, along with its surrounding landscape, offering a composite reading of the site. In Chapter Five I examine the site's dedication ceremony as supplementary rhetoric to the site, observing how privileged rhetors interpreted, politicized, and helped institutionalize King's memory. Chapter Six concludes the study by offering implications, limitations, and directions for future research.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Tom and Betty Walker, for their love and support.

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Finishing the hat,
How you have to finish the hat,
How you watch the rest of the world
From a window
While you finish the hat.

--Stephen Sondheim, *Sunday in the Park with George*

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Over the last two decades scholars in the humanities and social sciences have increasingly taken up the study of “public” or “collective” memory. Offering a simplified definition of the complicated term, memory studies scholar Barbie Zelizer explains that “collective memory refers to recollections that are instantiated beyond the individual by and for the collective.”¹ Within the interdisciplinary field of memory studies, scholars often examine places, or *loci*, of public memory, observing how the sites function rhetorically in a variety of ways. In his landmark essay, “Between Memory and History,” French historian Pierre Nora discusses *les lieux de mémoire*, or “sites of memory,” asserting that “memory attaches itself to sites” and “takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images, and objects.”² Many critical scholars have taken up the study of *les lieux de mémoire*, examining the rhetorical character of museums, monuments, memorials, and other memory sites.³

One prominent strand of public memory scholarship in an American context concerns sites remembering the Civil Rights Movement and Martin Luther King, Jr.⁴ These studies explore the celebratory, political, and pedagogical functions of memory sites such as Birmingham, Alabama’s Civil Rights Institute and Atlanta, Georgia’s Martin Luther King, Jr. Historic Site. This dissertation situates itself in this field of scholarship by focusing on the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial in Washington, D.C. The product of a twenty-seven-plus year effort by the National Parks Service, King’s Fraternity Alpha Phi Alpha, the King

Estate, as well as other individuals and organizations, the King Memorial opened in 2011, purporting to be a “public sanctuary where future generations of Americans, regardless of race, religion, gender, ethnicity or sexual orientation, [could] come to honor the life and legacy of Dr. King.”⁵

The Memorial’s design found inspiration from a quotation from King’s 1963 “I Have a Dream” speech: “Out of the mountain of despair, a stone of hope.”⁶ The Memorial presents a physical manifestation of this metaphor through its primary design elements: a “Stone of Hope,” a large granite stone inscribed with the image of King, placed in front of the “Mountain of Despair,” two stones which serve as the central entryway into the plaza (fig. 1). The “Stone of Hope” features King standing and facing away from the two parts of the “Mountain of Despair,” with arms folded and eyes solemnly gazing across the Tidal Basin towards the Jefferson Memorial. On either side of the Memorial’s main features are polished granite walls inscribed with quotations from several of King’s writings and speeches (fig. 2).



Figure 1. Out of the Mountain of Despair, A Stone of Hope.⁷



Figure 2. The South Inscription Wall.⁸

Throughout its conception and construction, the Memorial received national attention and praise for its efforts in celebrating King’s memory. The site’s dedication ceremony, on October 16, 2011, drew thousands of people to the site, while also prompting event coverage by the national media. However, not all of the Memorial’s attention was positive, as the media reported numerous controversies surrounding its history and design. Some critics railed against the King Memorial for being “made in China,” drawing attention to its design by renowned Chinese sculptor Lei Yixin, its use of Chinese granite, and the employment of Chinese labor.⁹ Others, including former U.S. poet laureate and English professor Maya Angelou, criticized the Memorial for paraphrasing a quotation from King in a way to make him sound like an

“egotist.”¹⁰ The dedication ceremony, lasting over three hours, was not without its own controversies, as speakers including President Barack Obama turned the occasion into somewhat of a political forum.¹¹

While other scholars have also examined King-related memory sites, the simultaneous praise and criticism levied specifically at the King Memorial encourage attention. Additionally, the memory of King constructed and institutionalized at the national level by the National Parks Service (NPS) makes this specific memorial worthy of analysis. Adding further significance to any project examining King’s memory are the many educators, activists, and members of the media who lament the perceived lack of knowledge of King’s life and accomplishments, especially among younger generations of Americans. For instance, Jasmyne Cannick, an African American community activist and columnist says of younger generations, “They don’t know what organization he founded, they don’t know key lines of his speeches, they don’t know when he was killed. I’m embarrassed and disappointed by this.”¹² When asked about King’s identity, many individuals might produce answers no deeper than 14-year old Marcus Brown: “I know he said, ‘I have a dream.’”¹³ The ways that King’s memory is constructed for such individuals remains a potentially relevant topic for public memory scholars to address.

Moreover, some scholars mourn the depleted mythic construction of King as the transcendent “national savior.”¹⁴ As the nation celebrated the first Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, in 1987, historian and activist Vincent Gordon Harding wrote, “It appears as if the price for the first national holiday honoring a black man is the development of a massive case of national amnesia concerning who that black man really was.”¹⁵ Harding added that society placed King into “the relatively safe categories of ‘civil rights leader,’ ‘great orator,’ [and] harmless dreamer of black and white children on the hillside,” while forgetting him as an evolving, embattled, and

confrontational figure.¹⁶ In King's case, as the memory of his universal messages of peace and equality have been celebrated, his more specific agendas, messages, and accomplishments have been forgotten.¹⁷ By studying the King National Memorial, I am able to examine this trend, of celebrating the general to the detriment of the specific, at the national level.¹⁸

One major component of this study is an interpretation of the King Memorial based primarily on my own experience encountering the site; yet, as with all rhetorical artifacts, I acknowledge that multiple interpretations exist for the King Memorial. People interpret texts differently because of their own beliefs and experiences, in addition to factors such as age, class, gender, race, religion, ability, and sexual orientation. I recognize that I visited and interpreted the site from the standpoint of a white, middle-class, college-educated male American from the South. My own beliefs and experiences do not enable me to completely understand or account for how other groups may interpret the Memorial. Communication scholars Victoria E. Sanchez and Mary E. Stuckey add:

[E]ven as individual interpretations of a text are influenced by demographics and past experiences, the text itself contributes to experience. Just as images and stereotypes can be created and reinforced in texts, they can also be challenged, reformed, and remade during the process of reading or viewing.¹⁹

Rhetorical texts often contain complex, contradictory messages that can be interpreted as positive and negative, supportive and challenging, and in the words of Sanchez and Stuckey, "hegemonic and emancipatory."²⁰ More specifically, postmodern memorials, such as the King Memorial, are examples of what memory scholars Carole Blaire, Marsha S. Jeppeson, and Enrico Pucci, Jr. call "multivocal rhetoric."²¹ That is, the sites hold multiple meanings that allow for—and encourage—different and even conflicting readings. I offer my own critical interpretation of the King Memorial's messages, but acknowledge that my readings are imperfect and are in no way definitive or comprehensive of how all others might interpret the site.²²

Therefore, this study also offers a robust, though incomplete, analysis of other major interpretations of the site.

A multi-faceted approach also enables this study to attend to how the Memorial's creators, benefactors, and observers have interpreted the site. Thus, I explore the conspicuous motives of the rhetors (as reflected and intimated in public discourse) behind the Memorial through a historical-contextual examination of the Memorial's conception, planning, and construction. Recounting the Memorial's history also elucidates prominent critical and positive responses to the site, showing the variety of interpretations that have proliferated among its critics and supporters. A rhetorical analysis of the Memorial's dedication ceremony, then, describes other prominent—perhaps, the principal—interpretations of the site. Communication scholars V. William Balthrop, Carole Blair, and Neil Michel make the case for studying a dedication ceremony as “supplemental rhetoric” to a site, asserting that “Ritual dedications of commemorative sites are important not only as generic cultural initiations, but as interpretive apertures. The rhetoric of such events usually provides guidance to the audience, offering or implying interpretations of the site that are preferred by those empowered to offer them.”²³ The authors continue:

Recent communication scholarship is replete with important contributions to a literature, escalating in both size and sophistication, on material rhetorics of commemoration. Our critical assessment relies on that work and respects its demand that commemorative places be treated not simply as contexts for rhetoric but as themselves rhetorical. However, that is not to deny the significance of the supplemental rhetoric that a commemorative place may give rise to, and that in turn reinterprets or reperforms the place.²⁴

Thus, this study additionally analyzes the King Memorial's dedication ceremony as a hegemonic vehicle for interpreting the site, underscoring the event's significance in influencing how others might also interpret the Memorial.

Ultimately, this study offers a critical interpretation of the King Memorial and explores other interpretations in order to uncover how the site contributes to the public memory of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. In Chapter Two I present three central features of public memory: (1) public memory is situated in concrete sites and artifacts; (2) public memory is purposeful, partisan, and partial; and (3) public memory responds to present circumstances by educating and identity-building. Throughout this dissertation, I investigate the significance of those assumptions with regard to the memory of King as cultivated by the King Memorial. Through the critical interpretation of the Memorial and its related texts, along with the process of amassing other readings of the site, I am able to pose a number of research inquiries. How do the Memorial's various components (e.g., location, textual features, visual elements, experiential landscape) add contour to King's public memory? How might the Memorial's visitors, critics, and producers arrive at different, sometimes conflicting interpretations of the site? How do related discursive texts (e.g. dedication speeches, pamphlets, articles, and editorials) influence the Memorial's cultivation of King's public memory? These types of research inquiries are not entirely unique to this case study. Yet this study yields new and significant results. I specifically contend that the Memorial and its related discourse support different claims to "ownership" of King's memory. I also argue that the Memorial reconciles the memory of King and the Civil Rights Movement with a "mainstream" narrative of progress throughout U.S. history, institutionalizing King and transforming him from a vernacular voice to a hegemonic figure.²⁵ Additionally, I argue that the Memorial and its related discourse universalize King's memory, in the process turning the site into a contentious and contested rhetorical battlefield.

Plan of Study

Chapter One introduces public memory and the King Memorial, while also offering a rationale for the case, presenting a macro argument, articulating research questions, and providing a methodological and theoretical overview of the study. Chapter Two presents a more detailed examination of the project's theoretical framework by reviewing scholarship on public memory. The chapter offers a full description of public memory by, first, distinguishing it from both individual memory and history and second, articulating its defining characteristics. The chapter also reviews literature focusing on memory sites and artifacts related to King and/or the Civil Rights Movement.

Chapter Three offers a historical-contextual analysis, collecting the publicly professed motives of the Memorial's producers, along with the response from the site's critics and supporters. By tracing the Memorial's history from its conception and approval to its design and construction, this chapter recovers the multivalent messages that the site's producers apparently sought to convey. By discussing the criticism and support that the project faced throughout its construction and upon its opening, the chapter also reveals vernacular interpretations of the site.

Chapter Four presents my own critical interpretation of the King Memorial, assessing its rhetorical form and force. Based primarily on my own encounter with the site, I offer a composite reading of the site's textual composition and visual design.²⁶ I acknowledge that alternative readings of the site are inevitable and do not promote a definitive reading of the Memorial as a stand-alone artifact. Instead, I examine the site as part of larger physical and cognitive landscapes. With an idea of the larger landscapes and contexts surrounding the King Memorial, I am also able to detail some of the memories that are forgotten or ignored by the site.

Chapter Five outlines a rhetorical analysis of the King Memorial's dedication ceremony, which featured singers, celebrities, politicians, and activists and culminated with a speech from President Barack Obama.²⁷ Significantly, this chapter reveals the official or, at least, preferred interpretations of the site as articulated by those empowered to speak or perform at the event. Additionally, the chapter discusses how those individuals linked King's memory to their own political agendas. Finally, the analysis examines how event participants helped the Memorial institutionalize King's memory.

Chapter Six concludes the dissertation, drawing from and expanding on each chapter's discussions in order to offer a robust and inclusive assessment of the Memorial. The chapter offers specific implications related to the contested "ownership" of King's memory, its placement in an institutional narrative of progress, and its problematic universalization. In addition, the chapter acknowledges the study's limitations and proposes potential directions for future research.

CHAPTER 2

THE SCOPE AND FORM OF PUBLIC MEMORY

This chapter focuses on the scope and form of public memory through a review of scholarship relevant to the larger study. This chapter, divided into three sections, distinguishes public memory from other related areas of study, presents three generally agreed upon assumptions of public memory, and discusses rhetorical studies related to the memory of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement.

Public from Private, Memory from History: Distinguishing Public Memory

Recent works in memory studies have primarily examined memory as a collective or public phenomenon. However, some of the early scholarship on memory focused on individual memory. As cultural historian and philosopher Walter Ong suggests, interest in memory was sparked because public speakers in primarily western oral cultures, such as ancient Greece and Rome, depended on memory as a skill.¹ Indeed, the most obvious use of memory came from orators' need for storing information for constructing speeches and for modeling the successful or, in the least, most memorable and powerful speeches of the past. But some philosophers saw memory as something greater still. Historian Francis Yates's *The Art of Memory* expertly traces concepts of memory from ancient Greece and Rome through the Middle Ages. Yates highlights philosophers such as Cicero, who wrote of the importance of memory as one of his five parts of rhetoric in *De Oratore*, and Plato, who linked memory to knowledge and the divine in *Phaedrus*.² Yates underscores the importance of memory to such theorists, claiming that for

Plato, “memory is not a ‘section’ of this treatise, as one part of the art of rhetoric; memory in the Platonic sense is the groundwork of the whole.”³

In the Middle Ages, theologians continued to promote the importance of memory, endorsing classical mnemonic systems for Christians to use to remember various virtues.⁴

But while interest in memory continued through the seventeenth century, Yates argues that the advancement of the scientific method during the Renaissance and enlightenment made the art of memory seem less important.⁵ Public memory scholar Greg Dickinson explains:

By the nineteenth century, the social alterations caused by mechanized production, rapid changes in demographic formations, the development of urbanization, the turn towards increasingly analytical professions, the rise of the mass media which fragmented memory traditions, and a shift from an emphasis on ‘live organic memory’ to analytic or archival memory associated with history, all lead to a destabilization of memory itself.⁶

Although the study and practice of individual memory declined for a multitude of reasons, scholars soon became interested in the idea of “memory as a social activity, accomplished not in the privacy of one’s own gray matter but via shared consciousness with others.”⁷ Increasingly, throughout the twentieth century, scholars began to study “public memory,” “collective memory,” and “social memory,” rather than individual memory.

Today, this multi-faceted focus on shared remembering dominates the field of memory studies. Some scholars use the various designating terms (most prominently, “collective” and “public”) interchangeably and synonymously, but others draw clear distinctions. Memory scholar Edward S. Casey argues for and elaborates on such distinctions in his essay, “Public Memory in Place and Time.” For Casey, social memory entails a “memory shared by those who are *already* related to each other,” whether by affinity and affection, geographical proximity, or common engagement.⁸ Different from both public and collective memories, social memories might not even occur in the public sphere (e.g., these memories might be shared by families or

other small groups). Conversely, Casey argues that collective memories occur when “different persons, not necessarily known to each other at all, nevertheless recall the same event.”⁹ Casey identifies instances of “flashbulb memories” as the most obvious forms of collective memories. These memories, notably including examples such as President John F. Kennedy’s assassination and the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, are instances where individuals recall “not just a catastrophic event but *just where he or she heard it*, for example, the actual circumstance of learning the bad news.”¹⁰ Casey notes that these memories are collective but also personal, with each person remembering the events (and the person’s experience of the events) differently. Casey carefully and adeptly unpacks social memory and collective memory, before turning to public memory, which he distinguishes as always taking place “in the open, in the *koinos kosmos* where discussion with others is possible” and involving “remembering together” or “a conjoint recollection.”¹¹ In Casey’s view, while each form of memory is related, public memory should be studied as a distinct variety.

Public memory theorists Carole Blair, Greg Dickinson, and Brian L. Ott criticize Casey’s nuanced definitions, noting that “we are less inclined than Casey to understand the different modifiers as representing different *kinds* of memory in practice.”¹² The authors instead describe the particular modifiers as revealing of “distinct theoretical connotation[s] brought to bear by researchers.”¹³ Describing their own preference, Blair, Dickinson, and Ott discuss using the term “public memory” because of the rhetorical tradition’s emphasis on things *public*—public address and the public sphere, included. The authors merge Casey’s definitions, placing under the “public memory” umbrella, “those studies taking the stance that beliefs about the past are shared among members of a group, whether a local community or the citizens of a nation-state.”¹⁴

A close adherence to Casey's distinctions is likely useful for some scholars but can also limit one's understanding of memory studies theories. That is, memory studies scholars share common assumptions and interests and yield pertinent implications for each others' works, regardless of which descriptor they place in front of "memory." Within this study, I follow Blair, Dickinson, and Ott's lead in using "public memory" as an umbrella term to encompass others such as "cultural memory," "popular memory," "social memory," and "collective memory," as a way of simplifying the vocabulary and broadening the theoretical boundaries for memory studies scholarship. Still, an understanding of the nuances provided by Casey can be helpful for scholars interested in non-public (interpersonal or small group) memory or in the intersections between public and personal memories.¹⁵

Throughout the existence of memory studies, scholars have also made great efforts to distinguish *memory* from *history*.¹⁶ French historian Pierre Nora laments the "conquest and eradication of memory by history," arguing that memory and history, "far from being synonymous, appear now to be in fundamental opposition."¹⁷ Nora explains the differences, in part, between the two terms:

Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past. Memory, insofar as it is affective and magical, only accommodates those facts that suit it . . . History, because it is an intellectual and secular production, calls for analysis and criticism. Memory installs remembrance within the sacred; history, always prosaic, releases it again. Memory is blind to all but the group it binds . . . History, on the other hand, belongs to everyone and to no one, whence its claim to universal authority. . . . At the heart of history is a critical discourse that is antithetical to spontaneous memory. History is perpetually suspicious of memory, and its true mission is to suppress and destroy it.¹⁸

For Nora and other scholars, memories offer interpretations of the past that are relevant to the present and responsive to the needs and desires of the groups that conjure them.

Phenomenologist Dylan Trigg suggests that a memory's interpretation of the past is often

augmented by imagination, and this “blending . . . marks a broader tension between memory and history, whereby the past becomes articulated indirectly.”¹⁹ While memory involves creativity and imagination, noted historian Bernard Bailyn points out that “creativity in history” is “memory in a straightjacket.”²⁰ History, apprehensive of memory as an imaginative response to contemporaneous exigencies, critically examines it. Bailyn suggests that historical accuracy is important “so you don’t fantasize about the past and make up myths to justify some immediate purpose—so you can make decisions based to some extent on what has gone before, on knowledge of actual experience.”²¹

Public memory scholar Kendall R. Phillips examines what many would identify as the traditional distinction between memory and history, acknowledging history’s “apparent claims to accuracy and objectivity . . . implying a singular and authentic account of the past.”²² While memory, Phillips suggests, “is conceived in terms of multiple, diverse, mutable, and competing accounts of past events,” history often attempts to be “fixed,” “singular,” and even “authoritative.”²³ But Phillips admits that such histories have been challenged from within and from outside of history departments. Indeed, many histories exist of various events, offering narratives that are at times subjective, imaginative, partial, conflicting, and/or responsive or related to current events. In practice then, many might find it difficult to see where “history” begins and “memory” ends (or vice-versa). Historian Carl Becker actually uses memory in his definition of history, as do many others in the field. Becker defines history as “the memory of things said and done.”²⁴ From such definitions and from an analysis of any historiography, the dichotomy between memory and history so fervently presented by Nora and other scholars becomes less apparent.

If public memory and history are neither synonymous nor entirely dichotomous, perhaps they are as cultural studies critic Marita Sturken suggests, “entangled.”²⁵ Blair, Dickinson, and Ott adopt Sturken’s notion and suggest that scholars should distinguish memory from history by focusing on “the parameters by which it typically is assessed.”²⁶ The authors explain, “If history can be said to be judged by its adherence to protocols of evidence, we might say that public memory is assessed in terms of its effectivity.”²⁷ This distinction between the fields of history and memory studies seems most clear, as David Thelen suggests historians are “concerned above all with the accuracy of a memory, with how correctly it describes what actually occurred at some point in the past.”²⁸ Meanwhile, Zelizer claims that public memory scholars differ in that they, “fabricate, rearrange, or omit details from the past as we thought we knew it,” adding that “Issues of historical accuracy and authenticity are pushed aside to accommodate other issues, such as those surrounding the establishment of social identity, authority, solidarity, [and] political affiliation.”²⁹

This distinction is comprehensible, if not comprehensive. LGBTQ studies scholar Charles E. Morris III questions historians’ aim at rendering authenticity in his analysis of the “queering” of Abraham Lincoln. Morris notes that Lincoln historians became defensive when confronted by the newly suggested public memory of Lincoln as “Our Gay President” by LGBTQ activist Larry Kramer in 1999. Morris argues that some more conservative historians were quick to brush aside potentially legitimate evidence that Lincoln might have been involved in a same-sex relationship. Morris suggests that the historians in this case seemed more interested in protecting the traditional memory of Lincoln than in striving for veracity. Morris asserts, “Given the magnitude of Lincoln’s memory in forging our collective, national identity, with obvious implications for individual identity, conviction of his homosexuality would

necessarily implicate us all, by means of this inescapable heritage, as practitioners and progenitors of same-sex love.”³⁰ These “historians” then were more interested in promoting (or marginalizing and destroying) a particular memory than they were in providing an accurate account of Lincoln’s life. Morris sees very little distinction between memory and history (in this particular case) and says, “Some historians’ passionate differentiation between history and collective memory might be read as symptomatic of a fear that their ideological investments, however minimal, will be exposed in the comparison.”³¹ In describing these “ideological investments,” Morris quotes historian Dominick LaCapra’s assertion that “[a]ny ‘dialogue’ with the past in professional historiography takes place in a larger social, political, economic, and cultural context that places severe restrictions upon it.”³² Therefore, in at least minor ways, historical interpretations respond to contemporary exigencies facing historians, just as public memories respond to those facing rhetors; after all, Morris adds, “. . . history is tropologically, ontologically, and ideologically a *rhetorical enterprise*.”³³ This is to say, historians might mostly be interested, as Thelen suggests, in the authenticity of a memory; but history and memory are both rhetorical and share other interests, as well. Likewise, memory studies scholars may concern themselves with verisimilitude, in addition to their other varied interests.

As evidenced in the previous paragraphs, distinguishing public memory from other areas of study is a complicated endeavor. Perhaps this is to be expected, as public memory is an interdisciplinary field with roots in psychology, history, communication, anthropology, sociology, literary studies, and other disciplines. As Zelizer aptly describes it, the field of contemporary memory studies has the “feel of a blended family grown too large too fast.”³⁴ In similarly colloquial terms, memory studies serves as a “place where scholars of different kinds can meet. It has created a shared forum for dissimilar minds, all of whom use different tools to

poke about it.”³⁵ Even among scholars in the same field, disagreements weigh heavy. But among rhetorical critics, who often cannot even agree on a definition of “rhetoric,” few should be surprised at disputes over what is meant by public memory.³⁶ And although scholars will likely never agree on every nuance related to public memory, most seem to reach a general consensus on a number of positions. The following section focuses on certain agreements between memory scholars.

Reaching a Consensus: Three Traits of Public Memory

Many scholars advocate what they deem to be the most crucial characteristics of public memory. While these traits may be grouped together in different ways, I condense what I determined to be the most important consensual assumptions together into three multi-faceted propositions: (1) public memory is situated in concrete sites and artifacts; (2) public memory is purposeful, partisan, and partial; and (3) public memory responds to present circumstances by educating and identity-building.³⁷

Public Memory is Situated in Concrete Sites and Artifacts

Many of the first rhetorical efforts in public memory scholarship, G. Mitchell Reyes laments, “tend[ed] toward the discursive,” stemming from the public address discipline’s “twentieth-century roots in the study of oratory.”³⁸ Zelizer also notes that “acts of memory often rest with language,” whether in chants, songs, stories, or speeches.³⁹ But today, while some rhetorical critics still focus on oral and written discourse, many have broadened the scope of their scholarship to analyze other types of texts. Increasingly, scholars heed Zelizer’s call that “One of the most marked characteristics of collective memory is that it has texture. Memory exists in the world rather than in a person’s head, and so is embodied in different cultural forms.”⁴⁰ This distinction is seen throughout contemporary public memory scholarship, as scholars turn to

markedly *textual*, *concrete*, and *material* forms of rhetoric in their studies. Some scholars have examined the commemorative functions of films, photographs, and other material artifacts.⁴¹

Most scholars have turned their attention to material *sites* of memory.

In *De Oratore*, Cicero referenced the concept of memory sites by telling the story of Simonides of Ceos.⁴² The story concerns Simonides reciting a poem for Scopas, a wealthy nobleman of Crannon in Thessaly. After reciting the poem for Scopas and his family, and being refused the money he is owed, Simonides leaves the room. During Simonides' absence, the roof above the room caves in, crushing and killing Scopas and all of his family. Each body becomes impossible to identify, but Simonides remembers where each person sat in the room and is able to identify each body by their location in the debris. Rhetors in ancient times applied the technique of this story to oration by memorizing a house, temple, or some other type of space, and then linking parts of a speech to specific parts of the memorized space. Dickinson explains that "the spaces and images used for memory were *loci* of memory, sites available to the orator to aid in memory. The idea or part of a speech to be remembered was placed on or condensed into the image or space selected. The recollection of a room's image triggered recollection of the idea."⁴³ Using this technique, a speaker might imagine a house as he delivered his speech, going from room to room in his mind as he verbally recalled different topics. Augustine also related memory to place, comparing memory to "a great field or a spacious palace, a storehouse for countless images of all kinds."⁴⁴ Centuries of orators, philosophers, and theorists saw individual memory as inextricably linked to space and place.

Public memory, too, Nora suggests, "attaches itself to sites" and "takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images, and objects."⁴⁵ That is, concrete sites of memory exist, such as cemeteries, churches, memorials, battlefields, monuments, and homes, making memory

both material and, as historian Nathan Wachtel puts it, “anchor[ed] in space.”⁴⁶ In recent years critical scholars interested in memory have most often examined commemorative sites such as memorials, museums, and monuments.⁴⁷ The study of such sites is an unsurprising trend since an astounding number of people visit these places each year on vacations, fieldtrips, and other outings.⁴⁸ Still other scholars choose to focus on material sites without strictly commemorative functions, analyzing the common, often inescapable sites named in honor of groups and individuals, such as roads, schools, and hospitals.⁴⁹

Critics take a variety of approaches to commemorative material artifacts. Memory scholar Victoria J. Gallagher tells us that these artifacts “may be examined in terms of form/style and content as are speeches and literary works.”⁵⁰ But Dickinson, Ott, and Eric Aoki explain that “traditional objects of rhetorical study such as public speeches have relatively clear beginnings and endings,” making them very different from material artifacts.⁵¹ Whereas speeches are “over,” and books are “finished,” material artifacts call attention to their “presentness,” existing as contemporary, ongoing pieces of rhetoric for as long as we observe them.⁵² Of course, similar criticism of speeches as present, material forms of rhetoric is possible, as well.⁵³ Speeches, monuments, films, and other assorted artifacts may all be viewed in varying ways as concrete texts of memory. Moreover, as Zelizer argues, “[Memory] bounces to and fro among [artifacts], on its way to gaining meaning.”⁵⁴ Studies such as my own that examine both the discursive and the material heed the ways that the artifacts work concomitantly in the construction of public memory.

Public Memory is Purposeful, Partisan, and Partial

Carole Blair, Marsha Jeppeson, and Enrico Pucci point out, “Public commemorative monuments . . . select from history those events, individuals, places, and ideas that will be

sacralized by a culture or a polity.”⁵⁵ Here, the authors note the consciousness and partiality of commemorative artifacts. As Nora argues, “there is no spontaneous memory,” and “we must deliberately create archives, maintain anniversaries, organize celebrations, pronounce eulogies [and construct other types of commemorative artifacts].”⁵⁶ Rhetors mindfully decide on the *who*, *what*, and *how* of remembering. That is, they select items (the what or who) to remember and decide on how to remember them. Through this purposeful, partisan, and partial process of remembering, they also choose what and/or who to try to forget.

Cicero recounts the story of the Athenian intellectual Themistocles who confronted a teacher who offered to instruct him on the art of memory.⁵⁷ Themistocles responded by proclaiming he would rather learn how to forget, understanding that the “ability to forget what he did not want to remember was preferable to being able to remember whatever he had heard or just seen once.” Although commemorative artifacts may attempt to forget, Cicero demonstrates the hardship of that goal. Blair, Dickinson, and Ott describe the remembering/forgetting dialectic as, “nearly an assumptive cliché in public memory studies.”⁵⁸ In rhetorician Bernard J. Armada’s words, many scholars explore commemorative texts as they suggest “who/what is central and who/what is peripheral; who/what we must remember and who/what it is okay to forget.”⁵⁹ Their purposeful and partisan nature always leads commemorative artifacts to selectively present fragments of the past. In addition, commemorative artifacts may be partial due to topical, financial, or time-related restraints, and “they can never present ‘the’ past in all of its social, cultural, and political complexity.”⁶⁰ By leaving out content, rhetors establish what they deem to be most important for audiences to remember—but Blair, Dickinson, and Ott deny that the failure to represent content is a “sign of forgetting,” instead calling it a “stand-in or simplistic restatement of the problem of representation.”⁶¹ A museum only highlighting certain

elements of a memory may not be purposefully trying to make audience members forget other related items. Additionally, that museum is unlikely to succeed in making audience members completely forget other items, because no memory field is constituted by only one commemorative site or artifact. Indeed, although all memory artifacts are partial, audience members always view them within a context of other related memories. Dickinson, Ott, and Aoki explain these contexts as the experiential landscapes of memory. The authors explain that these experiential landscapes surround all memory artifacts and consist of the artifact's surrounding *physical* landscapes, as well as their *cognitive* landscapes.

Dickinson, Ott, and Aoki explain the importance of physical landscapes for memorials and monuments, writing that “historical and cultural sites are part of the texture of larger landscapes. The experience of museums and memorials does not begin at their entrances. Visitors must travel to these sites, which are often surrounded by other historical or tourist sites.”⁶² Dickinson, Ott, and Aoki study the Buffalo Bill Museum, noting that audiences must travel through the Wyoming plains to the location, which is further surrounded by the Whitney Gallery of Western Art, the Plains Indian Museum, the Cody Firearms Museum, and the Draper Museum of Natural History. Moreover, the authors argue that the site does not stand alone, but is part of a larger landscape including Mount Rushmore, the Crazy Horse Memorial, and other landmarks of the American West.⁶³ In essence, the surrounding physical landscape affects a visitor's observance of a commemorative site or artifact. The partial memory constructed by a commemorative artifact may be supported, emphasized, challenged, weakened, mocked, or ridiculed by its surrounding physical landscape.

Dickinson, Ott, and Aoki suggest that critics also examine the cognitive landscapes, or dreamscapes, of commemorative sites. The authors explain that the “experience of a particular

place comprises not just the tangible materials available in that place, but also the full range of memorized images that persons bring with them.”⁶⁴ In the authors’ study of the Plains Indian Museum (PIM), the site’s dreamscape consists of famous images of the West and representations of Native Americans. A visitor to the site may remember Western films or “playing Indian” as a child. Visitors to the PIM view the site as part of a larger cognitive landscape, alongside their other related memories. As with the physical landscapes, cognitive landscapes may alter the ways that one reads a memory text.

Together, the cognitive and physical landscapes surrounding spaces of memory create what Dickinson, Ott, and Aoki call experiential landscapes. These experiential landscapes “invite visitors to assume (to occupy) particular subject positions. These subject positions, in turn, literally shape perceptions, that is, they entail certain ways of looking and exclude others.”⁶⁵ Communication scholar Marouf Hasian, Jr. examines the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) as part of an experiential landscape—with other famous memorials in Washington, D.C. making up its physical landscape and visitors’ other memories of the Holocaust and World War II making up its cognitive landscape. Hasian reports that the museum “allows audiences to bring their own experiences and prior knowledge to the museum,” but “channel[s] [these experiences] into a discernible narrative.”⁶⁶ As with other sites within their experiential landscapes, the USHMM promotes a subject position, encouraging visitors to perceive a topic in a certain way. Dickinson, Ott, and Aoki encourage rhetorical and cultural critics to be more attentive to the experiential landscapes of memory sites, advancing the idea that a site’s “boundaries blend with the rest of the landscape, and the rest of the landscape is constituted, in part, by [the site].”⁶⁷

Many scholars examine how the experiential landscapes of a commemorative artifact may alter an audience member's consumption of a public memory. Carole Blair and Neil Michel observe the Astronaut's Memorial in Cape Canaveral, Florida. The authors offer two readings of the monument, with the first presenting the place as a fitting memorial with the potential to engage audiences with the memory of the *Challenger* disaster.⁶⁸ However, Blair and Michel found that their initial reaction to the site was not shared by other visitors that they observed. They observed that many visitors ignored the memorial, while others made only quick visits to the memorial and were hardly reflective. Through further observation and research, Blair and Michel discovered that a majority of visitors to the site all traveled 40 miles from Walt Disney World; they were all tourists in search of theme parks, rather than memorials. Additionally, the memorial itself was surrounded by the theme park of the Kennedy Space Center Visitor Center, also known as Spaceport USA. Blair and Michel's second interpretation of the site took this information into account, concluding that the memorial's surrounding landscape drastically changed the space's effect on audience members.⁶⁹

Armada offers up an interpretation of Memphis, Tennessee's National Civil Rights Museum, but highlights the ways that the space's official narrative is interrupted by non-affiliated counter-narratives. Specifically, museum visitors, at various points throughout their visit, could visibly see Jacqueline Smith, a protestor with signs reading "Boycott the National Civil Rights Wrong Museum—9 Million Dollar Tourist Trap Scam" and "Poverty is Violence."⁷⁰ Armada argues that "Smith's presence imposes itself upon the visitor," and "thrust[s visitors] into an ambiguous realm filled with jarring contradictions that frustrate clear resolution."⁷¹ Rather than consuming the museum's deliberately constructed, partial and partisan

message, audience members became aware of conflicting visions associated with civil rights memory.

Public Memory Responds to Present Circumstances by Educating and Identity-Building

Beyond their clear partiality and partisanship, rhetorician Bruce E. Gronbeck posits that commemorative artifacts cultivate “useful memor[ies] that an audience can find relevant to the present.”⁷² This is the core of memory studies: the understanding that commemorative artifacts are activated by and are responsive to contemporary issues. Commemorative artifacts offer stories from the past, morals included, that educate and build group identity. Rhetors may turn to public memory to justify a position, explain a problem, or offer hope for the future. As cultural historian Michael Kammen suggests, “Societies . . . reconstruct their pasts rather than faithfully record them, and . . . they do so with needs of contemporary culture clearly in mind—manipulating the past in order to mold the present.”⁷³ Nora adds that we “buttress our identities” with these creatively crafted memories.⁷⁴

The notion that public memory responds to the present through sheer manipulation or fabrication might justifiably alarm many. However, most case studies do not reveal such a complete abandonment of accuracy; a relief to know, since observers of many commemorative artifacts are likely to see the created memories as “real.” Especially with museums and memorials, Gallagher suggests that visitors hold the “perception that memory is history,” adding that, “Unless someone remembers something, historically it might as well not have happened.”⁷⁵ Dickinson, Ott, and Aoki also discuss museum visitors as seeing “artifacts, images and narratives of the museum as ‘real’ and thus reliable markers of the past.”⁷⁶

But while museums and other types of commemorative sites and artifacts are not unbiased or wholly truthful, Gallagher asserts that they all “might be said to have an educational

function,” although some sites “differ both in the extent of the educational function and the need for it.”⁷⁷ Some commemorative artifacts attempt to educate audience members on specific subjects, but many try to teach larger lessons on values and ideas. Dickinson, Ott, and Aoki view the Buffalo Bill Museum as a “pedagogical site, working to teach its visitors about the Old West and in so doing inculcating a particular vision not only of ‘the West’ but also of what it means to be American.”⁷⁸ Gallagher examines the memory of Martin Luther King, Jr. and suggests that the holiday, the memorial in Atlanta, and the numerous celebrations and programs “attempt to apply King’s values, beliefs, and practices to contemporary issues.”⁷⁹ These studies highlight the power of commemorative artifacts’ abilities to educate the public.

Rhetorical theorist and critic Barbara Biesecker observes how commemorative artifacts of World War II, such as the film *Saving Private Ryan* and Tom Brokaw’s book *The Greatest Generation*, “function rhetorically as civics lessons for a generation beset by factious disagreements about the viability of U.S. culture and identity.”⁸⁰ Biesecker asserts that these texts remember the “greatest generation” in an effort to show modern day audiences what it means to be a “good citizen.”⁸¹ Biesecker argues that Brokaw’s book specifically serves as a “pedagogy for citizenship in the multicultural age that induces readers to enact the fantasy of the undifferentiated ‘We’ of ‘We the People.’”⁸² Biesecker’s essay operates under the “more or less explicit assumption what we remember and how we remember it can tell us something significant about who we are as a people now . . . and about who we may become.”⁸³ The commemorative artifacts of World War II present a narrative of an actively engaged, patriotic community and encourage present day citizens to follow in that community’s footsteps.

In a similar study, Hasian argues that the USHMM is designed to “help with pluralistic lessons,” allowing visitors to see “what happened when politicians and militarists abandoned the

sacred tenets of civic Republicanism.”⁸⁴ As the other World War II artifacts examined by Biesecker, the USHMM venerates the traditional American values. In addition to educating the public on American values and the Holocaust, the site holds the potential “to play an active role in future policy and politics.”⁸⁵ The site, along with politicians referencing the site, may attempt to use the memory of the Holocaust “in the prevention of future genocides.”⁸⁶

In summary of these assumptions, public memory through its material presence, through its partial and partisan form, and with the purpose of educating and cultivating identity reveals its nature. Perhaps Zelizer describes it best, writing “always a means to something else . . . collective memory is evaluated for the ways in which it helps us to make connections—to each other over time and space, and to ourselves. At the heart of memory’s study, then, is its usability, its invocation as a tool to defend different aims and agendas.”⁸⁷ Memory is thus studied and summarized with descriptors such as purposeful, partisan, partial, textural, pedagogical, and—above all—usable.

Case Studies in Public Memory: King and the Civil Rights Movement

Scholars build upon the common assumptions of public memory by looking at a variety of artifacts, under the umbrella of a variety of themes and topics. One of the frequently visited topics of such scholarship is the memory of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement. Most, but not all, of these studies compare in scope to Armada’s previously discussed analysis of Memphis’s Civil Rights Museum, looking at museums and memorials.

Presidential scholars Shawn Parry-Giles and Trevor Parry-Giles observe the use of civil rights memory for personal, political gain in their analysis of Bill Clinton’s 1998 commemorative address of the March on Washington. They argue that Clinton, who was dealing at the time with the Lewinsky scandal and foreign policy issues, exploited the public memory of

the Civil Rights Movement in an effort to reconstruct his own political image.⁸⁸ The authors use the address as an illustration of how memory and nostalgia can be used as a “political tool,” specifically by the President, adding that “no other individual possesses authority and power to influence collective memory more than the President of the United States.”⁸⁹ This study, while obviously demonstrating the partiality and usability of a memory, makes its most compelling argument therein: that some “sources of collective memory have more or less claims to authority and legitimacy [than others]”—a notion that Armada might benefit from observing in his discussion of Jacqueline Smith and the National Civil Rights Museum.⁹⁰ Some might argue that Armada’s focus on one protestor outside of the museum ignores or minimizes the difference in credibility between the two entities, noting that the Civil Rights Museum is more authoritative and permanent. However, Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles might also benefit from Armada’s analysis, as they fail to account for the President’s limitations in crafting public memory, even as the “chief [interpreter] of public memory.”⁹¹

Blair and Michel justify their study of the Civil Rights Memorial in Montgomery, Alabama, a city not widely viewed as a tourist destination, through an interpretation of the site as a “rhetorical performance” of civil rights tactics that “infringes” upon the city where these tactics were often used.⁹² Blair and Michel vividly describe the city’s numerous monuments to white supremacy and the Confederacy, including the first White House of the Confederacy, the Confederate Soldiers Monument, and a statue of Jefferson Davis near the Capitol. The authors argue, “The Civil Rights Memorial disrupts this cityscape performatively, intruding upon the otherwise rather unitary character of Montgomery’s other symbolic spaces.”⁹³ Blair and Michel detail the ways that the monument’s design and location confront pedestrians in the area, forcing involvement from visitors, in addition to “those who take no action to attend to it and even those

who go out of their way to avoid it.”⁹⁴ For those visitors more thoughtfully and motivationally engaged with the memorial, Blair and Michel discuss a more intense performative experience. In a comparable analysis of Birmingham’s Civil Rights Institute, Gallagher also looks at a museum/memorial where “historical conflicts are localized and brought close to home.”⁹⁵ As do Blair and Michel, Gallagher attends to the surrounding landscape of the institution, noting relevant sites such as the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church and Kelly Ingram Park. Also, as do Blair and Michel, Gallagher describes the space as performative. But unlike Montgomery’s Civil Rights Memorial which reproduces civil rights tactics, the Civil Rights Institute promotes a narrative and ideology of “progress.”⁹⁶ Instead of being disruptive then, the Civil Rights Institute explains the city, taking visitors through a sordid past but towards a promising future. Gallagher argues, “Birmingham is transformed from ‘Bombingham’ to an ‘All American City’ that remembers its past (in the guise of historical knowledge and facticity rather than myth and legend) and has learned and continues to learn from it.”⁹⁷

Two prominent pieces in memory studies examine the specific memory of Martin Luther King, Jr.: Gallagher explores the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial (Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site) in Atlanta, Georgia, while Messner and Vail analyze an effort to memorialize King through the naming of a street in Muncie, Indiana. The authors all note the differences between the modes of remembering King. The approximately 700 roads named after King serve as present and functional sites of memory for people across the U.S. (similar to schools and other buildings named for King). Gallagher also discusses the King national holiday as similarly “imping[ing] on the lives of most, if not all, citizens by virtue of its inclusion on calendars and in school schedules.”⁹⁸ Atlanta’s memorial differs because it lacks this “impinging” element; citizens must travel to the site in order to fully experience its memory-

making. But the memorial and national holiday, Gallagher notes, both serve as national means of remembering King. Street naming, communication scholars Beth A. Messner and Mark T. Vail demonstrate, “represents a community’s recognition of [King’s] struggle for racial equality and vision for the future,” and often results in local disputes.⁹⁹ Messner and Vail conduct a fantasy theme analysis of citizen discourse produced during deliberations on renaming a street after King. The authors’ analysis reveals “a city at war” over the proper location and method of remembering King and the Civil Rights Movement. Contrarily, Gallagher suggests that the memorial’s location, “in the context of the black experience,” plays an important role for black Americans and “bespeaks accomplishment, pride and leadership.”¹⁰⁰ Prominent, well maintained, and often traveled streets force the memory of King out into society. Atlanta’s memorial, in an isolated, poor, and historically black area uses King’s memory to draw attention to issues of the present.

Conclusion

Having delineated the scope and form of public memory, this study hereafter proceeds to examine the public memory of Martin Luther King, Jr. as cultivated by the National Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial. Throughout the remaining chapters, I refer to and draw implications about the three traits of public memory. I also offer a noteworthy expansion to the study of civil rights memory. Indeed, this study contributes to the existing literature on public memory through a multi-faceted analysis of a unique memory site.

CHAPTER 3

“BUILDING THE DREAM:” A HISTORICAL-CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF THE KING MEMORIAL

In Rocky Mount, North Carolina, public outcry led to the 2005 removal of a statue of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Residents of the city, where King gave an early version of his “I Have a Dream” speech in 1962, complained that the statue bore little resemblance to King and compelled the City Council to take it down. What followed was an embarrassing turn of events, as a model of a proposed replacement statue was similarly rejected for its appearance, and the City Council returned the original statue to its place in the park only two years later. Dr. Elbert Lee, a civil rights activist who had protested the original statue, lamented its return, “To know a statue like that is going back up there, which will be there forever . . . An unborn generation will never know the real appearance of Dr. Martin King.” But City Council member Chris Miller said the statue “was intended to honor Dr. King and his life . . . I was disappointed when it was taken down. Just differences of understanding, I think, about what a statue is.”¹

Controversies and “differences of understanding” with regard to memorializing King are certainly not unique to Rocky Mount. Also notable are efforts to remove the “World’s Ugliest Statue of Martin Luther King” in Charlotte, North Carolina, and an eight-foot bust of King in Buffalo, New York.² Additionally, as communication scholars Beth A. Messner and Mark T. Vail demonstrate, strife and controversy often surround the hundreds of the nation’s streets named for King.³ Unsurprisingly then, the decades-long effort to memorialize King at the

national level encountered much disagreement and debate. This chapter recounts the history of the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial in Washington, D.C., uncovering and interrogating issues related to its origins, location, design, and funding. I pay special attention to the publicly-discernible “intentions” of the Memorial’s producers in order to clarify the messages they meant for the site to convey. I also consider the positive and negative criticism levied at the Memorial in order to present vernacular interpretations of the site. I contend that conflict and pragmatism compromised the various rhetors’ desired effects of the Memorial. I also argue that issues of memory “ownership” prevented a universally satisfying collaborative effort.

Origins

As Victoria J. Gallagher notes, before the King National Memorial came to fruition, only two other nationally-based means of remembering King existed: Atlanta, Georgia’s Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Center and the King Federal Holiday in January. The Center was established with its first program in 1968, the year of King’s assassination, although the Memorial itself did not open until 1977.⁴ The establishment of a national holiday was a more complex affair, as Representative John Conyers of Michigan continually met resistance when introducing a bill proposing the holiday for 15 straight legislative sessions beginning in 1968. President Ronald Reagan signed the bill declaring King’s birthday a national holiday on November 2, 1983, and the country celebrated the first legal national holiday on January 20, 1986.⁵

Gallagher contends that these two national means differ substantially. She argues, “the national holiday impinges on the lives of most, if not all, citizens by virtue of its inclusion on calendars and in school schedules. No matter what the quality, quantity, or social slant of one’s memories of King, all citizens may be said to participate in the holiday in one way or another

simply by living through the day.”⁶ Meanwhile, the Center requires people to travel to a historic district featuring King’s birth- and final resting places. While very different in form, the National Holiday and Atlanta’s National Historic Site worked in conjunction with civil rights museums, regional memorials, and buildings and roads named for King in a common effort to spread his memory throughout the nation. But many felt that King should also be remembered alongside other national heroes and icons on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., which serves and has always served as the “public” space of reflection and repose in the nation’s capital.

The twenty-seven-plus year effort to bring the King Memorial to the National Mall began with a 1983 conversation between Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity member George Sealey and his wife Pauline about the lack of memorials to African Americans in the nation’s capital. Sealey and six of his fraternity brothers continued the conversation, focusing on King who had been a fellow member of the nation’s oldest African American Greek-Letter fraternity. In January 1984 the group presented a formal proposal at the Fraternity’s Board of Director’s meeting and Alpha Phi Alpha soon began to champion the cause. But while Alpha Phi Alpha initiated and took charge of the project, Fraternity brother John Carter insisted, “This is not an Alpha Phi Alpha memorial. It is not an African American memorial. This is a memorial for all Americans. Alpha is proud to be able to sponsor it, but it’s gonna take all of America to build it.”⁷

The Commemorative Works Act of 1986 prevents national memorials in the capital from honoring individuals until at least twenty-five years since their deaths have passed.⁸ King’s 1968 death meant that a memorial could not be approved or built until 1993 or later. The Senate first passed legislation to establish the memorial in 1991, but the 25-year rule caused the bill to die in the House. The legislation finally passed through both chambers with bipartisan support during

the 104th Congress in 1996. Representatives Connie Morella of Maryland and Julian Dixon of California introduced the House legislation, which passed unanimously. Senators Paul Sarbanes of Maryland and John Warner of Virginia sponsored the bill in the Senate.⁹ Sarbanes hoped the King Memorial would inspire the nation's youth. Voicing his aspirations from the Senate floor, he said,

It is our hope that the young people who visit this monument will come to understand that it represents not only the enormous contribution of this great leader, but also two very basic principles necessary for the effective functioning of our society. The first is that change, even every [*sic*] fundamental change, is to be achieved through nonviolent means; that this is the path down which we should go as a nation in resolving some of our most difficult problems. The other basic principle is that the reconciliation of the races, the inclusion into the mainstream, of American Life of all its people, is essential to the fundamental health of our Nation.¹⁰

For Sarbanes, the Memorial would mean more for the future than for the past; it would encourage peace and civic engagement for future generations. President Bill Clinton signed the legislation on November 12, 1996, authorizing Alpha Phi Alpha to incorporate the Washington, D.C. Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial Project Foundation (Foundation).¹¹ Headed by President Adrian L. Wallace and Vice President John Carter, the Foundation began efforts to locate, design, and raise funds for the Memorial.¹²

Location

In June 1998, the Foundation gained congressional approval to locate the Memorial in Area 1 of the National Mall, the region where most of the prominent memorials stood, including the Lincoln, Jefferson, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorials. This decision meant the Memorial would be the first to honor an African American on, or near, the National Mall. John Carter testified before the Senate, adding that the Memorial also differed in another substantial way. Carter said, "We now have an opportunity to break the trend of memorials to war and erect a monument which delivers a message of lifelong peace in our land. A memorial which

embodies not just the image of Dr. King, but the image of America, which is often called the melting pot of the world.”¹³ Carter saw the Memorial as a potential beacon for peace and diversity that would stand out from other monuments to war and to predominately white men who had served in politically high offices.

The Foundation examined several locations on the National Mall as potential sites for the Memorial and soon favored a four-acre site on the Tidal Basin. Two federal panels, the Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) and the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC), had to approve the site by law. The CFA agreed to the Tidal Basin site, but the NCPC argued that the site should be closer to the Lincoln Memorial. Some wanted the Memorial in close proximity to the Lincoln Memorial to recall images of King’s 1963 “Dream” speech. Others thought those memories could still be recalled in other areas where there would be more usable and flexible space for the Memorial. Behind the scenes, disagreements between the different parties were reportedly “emotional and divisive,” as described by the *Spartanburg Herald-Journal*. “Each camp had a favored location and argued passionately about why the other sites were disrespectful to King’s legacy.”¹⁴ NCPC Commissioner Margaret G. Vanderhye dismissed the Foundation’s proposed site saying, “Philosophically, it doesn’t work. We can do better.”¹⁵ The NCPC rejected the Tidal Basin site in a 7-5 vote on March 4, 1999 and instead recommended the east end of the Constitution Garden, a location within sight of the Lincoln Memorial. Just over a month later, the CFA reviewed and unanimously rejected the NCPC recommendation and proposed two additional sites: an area on the west end of the Constitution Gardens and a place on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial.¹⁶

A memorial on the steps of the Lincoln would have undoubtedly recalled King’s “I Have a Dream” speech during the 1963 March on Washington, as well as the event’s connection to the

100-year anniversary of Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation. Such a memorial also could have radically changed the aesthetics and functionality of the Lincoln Memorial for various events. But some, such as University of Pittsburgh History Professor Kirk Savage, favored the idea. Savage wrote a book suggesting placing a statue of King in the spot where he stood to deliver his “Dream” speech but acknowledged that his idea “would never happen.” Instead, the NPS later placed a small plaque on the spot, in 2003, to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the address.¹⁷ Memorializing King at the Lincoln Memorial makes sense to a degree, but whether for practical, aesthetic, or other reasons, a full-scale monument at the feet of Lincoln never came to fruition. Perhaps such a memorial would have drawn criticism for only evoking the memory of King’s most famous speech. Perhaps too the memorial would have been criticized for recalling the 1876 Washington, D.C. statue of Lincoln as the “Great Emancipator,” with an African American on his knees, groveling at Lincoln’s feet (fig. 3).¹⁸ King, forever at the feet and in the shadow of Lincoln, or as historian and memory scholar Scott A. Sandage ponders, “King on those steps, reciting his Dream: Is this the new emancipation moment, at once liberating and limiting?”¹⁹



Figure 3. Emancipation Memorial in Washington, D.C.²⁰

With a stalemate between the two federal commissions, NCPC Chair Harvey Gantt helped broker a deal resulting in a unanimous vote on December 2, 1999, to approve the original choice of the Tidal Basin site. Gantt commented, “Ultimately, it boiled down to the fact that nobody wanted to see an impasse on this . . . Everyone wanted a memorial, and we had a heart-to-heart with members about how to make that happen.”²¹ The Foundation would later select 1964 Independence Avenue as the site’s address, referencing the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

The chosen site was most noticeably adjacent to the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial, but the Foundation and the press were more eager to discuss its spatial relationship to the Lincoln and Jefferson Memorials. Across the Tidal Basin from the Jefferson Memorial and a short walk away from the Lincoln, the Foundation described the location as creating a visual “line of leadership” between the sites (fig. 4). Georgia Congressman and civil rights activist John Lewis said the site was “so fitting a tribute to Dr. King, his message and his legacy . . . To have it between the Lincoln and the Jefferson, between the writer of the Declaration of Independence and the emancipator of the slaves.” King’s daughter Yolanda Denise King also spoke favorably on the location’s proximity to the other memorials, exclaiming,

I often say that George Washington birthed the country and certainly Jefferson was a part of that birthing. And then Lincoln was the one that allowed the country to move to the next level in terms of the unifying. And my father was the force that served to move us closer to actually being true to what was originally conceived on paper. So it is extremely significant.

While some drew attention to Jefferson as a slaveholder, Lewis responded by saying, “[King] said that there would be a day when the sons and daughters of slaves and slaveholders would join hands together.”²² To Lewis and others, the relationship between the three sites had a reconciling effect.



Figure 4. “Line of Leadership.”²³

Design

On February 15, 1999, the Foundation announced a design competition for the Memorial and disseminated information to architects, designers, and artists around the world. In December the Foundation appointed a panel of 11 individuals from the fields of architecture, landscaping, and the fine arts to serve as competition assessors. By September 12, 2000, the panel had reviewed over 900 designs from 52 different countries and selected a design by ROMA Design Group of San Francisco, California.²⁴ The original design, largely consistent with the Memorial’s final form, easily gained approval on April 18, 2002, from the CFA and on April 6, 2006 received acclaim from the NCPC for its “beauty and grandeur.” Praise quickly turned into criticism, in 2007, when Chinese sculptor Lei Yixin joined the project as the head sculptor for the “Stone of Hope.”²⁵

Discovered by the Foundation at a 2006 Minnesota stone-carving symposium, Lei was best known for his government-commissioned sculptures of Chinese national figures such as Mao Zedong. The California chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) denounced the foundation as “outsourc[ing] the production of the monument to Dr. King to the People’s Republic of China, the country with the worst record of human rights violations and civil rights abuses in the world,” adding that the sculptor was “renowned for his many sculptures and busts glorifying Mao Zedong, murderer of 70 million innocent Chinese, which is in direct opposition to Dr. King’s philosophy and to the ideal of positive and social change throughout the world.”²⁶ Many believed that the sculptor should be an American citizen, while some called specifically for an African American. Among them was Atlanta artist Gilbert Young who launched Kingisours.com to petition the foundation to hire an African American sculptor. Young said, “It is disgraceful that there will be a sculpture to honor a black man for his fight against racism in this country and we couldn’t find one black person on earth to interpret his likeness . . . It is insulting and does not serve my people well. It makes us invisible.” Others agreed with Young in his assertion that “We need a black artist to interpret Dr. King . . . because he died for us.” Foundation President and CEO Harry E. Johnson refuted such criticism by saying, “Dr. King was an international hero,” and spoke practically, adding that “We searched the world looking for a sculptor who could do this work in granite and stone . . . There are no African American sculptors that [*sic*] do this type of work in granite.”²⁷ Johnson further pushed back on criticism by emphasizing the involvement of two African Americans, painter Jon Onye Lockard and sculptor Ed Hamilton, who were collaborating with Lei.²⁸

Lei’s sculpture of King garnered disparagement in its own right. Lei covered his walls with pictures of King before beginning work on his first clay model featuring the civil rights

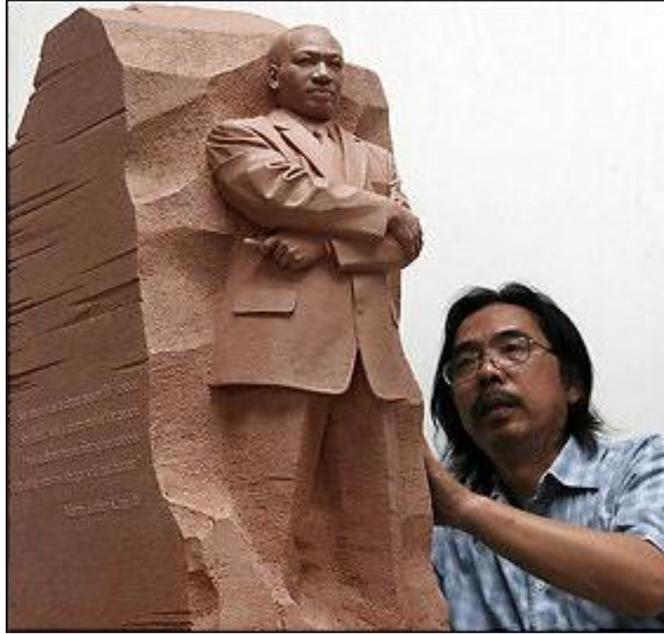


Figure 5. Lei Working on a Model of the King Sculpture.²⁹

leader, pen in hand, with folded arms (fig. 5). When explaining the goal of his design, Lei said, “When you see the statue of Martin Luther King, you might think of the injustices around the world, which call for our collaborative efforts . . . to bring to justice the things that King himself was unable to finish.”³⁰ Lei’s own description may explain the unfinished look of the King sculpture, as the sculptor insists that there is still work to be done in order to complete King’s work. But criticism did not center on the sculpture’s unfinished appearance. Instead, critics claimed the likeness of King looked detached, confrontational, angry, unreal, and/or Asian.³¹ American art and architecture scholar Michael J. Lewis writes that the most frequent claim against the sculpture was that “it recalls the despotic sculpture of Leninist-Maoist regimes, with their avuncular but stern ‘dear leaders.’”³² Less eloquently, frequent King sculptor Ed Dwight argued the statue design “didn’t look like Martin Luther King. He had a whole bunch of wrinkles and great big bulky clothes. It wasn’t right.”³³

For their part, the foundation disagreed internally on the statue's design. They debated which of King's characteristics and values the sculpture should emphasize with its design. Lei said of the different views, "If there are 1,000 readers of *Hamlet*, you will have 1,000 [different] interpretations."³⁴ In April 2008 the CFA rejected the design, responding harshly that "the colossal scale and Social Realist style of the proposed sculpture recalls a genre of political sculpture that has recently been pulled down in other countries."³⁵ Within a month the Foundation, required by law to gain the commission's approval before proceeding, made minor changes in response to their criticism. These changes included smoothing away wrinkles from King's face and slightly reshaping his mouth, but did not address the major issues most critics complained about (e.g., the folded arms). Still, the commission claimed their concerns had been sufficiently addressed and approved the design.³⁶ While many critics remained unappeased, key individuals behind the Memorial seemed content. King's son, Martin Luther King III said, "I've seen probably 50 sculptures of my dad and I would say 47 of them are not good reflections . . . This particular artist – he's done a good job."³⁷

On Sunday July 22, 2007, Foundation President and CEO Harry E. Johnson accompanied Congressmen John Lewis and Hank Johnson to Stone Mountain, Georgia, to inspect granite quarries for potential building materials for the Memorial.³⁸ This bold idea gained inspiration from King's reference to Stone Mountain in his "Dream" speech and from the location's complex and controversial history. Stone Mountain, a site associated with the South's "Lost Cause" memory and the 1915 rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan, hosts the world's largest work of sculpted art: a memorial to the Confederacy depicting Jefferson Davis, Robert E. Lee, and "Stonewall" Jackson. In 1958 the Georgia legislature voted to fund the Confederate memorial's completion, corresponding with their resistance to racial integration.³⁹ The use of granite from

Stone Mountain could have enhanced the meaning of the King Memorial's central metaphor, as the "Stone of Hope" would have physically come from what was, to many people, a "Mountain of Despair."

Instead of stone from the controversial Stone Mountain, the Foundation eventually elected to build the Memorial's main features from Chinese pink shrimp granite. The Foundation anticipated criticism and defended their choice by claiming there was not a sufficient quantity of the granite in the United States. However, this did little to quell critics, who echoed their prior disapproval of the Chinese sculptor and blasted the choice. Many protested the use of Chinese granite and some even questioned the choice of white granite in the sculpture of a black man. Ed Jackson, Jr., the executive architect of the King Memorial, explained that the white granite would look better to visitors coming at night.⁴⁰ As with the selection of the sculptor Lei Yixin, the decision to use white granite from China was, at least partially, a practical one, rather than something purposefully symbolic or meaningful.

Unlike the design and construction of the "Stone of Hope" and "Mountain of Despair," which were fraught with controversy early on, the selection of quotations for the Memorial's walls was at first serene and largely uncontested. In late 2006 for the purpose of selecting quotations from King's sermons, speeches, and writings to be included in the Memorial, the Foundation assembled a council composed of historians and other scholars including Maya Angelou, Lerone Bennett, Clayborne Carson, James Chaffers, Henry Louis Gates, Jon Onye Lockard, and Marianne Williamson.⁴¹ The council set out to select quotations from different points in King's career that were "most representative [of] Dr. King's universal and timeless messages of Justice, Democracy, Hope and Love." The design team decided not to place the quotations chronologically in order to allow visitors to read the quotations as they liked, without

having to follow a defined route. In total, the Council of Historians selected fourteen quotations for the Inscription Wall, the earliest from the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955 and the latest from King's final sermon at the National Cathedral in 1968.⁴²

Noticeably and notably, the Foundation decided not to include any words from King's "I Have a Dream" speech on the Memorial's Inscription Wall. The Foundation gave several reasons for the omission: "Primarily, the entire memorial design is derived from King's most memorable speech; given the limited room for sharing his message and the breadth of his work, the overall design itself is the mark of respect for the moving words from 1963." The Foundation also reasoned that the "Dream" speech was King's best known and was already taught in schools. They explained, "But key messages that have and will continue to withstand the test of time are lesser known, and this memorial presented the opportunity to shift the focus of attention from one example of Dr. King's inspirational words to many."⁴³ With their selected quotations, the Foundation wanted to introduce visitors to King as a prolific wordsmith who crafted messages with universal themes.

While the Inscription Wall quotations escaped controversy, a late change to the Stone of Hope's design created a large and lasting issue for the Memorial. The Foundation originally planned on placing two quotations on the stone: first, the site's only quotation from King's "I Have a Dream" speech, "Out of the mountain of despair, a stone of hope;" second, what executive architect Ed Jackson, Jr. called King's "own eulogy," "If you want to say that I was a drum major, say that I was a drum major for justice. Say that I was a drum major for peace. I was a drum major for righteousness. And all of the other shallow things will not matter." In a late decision, planners decided to change which sides of the stone each quotation would appear on, wanting the "stone of hope" inscription to be seen first by visitors entering through the

Memorial's portal. Unfortunately, by the time they informed Lei Yixin, the sculptor had already prepared each side of the stone for their original inscriptions. The "drum major" quotation would not fit and Jackson's design team faced a last minute decision. Jackson said, "We sincerely felt passionate that the man's own eulogy should be expressed on the stone," and concluded "the least we could do was define who he was based on his perception of himself: 'I was a drum major for this, this, and this.'"⁴⁴ Thus instead of selecting a new quotation for the spot, the designers decided to paraphrase King's quotation to "I was a drum major for justice, peace, and righteousness."

The most outspoken critic of the change was Maya Angelou who said, "The quote makes Dr. Martin Luther King look like an arrogant twit. He was anything but that. He was far too profound a man for that four-letter word to apply. . . . He had no arrogance at all. He had a humility that comes from deep inside. The 'if' clause that is left out is salient. Leaving it out changes the meaning completely." In response, Jackson claimed that Angelou, who once served on the site's Council of Historians, failed to attend meetings where the Memorial's quotations were selected. Jackson said that others on the council knew about and favored the idea of the paraphrased quotation and added that "I'm the guy that's making the decisions . . . The buck has to stop somewhere. Otherwise we go round and round and round." Council member Jon Onye Lockard supported Jackson's decision opining, "I think it's rather small of folks to pick at things. This has been going on for 14 years, and all of them have had plenty of time to add their thoughts and ideas."⁴⁵ Criticism seemed petty and unfair to many Foundation members, who conversely had themselves argued over what others might identify as minor disagreements throughout the Memorial's conception and construction history. But Angelou did not stand alone in her criticism of the paraphrase. Others repeated the criticism of editorialist Rachel

Manteuffel, who wrote that the quotation made King look like “arrogant jerk.” She continued, “It’s akin to memorializing Mahatma Gandhi with the quote, ‘Don’t you know who I *am*?’ Even if the Mahatma said that once, it’s not as though that is what we remember him for.” But more important to Manteuffel was that the quotation was not exact. Offering another comparison she wrote, “This is the equivalent of a Hollywood publicist pulling four words out of context from a newspaper review to make a bad film seem good. Except in this case, it’s the reverse: It takes the good out of context and makes it bad.”⁴⁶ As the Memorial’s dedication approached, this charge became the harshest and most widespread criticism that the site faced.

Fundraising

When asked how much the Memorial might cost, project originator George Sealey initially guessed around \$1.5 to \$2 million, but by the time of its completion the total costs for the Memorial ended up being closer to \$120 million.⁴⁷ The 1996 legislation authorizing the King Memorial stipulated that no federal dollars be used for the project, leaving fundraising duties to Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity and the Foundation. Additionally, the legislation set a deadline of November 12, 2003, for the Foundation to raise \$100 million for the project. By June of that year the Foundation claimed \$25 million in cash and pledges and reported only \$16,794 in cash in the bank. Some criticized Alpha Phi Alpha for its handling of the fundraising. A *Village Voice* exposé described Foundation President Harry E. Johnson, who also served as the general president of Alpha Phi Alpha, as running the organization “as if it were purely an internal Alpha project” and recommended that the fraternity “look beyond themselves to make [the King Memorial] happen.”⁴⁸

On May 7, 2003, Senate Majority Leader William Frist hosted the launch of a national media campaign to raise funds for the Memorial.⁴⁹ The campaign, designed for free by Saatchi

& Saatchi featured television, radio, internet, and print advertisements with celebrities including Halle Berry, Morgan Freeman, and Al Roker.⁵⁰ On August 28, Yahoo! featured the Memorial on its homepage to help raise funds and awareness for the Foundation. However, the organization could not raise the money by their original deadline and had to seek an extension from congress. Congress passed the necessary legislation on October 28, granting a three year extension to Alpha Phi Alpha to raise the funds necessary for the Memorial.⁵¹ The sponsors of the legislation reaffirmed their support for the project. Texas Congresswoman Sheila Jackson-Lee urged support for the extension, saying:

[I]t is important in this time to give tribute to Dr. King on the basis of his call for peace and justice. He was a man who believed in nonviolent action, and he was a man who believed in peace over war and life over death. Now, in the backdrop of the violence of terrorism, but particularly in the predicament we find ourselves in Operation Iraqi Freedom, with our young men and women on the front lines and with a cry by the world for peace in the Middle East, it is important to honor Dr. Martin Luther King, a man of freedom, a man who promoted equality, a man of peace, a man who applauded and respected the diversity of this Nation.⁵²

Jackson-Lee saw supporting the King Memorial as supporting the nation's professed values of peace, freedom, equality, and diversity; she also recognized the potential for King's memory to affect the nation's present circumstances.

With an extension granted, the Foundation continued its fundraising drive, attracting gifts from the public, in addition to corporate sponsors like Tommy Hillfiger, Walt Disney, State Farm Insurance, PepsiCo, ExxonMobil, BET, and Wal-Mart.⁵³ Some critics, such as Syracuse University Professor Boyce Watkins, railed against the use of money from such donors. Watkins signaled out BET for "[creating] an entire generation of anti-intellectual Black youth and . . . [for fueling] the Black HIV epidemic by promoting a lifestyle of sexual irresponsibility with non-stop booty-shaking videos." Watkins also targeted Wal-Mart for its "long list of multi-billion dollar labor and human rights violations," and claimed that "If Dr. King were alive today, he'd be

standing in front of Walmart with a picket sign, not asking them for money to build a statue.”⁵⁴ By alleging foresight as to what a still-alive King would think and do, Watkins claimed moral superiority over the Foundation and its fundraising efforts. Other criticism of the fundraising process coincided with disdain for sculptor Lei Yixin. Some conspiracies held that the Foundation hired Lei in hopes of obtaining a large donation from the Chinese government. Johnson debunked such theories, repeating that the sculptor was hired for his expertise and experience.⁵⁵

Adding to the Foundation’s fundraising woes, the King family charged the organization over \$800,000 for the use of King’s words and likeness in fundraising materials. The King family, which owns King’s intellectual property and likeness through the King Center and Intellectual Properties Management organizations, reached an arrangement with the Foundation that saw them collect \$71,700 in 2003 and \$761,160 in 2007.⁵⁶ Critics called the King family “shameless” and “greedy,” but these were not new charges to King’s children Dexter, Bernice, and Martin Luther King III. The King family faced similar charges of dishonoring King’s memory in the 1990s after successful lawsuits against *USA Today* and CBS for publishing the “I Have a Dream” speech without their permission.⁵⁷ King historian David Garrow was especially appalled and charged, “I don’t think the Jefferson family, the Lincoln family . . . I don’t think any other group of family ancestors has been paid a licensing fee for a memorial in Washington. One would think any family would be so thrilled to have their forefather celebrated and memorialized in D.C. that it would never dawn on them to ask for a penny.” He added that King would have been “absolutely scandalized by the profiteering behavior of his children.”⁵⁸

Foundation President Harry Johnson insisted that the fees were not troublesome and maintained that the organization had a good relationship with the King family.⁵⁹ But some

behind the scenes, including a former executive director of the project Paul Du Bois, described a different scenario. According to Du Bois, the King family initially asked that 50 percent of all money raised for the Memorial go to the King Center, which led Johnson to make a counter-offer of \$600,000. Du Bois recalls Dexter King responding, “That’s very generous of you, but my father was a spiritual man and he set aside the question of money, but if he were to take it—his spirit is speaking to me and he’s saying it really should be \$800,000.” Johnson denied the allegation and others have not confirmed Du Bois’ report.⁶⁰ Johnson also assured critics that the Memorial’s sculpture and the majority of its quotations were in the public domain, meaning that no further licensing fees would be charged. The King family told critics that they would not profit from the money which would go to the King Center, adding that they worried fundraising efforts for the Memorial would lead to fewer donations for the site in Atlanta.⁶¹ Regardless of its accuracy, the perception of tension and scandal did little to help fundraising efforts.

Fundraising efforts often referred to the Memorial as the “Dream.” The Foundation’s website, buildthedream.org, alternately encouraged individuals to “Build,” “Support,” and “Become a ‘Believer in the Dream.’”⁶² A “Dream Team” of celebrities such as Harrison Ford, Whoopi Goldberg, and Samuel L. Jackson took part in “Dream Dinner” fundraisers throughout the nation. Likewise, a “Dream Concert” boasted Garth Brooks, Aretha Franklin, Carlos Santana, and other singers as celebrity participants. The Foundation’s “Dream Keepers” College Program engaged students in fundraising efforts.⁶³ Conflating King’s “Dream” trope from his most famous speech with the actualization of the Memorial, while understandable as a fundraising tactic, might have wrongly created the impression that the Memorial fulfilled King’s “Dream.” But Watkins asserted that the “corporate memorial” might make King question the Foundation’s understanding of his “Dream.” He wrote:

Dr. King fought for American equality in all areas that mattered, including education, economics, and incarceration, among others. As it stands, African Americans continue to be oppressed in ways that would make David Duke blush. Black children are not being educated, the wealth gap has grown to a level almost as high as when Dr. King was alive, Black unemployment is the highest that it's been in a quarter-century and there are more black men in prison than there were enslaved back in 1865. . . . Whose dream is this?⁶⁴

But in spite of conflating the two as a fundraising strategy, the Foundation largely recognized the Memorial's completion as the fulfillment of its own dream, rather than King's. The Foundation described the finished site as a "living memorial," suggesting that the dream would not be completed but would live on at the site.⁶⁵

Conclusion

Not unusually, tens of thousands gathered at the Lincoln Memorial on the anniversary of King's "I Have a Dream," in 2010, just over a year before the King Memorial's dedication ceremony. Surprisingly though, the event was not a commemorative march or ceremony, but a rally to "restore honor in America" headlined by conservative media personality Glenn Beck and former Republican Vice Presidential nominee Sarah Palin. Beck called the rally a "moment, quite honestly, that I think we reclaim the civil rights movement," adding that "Whites don't own Abraham Lincoln [and] blacks don't own Martin Luther King."⁶⁶ The announcement of the event provoked a huge backlash, with some claiming conservatives were "hijacking [King's] legacy."⁶⁷ Reverend Al Sharpton, a civil rights activist and politician, for instance, responded with a "Reclaim the Dream" rally in Washington on the same day to oppose Beck's event.⁶⁸

I recount the story of Beck and Sharpton's opposing rallies to contextualize one of this chapter's central findings: the "ownership" of King's memory is often contested. In the case of the King Memorial, that ownership dispute came in many forms. Gilbert Young claimed ownership on behalf of African Americans, declaring "King is ours" in protest of the employment of a Chinese sculptor. Others, such as Harry Johnson and Paul Sarbanes, argued

that King's memory truly belonged to African Americans, to all Americans, and perhaps to the entire international community. Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity's involvement sometimes came into question, as critics pondered if the organization was building the Memorial for their own benefit or for the nation's. Some feared that large corporate sponsors tried to claim ownership of King's memory in moves to improve their own image. Finally, the King family's legal and economic rights to the slain leader's words and likeness caused critics to challenge their right to the ownership of his memory and their moral authority as stewards of his legacy. The larger question of ownership is at issue or is, at least, reflected in each debate over the Memorial, from the conflicts over King's likeness and words to the disputes over location and funds. But as the clash over Glenn Beck's use or "hijacking" of King's memory demonstrates, the issue of ownership is not unique to this case study. Indeed, in 1986, the question of ownership arose with the creation of the federal holiday celebrating King's birthday. At the time Sophomore Republican Congressman Newt Gingrich asserted, "No one can claim Dr. King. He transcends all of us."⁶⁹ But was Gingrich right? Does King's memory belong to the few or to the many? To the past, present, or future? Chapters 4 and 5 present additional findings on the issue of ownership and Chapter 6 further explores their implications.

This chapter's other central achievement was amassing the privileged motives behind and vernacular interpretations of the Memorial. The Foundation's creative urges and publicly meaningful purposes were sometimes tempered by practical concerns, as well as internal and external conflicts. For instance, primarily pragmatic reasons led the Foundation to use Chinese granite in constructing the Memorial's primary features, while time constraints and a lack of forethought led to the paraphrased "drum major" quotation. Conflicts over location and design also complicated open collaboration in some regards and forced various parties to compromise

over the Memorial's final form. Ultimately, most public criticism during the Memorial's construction went ignored. But some affected change, including the "drum major" firestorm. On January 11, 2013, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar ordered that the paraphrased quotation be either eliminated or altered in response to continued criticism. The implication of such a change, as journalist Nick Carbone observes, is that "Some things aren't set in stone—even if they are set in stone."⁷⁰

CHAPTER 4

THE RHETORICAL FORM AND FORCE OF THE KING MEMORIAL

This chapter offers a rhetorical analysis of the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial based on a weekend-long visit in August 2012. I spent a majority of this research trip exploring the site, observing its visitors, talking to park rangers, and taking notes and photographs. This chapter's analysis is primarily based on my own observations, but also references the motives of its creators and the critical response of the public. Additionally, this analysis attends to secondary sources produced by the NPS including pamphlets and guidebooks distributed on-site and a free mobile phone app. Throughout the chapter, I interweave a first person narrative of my initial visit to the site with my rhetorical analysis, following Dickinson, Ott, and Aoki's lead in "emphasiz[ing] the ways traveling to and through the museum [or memorial] influences the rhetorical force of the site."¹

To begin, Blair, Jeppeson, and Pucci suggest that rhetorical readings of postmodern commemorative sites, such as the King Memorial, can be problematic for various reasons.² The issue of authorship can be particularly murky, as collectives may collaborate, compromise, and compete over the particulars of a memorial. Explaining the significance of this issue, Blair, Jeppeson, and Pucci claim that "No unity arises from collective design; in fact, plurality is cultivated. And authorial intent is of negligible value in interpreting a 'design' that may incorporate as many intentions as there are collaborative designers."³ Therefore, this rhetorical analysis's foremost goal is not to evaluate the effectiveness of rhetors' attempts to imbue the

Memorial with their intended messages. Instead I heed postmodern commemoration scholars' insistence on "multivalent readings" and recognize the "goal is not to locate *the* message but the multiple, frequently conflicting messages. To attempt a unified, centered reading, thus, is to miss the point."⁴ This assertion of multivalence is consistent with one of the Foundation's professed views of the site: "This memorial is not designed to be experienced in a single way with one single message, but rather it is to have a broad accessibility, appealing to all of the senses with diverse and overlapping themes."⁵ Additionally, the Foundation's website claims that "The Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial is conceived of as an engaging landscape experience tied to other landscapes and monuments, not as a single object or memorial dominating the site."⁶ Blair, Jeppeson, and Pucci likewise note that postmodern memorials are sensitive to their contexts, users, and environments.⁷ I take a cue from this proposition, as well as another study by Dickinson, Ott, and Aoki, and examine the Memorial as part of an experiential landscape, acknowledging that "spaces of memory are better thought of as constitutive elements of landscapes than as discrete texts, that landscapes entail both physical and cognitive dimensions, and that such landscapes offer fully embodied subject positions, which literally shape visitors' practices of looking."⁸

By examining the Memorial's visual and textual components, its surrounding landscape, and many of its supplementary materials, this analysis follows rhetorical scholar Jason Edward Black's "fused approach," analyzing "representative fragments of the site's milieu."⁹ As rhetorical theorist Michael McGee says, using the concept of a "fragment:"

[E]mphasizes an important truth about discourse: *Discourse ceases to be what it is whenever parts of it are taken "out of context."* Failing to account for "context," or reducing "context" to one or two of its parts, means quite simply that one is no longer dealing with discourse as it appears in the world. . . . Put another way, the elements of "context" are so important to the "text" that one cannot discover, or even discuss, the *meaning* of 'text' without reference to them.¹⁰

Examining a representative sample of the site's many fragments ensures that the site is not taken out of its context and stripped of its meaning. Just as a reading of the site's visual elements would be incomplete without a reading of the site's textual components, a reading of the whole Memorial would be unfinished without a consideration of the site's many other fragmentary parts.¹¹

In summary, this analysis assesses the rhetorical form and force of the King Memorial not as a stand-alone artifact created by rhetors to cultivate memory in a certain way, but as an influential and complex text within an equally complex fragmentary experiential landscape. I divide my analysis into two parts. First, I observe the experiential landscape surrounding the King Memorial, most closely examining the physical landscape of Washington, D.C., and the National Mall and the cognitive landscape of prior knowledge and perceptions individuals have about King and the Civil Rights Movement. Second, I turn to the King Memorial to decode and analyze its various components, both visual and textual. But while I separately describe many of the Memorial's most prominent features, I also follow the example set by Blair and Michel in "attend[ing] not only to multiple design features of the Memorial, but also to its material performances and force within its context(s)."¹² In this portion of my analysis, I reference the experiential landscape, along with the Memorial's history as described in Chapter Three, in order to offer a composite reading of the site's various elements.¹³ I conclude the chapter by teasing out the whole of my interpretation.

The Experiential Landscape

In order to reach the King Memorial visitors must travel to and through Washington, D.C., a city boasting a racially diverse population of over 600,000, with the majority being African American (50.7%), White (38.5%), or Hispanic (9.1%).¹⁴ An additional 16 million

visitors come to the nation's capital each year as tourists, businesspeople, students, activists, and in numerous other roles.¹⁵ While for this project I traveled to Washington with the express purpose of visiting and studying the King Memorial, others may only see the Memorial briefly as a part of their trip's larger agenda. Residents of the city may pass by the Memorial on a stroll or bike ride through the National Mall. In short, visitors travel to the Memorial for a variety of reasons and experience the Memorial in different ways. While impossible to describe the physical and cognitive landscapes each individual travels through and accesses to reach the King Memorial, this section describes how the city and National Mall, along with prior knowledge of King and the Civil Rights Movement, may provide contour to one's experience of the Memorial.

Although Washington is racially, culturally, and ideologically diverse and is generally thought of as open to a wide range of people, some view the city and the National Mall as inaccessible. Gallagher explains that the smaller number of African Americans honored by memorials in the city help make the capital and National Mall "more accessible to the experiences of white Americans."¹⁶ While Gallagher's assertion is partly accurate, it draws attention to the city's changing physical landscape. Washington is filled with government buildings, museums and memorials, and various other historical and cultural landmarks. Many of the most noteworthy pay homage to white Americans, including Presidents George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt. But in the last fifteen years, the National Museum of the American Indian, the African American Civil War Memorial Museum, and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum all opened, changing the outlook of to whom the nation ought to pay tribute. In addition, although the majority of landmarks on the National Mall still celebrate the memories of predominately white Americans, Gallagher does not acknowledge the historical use of those sites by African Americans.

Historian Scott A. Sandage traces the history of African Americans demonstrating on the Mall from a 1939 Easter concert to the 1963 March on Washington. The Lincoln Memorial, although not conceived for this purpose, became “racially contested ground” where African Americans “strategically appropriated Lincoln’s memory and monument as political weapons.”¹⁷ In all, the numerous museums and memorials, along with other historic sites, create a culture of commemoration in the city that encourages visitors and occupants to think about U.S. history, culture, politics, and government. Steadily, these sites are encouraging visitors to consider culture and history that are not exclusively white and/or male centered.

Gallagher does assert that the “history of black American’s voting rights and participation in national government” make the nation’s capital more accessible to the commemoration of white leaders than African Americans.¹⁸ Again, this claim makes sense but draws attention to the changing cognitive landscape of the nation’s capital. The 2008 and 2012 presidential elections featured the most racially and ethnically diverse electorate in U.S. history and saw the election of the nation’s first African American president in Barack Obama.¹⁹

More pertinent to the memory of King is the relationship between Obama and the civil rights icon as perceived by the President, media, and public. Obama certainly recognized the link between the two and appropriated King’s words in many of his most important speeches.²⁰ On January 19, 2009, just one day before assuming the presidency, Obama celebrated MLK Day with a speech invoking King’s memory from the Lincoln Memorial. As Obama literally walked in King’s footsteps, the news media wondered aloud if Obama, soon to be the first African American president, symbolically fulfilled King’s “Dream.” Citing a CNN-Opinion Research Poll, political analyst Bill Schneider asked, “Has [King’s] dream been fulfilled? . . . With the election of Barack Obama, two thirds of African-Americans believe it has.”²¹ The presence of

an African American president who called on King's words and potentially helped fulfill King's "dream" altered the cognitive landscape for those visiting the King Memorial, as individuals might have contemplated how King's legacy affected Obama and vice versa. Knowledge of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement can also greatly impact the way one experiences the King Memorial. As discussed in Chapter One, actual knowledge of King's accomplishments is limited for many. However, King's memory is celebrated throughout the nation in a variety of ways. Prior participation in King Day parades, school programs, and other events may affect how some view the Memorial. Other visitors may have lived through and experienced the Civil Rights Movement firsthand. The diversity of knowledge and experience among visitors to the King Memorial makes it impossible to predict exactly how each person will feel during their encounter with the site.

A Rhetorical Reading of the King Memorial

As I walked slowly and deliberately through the Mountain of Despair entrance to the site, I read the quotation on the side of the Stone of Hope: "Out of the Mountain of Despair, A Stone of Hope." I immediately understood the Memorial's chief visual and textual metaphor and I recognized how the Memorial promoted the metaphor symbolically and performatively.²² Symbolically the stone itself is clearly displaced from the mountain rock, representing hope that originated in a world of despair. Performatively people enter from the Mountain of Despair and often look in awe at the stone's countenance of King; they come from their own varyingly tormented lives and find hope and promise at the site. As I performed the metaphor and walked around to the front of the Stone, I thought the entire Memorial to be a grand, fitting, and inspiring tribute to King, although I was struck by King's cold posture and the bitter expression of his visage.

Most visitors I observed paused longest in front of King's statue, either to gaze at his sculpted image or to take a photograph. King's figure is only partially carved from the white block of stone behind him that still encompasses his back and feet. Unable to march or move, he stands with his arms folded, sternly gazing across the Tidal Basin with a non-descript scroll, presumably a speech draft, in his left hand. King's facial expression looks solemn and even angry. The face does not invoke images of King as the inspiring speaker of a movement; nor does it instill the sense of hope that one might expect from an element titled the Stone of Hope. On closer inspection, King's eyes stare across the Tidal Basin just to the right of the Jefferson Memorial. King does not look with hope to the author of the Declaration of Independence, but instead with noticeable disdain with his back toward Lincoln and his eyes averting Jefferson. Although the Foundation made much of the "Line of Leadership" linking the memorials to Lincoln, King, and Jefferson, King's statue does not appear as pleased with his position between the two presidents. While people can interpret King's disdain (if they label it as such) in many different ways, I thought that perhaps King was unhappy being frozen between the memories of both presidents. Literally stuck in between a president who owned slaves and the president largely credited for freeing them, King's position does not do justice to the goals he espoused or the progress he helped oversee. Alternatively, King's position might be said to disrupt, rather than join, the "Line of Leadership" linking Jefferson to Lincoln. Rather than quietly taking his position in chronological order, King stands between the two forcing both presidents to acknowledge his placement.

King's scroll, which replaced a pen from early models of the sculpture, probably reminds visitors of King as a writer and speaker. One park ranger speculated that the scroll might be his "Dream" speech, but its blank appearance lets visitors interpret the document as they wish. As I

still pondered King's facial expression, I thought that the scroll might actually be the Declaration of Independence handed to him across the Basin by Jefferson, or the Emancipation Proclamation that he attained from Lincoln behind him. King then stood clutching one of those documents, brooding over its unfulfilled promises. Regardless of how one views the scroll, the sculpture's overall appearance can symbolically represent King's unfinished work. The sculpture's incomplete rocky edges call for more work in crafting and using King's memory. The scroll's empty pages represent the words left to write and the orations left to deliver. King's somber peering into the horizon reminds visitors of the daunting journey still ahead. Thus the Memorial leaves visitors to reflect on the present work to be done, rather than the accomplishments of King and past leaders. The Memorial privileges cultivating identity and promoting engagement over educating the public about King's actual life and career. The Memorial's symbolic features also are vague enough to allow audiences to interpret what their specific identity is and what causes they should engage in.

While the Memorial's central metaphor makes sense for those entering through the Mountain of Despair, visitors may also enter from the walkway by the Tidal Basin. Those visitors, who may be coming from the neighboring FDR Memorial or from elsewhere, are unable to perform the metaphor perhaps as the architect would have it and instead instantly witness the Memorial's depiction of King, with the Mountain and Inscription Walls behind him. Such visitors also do not immediately read the quotation that inspired the Memorial, so for them the Memorial's metaphor may not be as apparent. Even visitors familiar with the line from King's speech would not see the Stone as sufficiently hopeful or the Mountain as particularly despairing. In hue, size, and symmetry, the Mountain is unlikely to distress anyone.

Another issue arises as people perform the site's metaphor. From my observations, people most often enter the site, examine King's statue, the Tidal Basin, and a few of the quotations, and then exit back into the Mountain of Despair. Some might interpret this positively, as people return to their own lives' "mountains of despair" to carve out more stone of hope. People may leave inspired by the King Memorial and venture out to spread King's ideology and engage in positive change. But as I watched large numbers of people casually walk in and out of the Mountain of Despair, I saw the potential for a more pessimistic and awkward reading. I watched people return to their lives without either an understanding of or appreciation for King's vision. Moreover, I saw King stay behind with his back turned, unable to stop people from leaving; with his lips closed, unable to call out words of inspiration; and with his feet restrained, unable to lead the people in a march for change.

Even for those who do not think critically about the Memorial's elements, supplementary texts at the site seem to promote a certain interpretation. A descriptive sign positioned near the Memorial describes each major element, along with the Memorial's position in relation to the Lincoln and Jefferson Memorials. Interested visitors may also approach park rangers to receive two free pamphlets: one a listing of each of the Memorial's inscriptions, and the other a detailed guide describing the Memorial's purpose, history, and design. A free National Mall and Memorial Parks app also gives much of the same information. The texts reiterate and specify the Memorial's central metaphor: "[King's] image, facing the Tidal Basin, reinforces the boundless opportunities for advancement in the future. The Stone of Hope stands forward of, and is detached from the Mountain of Despair, a massive gateway representative of the struggle faced in the pursuit of social equality and peace."²³ The texts make no mention of King's demeanor or of the Mountain of Despair as the site's central exit point. Park rangers are generally helpful,

lead various tours of the site, and stand by to answer questions. During my visit I saw people ask the rangers about the site's visual features and, more often, about the site's various controversies.

As discussed in Chapter Three, one of the Memorial's major controversies was the paraphrased quotation on the north side of the Stone of Hope: "I Was a Drum Major for Justice, Peace and Righteousness." In the span of about fifteen minutes I saw two visitors approach park rangers to ask about the quotation. One ranger later confirmed to me that the quotation was one of the most frequently asked about elements of the site, probably due to media coverage of the issue. The two rangers I observed addressed the controversy in different ways. One reassured a visitor that plans were underway to change the quotation; the other treated the controversy as "blown out of proportion" and insisted that the paraphrase reflected the motives of King's message. The NPS inscriptions pamphlet explained the quotation as "the only paraphrase on the walls, to condense the idea for quick grasping."²⁴ In observing the whole of the site, I deemed the paraphrased quotation as perhaps the least important element of the Stone of Hope. The Stone's other quotation was more prominent to visitors entering the Memorial and the sculpture of King garnered the most attention. But the controversy around the quotation turned it into one of the Memorial's most discussed features. In my reading, the quotation itself, straightforward and thematically universal, seemed consistent with the rest of the Memorial. But I could also see the possibility of viewing the quotation and the larger monument as arrogant. Those thinking the quotation arrogant might similarly say the same about the King sculpture's disposition. That is, with arms folded and with eyes averted from the Jefferson Memorial, the site might invite visitors to see King as self-assured and, coupled with the paraphrased quotation, almost self-aggrandizing.

The Inscription Walls quote fourteen additional speeches, sermons, and writings by King. The majority could be said to fit in the categories of “Justice, Peace and Righteousness,” or love, non-violence, and similarly general and universal descriptors. For example, the following inscriptions speak of largely universal ideals:

WE SHALL OVERCOME BECAUSE THE ARC OF THE MORAL UNIVERSE IS LONG, BUT IT BENDS TOWARD JUSTICE. – DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, 1968

DARKNESS CANNOT DRIVE OUT DARKNESS, ONLY LIGHT CAN DO THAT. HATE CANNOT DRIVE OUT HATE, ONLY LOVE CAN DO THAT. – 1963

INJUSTICE ANYWHERE IS A THREAT TO JUSTICE EVERYWHERE. WE ARE CAUGHT IN AN INESCAPABLE NETWORK OF MUTUALITY, TIED IN A SINGLE GARMENT OF DESTINY. WHATEVER AFFECTS ONE DIRECTLY, AFFECTS ALL INDIRECTLY. – ALABAMA, 1963

Where the Lincoln Memorial’s interior includes the full texts of both the Gettysburg Address and Lincoln’s Second Inaugural, the King Memorial’s inscriptions are taken from a number of sources and presented with little context. The presence of whole texts, such as the 1963 Letter from a Birmingham Jail, would likely discourage visitors from actually reading the inscriptions. Few would attend to the writings because of their length and the difficulty and awkwardness that might come from reading them from the walls. Instead of whole texts then, the Memorial condenses King’s words into bite-sized ideas. That is, as McGee observes, the reduction of an “apparently finished text into a fragment that seems more important than the whole from which it came.”²⁵ The included quotations are placed in non-chronological, non-categorical order and offer only the year (and sometimes location) of their utterance or writing. The absence of further context further demonstrates McGee’s point that the fragment seems more important than the whole. Furthermore, the quotations are an obvious attempt to make King’s words relevant and inspiring to a variety of present and future audiences. But absent of context and offering little

about King's positions on the issues of his day, the Inscription Walls present King as an idealistic philosopher, rather than an activist who evolved in thought throughout his career.²⁶

Two quotations are exceptions to the universality and non-specificity of the inscriptions.

The first describes King's position on the Vietnam War:

I OPPOSE THE WAR IN VIETNAM BECAUSE I LOVE AMERICA. I SPEAK OUT AGAINST IT NOT IN ANGER BUT WITH ANXIETY AND SORROW IN MY HEART, AND ABOVE ALL WITH A PASSIONATE DESIRE TO SEE OUR BELOVED COUNTRY STAND AS THE MORAL EXAMPLE OF THE WORLD.
– CALIFORNIA, 1967

The Vietnam War quotation places King in time for visitors to the Memorial and also demonstrates his non-violence agenda as more than a Civil Rights Movement strategy. The quotation also can serve a purpose of identification for today's audience, as visitors might recall their own feelings on the Iraq War, War in Afghanistan, or other present or future conflicts. The quotation reconciles patriotism with anti-war efforts. Two other more general quotations deal with war and non-violence, as well:

I BELIEVE THAT UNARMED TRUTH AND UNCONDITIONAL LOVE WILL HAVE THE FINAL WORD IN REALITY. THIS IS WHY RIGHT, TEMPORARILY DEFEATED, IS STRONGER THAN EVIL TRIUMPHANT. – OSLO, NORWAY, 1964.

IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO SAY "WE MUST NOT WAGE WAR." IT IS NECESSARY TO LOVE PEACE AND SACRIFICE FOR IT. WE MUST CONCENTRATE NOT MERELY ON THE NEGATIVE EXPULSION OF WAR, BUT THE POSITIVE AFFIRMATION OF PEACE. – CALIFORNIA, 1967.

The quotations on war and peace make this Memorial unique from the others on the Mall.

Whereas the nearby monuments dedicated to veterans of World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War commemorate the efforts of soldiers in combat, the King Memorial promotes peaceful protest. Whereas the presidential memorials all honor presidents who led the nation in times of war, the King Memorial commemorates a figure who supported non-violence.

The other quotation that contained some clue to its context was from an address during the Montgomery Bus Boycott:

WE ARE DETERMINED HERE IN MONTGOMERY TO WORK AND FIGHT UNTIL JUSTICE RUNS “DOWN LIKE WATER, AND RIGHTEOUSNESS LIKE A MIGHTY STREAM.” – ALABAMA, 1955

This quotation may have been included partly because of the Montgomery Bus Boycott’s status as a foundational moment that the larger public would be somewhat familiar with.²⁷ But while the quotation serves to recall a specific event of the Civil Rights Movement, it primarily works as a call to action with the other more universal quotations including,

THE ULTIMATE MEASURE OF A MAN IS NOT WHERE HE STANDS IN MOMENTS OF CONVENIENCE AND COMFORT, BUT WHERE HE STANDS AT TIMES OF CHALLENGE AND CONTROVERSY. – 1963

MAKE A CAREER OF HUMANITY. COMMIT YOURSELF TO THE NOBLE STRUGGLE FOR EQUAL RIGHTS. YOU WILL MAKE A BETTER PERSON OF YOURSELF, A GREATER NATION OF YOUR COUNTRY, AND A FINER WORLD TO LIVE IN. – DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, 1959

Together, the quotations call on visitors to identify with civil rights activists and to strive for positive change. By identifying with activists, visitors could see courage and kindness as the pathway toward a better world. Since King’s philosophy worked during the Civil Rights Movement, visitors might reason, that this same philosophy could ensure success in their own endeavors, as well.

During my visit to the Memorial, I saw few people walk the entirety of the Inscription Walls. More often than not, visitors would read a couple of inscriptions and move on. Three long benches sit on each side of the Stone of Hope, but I observed no one reading or reflecting on the quotations from the benches. While some of the inscriptions are visible from the seats, the benches seem more suitable for rest than reflection. The other feature related to the inscription walls also seemed somewhat unsuccessful in its intended purpose. On each side of

the entryway, small waterfalls stand at the edge of the Inscription Walls. The waterfalls, inspired by the aforementioned “righteousness like a might stream” quotation were meant to be symbolic and audible. The Memorial’s website described the designers’ purpose: “It is the sound of water ‘rolling down’ that will draw a visitor’s attention. From this life-giving source, Dr. King’s message begins stretching away from the entrance, at once welcoming and yet daring the visitor to follow.” The website added, “The use of water creates an audible buffer, further enhancing the sensation of being enveloped within the space.”²⁸ In actuality, the waterfalls are barely visible and hardly audible. Meanwhile, the quotation that inspired them is the sixth inscription away from the entryway, making it unlikely that visitors would realize the feature’s intended symbolism.²⁹

The Memorial’s plaza also features plant life including cherry blossom trees and crape myrtles. The cherry blossom trees surrounding the Tidal Basin originated as a 1912 gift from Japan, signifying peace and unity between the nations. The NPS planted 182 additional cherry blossom trees around the King Memorial. These pink and white trees only blossom for approximately two weeks every spring. The Foundation adds that “Poetically, each year the peak blooming period for the trees coincides with the anniversary of Dr. King’s assassination, April 4th.”³⁰ Although most visitors are unlikely to experience the Memorial during the trees’ blooming period, it is interesting to note that even nature assumes a role in commemorating King at the site. Other plant life, including the crape myrtles, offer prolonged blooming seasons and add to the site’s ambiance throughout the year. Meanwhile, American elm trees, the “standard street tree of Washington, DC,” sit along the Memorial’s border.³¹ These trees serve to amalgamate the Memorial with its surrounding landscape, making the site fit in with the other monuments and landmarks around the city.

Conveniently located across the street from the Memorial's entrance and not visible from the site's central plaza, is a bookstore and ranger station. Upon walking into the bookstore, I immediately approached a table centered at the entrance to the shop. The table displayed two books, a postcard, a keepsake box, an ornament, and a large flag with the image of King in front of the Stars and Stripes. While I first noticed the flag, I quickly turned my attention to the two books: *The Black Family Reunion Cookbook* and Michelle Obama's *American Grown: The Story of the White House Kitchen Garden and Gardens Across America*. Although the shelves of the bookshop were lined with books on King and the Civil Rights Movement, none were featured in the store's most prominent display. I soon learned that Michelle Obama's book was a new release and that the National Council of Negro Women's (NCNW) annual National Black Family Reunion was scheduled to take place not long after my visit on the National Mall.³² However, I still thought it odd that these books should be displayed there instead of books on King. After all, the Memorial's pedagogical mission was to teach visitors about King—not to instruct on food.

Elsewhere in the bookstore, books and videos focusing on King and the Civil Rights Movement give the site a role in fulfilling the Memorial's educational goals. Reflecting the Foundation's emphasis on educating younger generations, many of the books are aimed towards children. Among such books I saw were *Who Was Martin Luther King, Jr.?*, *The Civil Rights Movement for Kids*, *We March*, *Black Trivia: The African American Experience A-to-Z*, and a comic book titled *Martin Luther King, Jr.: Great Civil Rights Leader*. Other books and films focusing on King and specific movement events, such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott, are available for visitors wanting deeper learning experiences.

The bookstore also boasts several items exclusive to the King Memorial, including magnets, pins, postcards, bookmarks, posters, pencils, and ornaments. Most of these items feature images of King himself or of his image sculpted on the King Memorial. King's image serves as a cipher, defined by critical scholars as a "basic figure and form for a variety of products and discourses within a much larger commodity field."³³ King's image helps market a variety of products to consumers, while also allowing them to take home fragments of the site to help in recalling their experiences with the Memorial. Images of the walls' inscriptions, along with copies of books, speeches, letters, and sermons written by King likewise enable visitors to continue pondering King's memory after they leave.

The bookstore also features items available at other locations on the National Mall, including books on presidents, NPS guidebooks, and maps of the area. Of particular significance to the King Memorial, although they were also available elsewhere, were books written about the current first term President Barack Obama. As previously discussed, thoughts of Obama likely already proliferated through the minds of visitors to the King Memorial, as Obama and others linked his presidency to the memory of King. But the physical presence of Obama artifacts in the bookstore directly called on visitors to make a connection between the sitting president and King. Additionally, other contemporary presidents were included only in general trivia and history books marketed towards children. The bookstore most assuredly privileged the connection between Obama and King by packaging Obama artifacts alongside King's memory.

Conclusion and Implications

This analysis affirms the following conclusions. First, while I detailed what memories the King Memorial includes, I also recognize the significance of the site's ability to forget, ignore, "bracket out or elide" certain memories.³⁴ A comprehensive listing or description of

every issue overlooked or discounted by the site would be inappropriate (and impossible), but I can attend to the Memorial's general omissions and speak to their importance. Notably, the site disregards other strands and leaders of the Civil Rights Movement. Of course the site is dedicated primarily to King, but it does not even speak to the conflictual or cooperative relationships between King and other notable figures such as Stokely Carmichael, Fred Shuttlesworth, or Malcolm X.³⁵ Such names might appear on the bookstore's shelves, but not in or among the most prominently displayed items. In rhetorical scholar Philip Wander's term, some of these names might constitute a "Third Persona," or "the 'it' that is not present . . . a being whose presence, though relevant to what is said, is negated through silence."³⁶ But before passing judgment on all figures not explicitly named or depicted on the King Memorial as "negated," one must also recognize the site's limitations in which memories it can promote. Furthermore, I again acknowledge that public memory is constituted by the whole of a memory field and not by a sole memory site or artifact. Still, in consideration of these omissions, along with the site's lack of contextual information for each quotation and its privileging of non-educational memorabilia (e.g., Obama's gardening book), I can only conclude that the pedagogical goals of the Memorial take a backseat to other agendas. The Memorial's misquoted and mischaracterizing "drum major" inscription further supports the conclusion that issues of veracity and comprehensiveness are cast aside. Even in view of the larger experiential landscape of King's memory, an examination of the King Memorial does not answer the many concerns expressed in Chapter One. Those lamenting the lack of knowledge of King's accomplishments find little reassurance in this site's rhetorical form.

Of the memories included by the site, certain fragments are privileged over others. From the quotations selected for the Inscription Walls to the books displayed in the bookstore, the site

promotes a distinct image of King and positive civic engagement. The general ambiguity of the Memorial's inscriptions allows visitors to easily identify with King's philosophy and apply his words to a variety of positions. The lack of context and the shortage of more specific and perhaps controversial quotations yield an image of King as a non-partisan, unifying figure. The site uses King's memory to promote relatively safe civic engagement by not specifying the issues or areas King might specifically engage in himself. The notable exception on the Inscription Walls is a quotation concerning the Vietnam War. Under the climate of war, this quotation legitimizes anti-war positions and links them to patriotism. But even with that one quotation, the sum of the inscriptions offers a broadly appealing and very usable memory of King for visitors to take with them. The symbolic features also vaguely promote engagement, allowing would-be activists to leave the Memorial and work for assorted causes under the auspices of King's memory.

Thus, the Memorial does little to quell the concerns of critics skeptical of the image of King as a universal hero. Vincent Gordon Harding's observation about King Day remains true in regard to the Memorial: the Memorial "had chosen, consciously or unconsciously, to allow King to become a convenient hero, to try and tailor him to the shape and mood of mainstream, liberal/moderate America."³⁷ By promoting King as a non-partisan and uncontroversial hero, the Memorial risks misleadingly inspiring everyone or failing to inspire anyone. The Memorial forgets that King actually stood for specific issues. Failing to account for those issues leaves hollow the hallowed ground of the Memorial.

The King Memorial not only develops an image of King as a unifying figure, but as a national hero. Adjacent to the FDR Memorial, in view of the Washington Monument, and in a "line of leadership" with memorials to Jefferson and Lincoln, King is situated among the most

revered presidents in the nation's history. Alongside memorials to war veterans, King is honored with those who sacrificed life and limb in service of the nation. The Memorial's placement, grandeur, and even its landscaping allow visitors to see King as a key figure in the narrative of national progress. Certainly, positive implications come from King's move from vernacular to official within the national narrative. The shift in attitudes towards race and ideology should not go unnoticed. Additionally, King's legacy of peaceful protest joins war, depression, and political battle as part of the national struggle towards progress. But the move does not come without potentially negative consequences. Where Washington, Lincoln, and the other presidents served the nation by executing laws, King worked to change policy. Where soldiers fought and died battling enemies from outside of the nation, King fought and died battling enemies from within. Does the Memorial legitimize the strategy of non-violence by placing it next to the strategy of war? Or does it work the other way around? Does the placement of the King Memorial legitimize his views of the nation? Or does it silence his voice? The King Memorial's inscriptions, by inclusion and omission, say little on specific issues or the state of the nation. King's depiction is silent and still. The Stone of Hope carved from white granite also whitewashes many of the leader's beliefs. I return to these issues in the dissertation's conclusion, but for now reiterate that consequences and tensions emerge from King's shift from a vernacular leader to an institutionalized symbol.

In Chapter Three's conclusion I discussed the contested "ownership" of King's memory. Here I add that the Memorial's textual and visual components indicate universal rights to his memory. Certainly, the image of King as a national hero supersedes any claims of ownership by individuals, races, or political parties. An included quotation might indicate King's own view on the issue:

IF WE ARE TO HAVE PEACE ON EARTH, OUR LOYALTIES MUST BECOME ECUMENICAL RATHER THAN SECTIONAL. OUR LOYALTIES MUST TRANSCEND OUR RACE, OUR TRIBE, OUR CLASS, AND OUR NATION; AND THIS MEANS WE MUST DEVELOP A WORLD PERSPECTIVE. – GEORGIA, 1967

Through its placement on the National Mall, the Memorial insists that King's memory belongs to the nation. By promoting the universal values of King, the Memorial insists that his memory also belongs to the entire world. However, self-aware of its surrounding experiential landscape, the Memorial subtly endorses one individual as the heir and steward of King's memory, if not its owner. Obama's physical presence at the Memorial (on the shelves of the bookstore), combined with his presence in the cognitive landscape of King's memory, bring him to the forefront of the "ownership" debate. As Chapter Five discusses Obama's address at the Memorial's Dedication Ceremony, I leave further discussion of this issue for the remaining chapters of the study.

Finally, I return to this chapter's beginning assumption that memorials engender plurality of readings. Alternative interpretations of the site are possible for those unhappy with King's depiction as cold and detached or upset with a paraphrased quotation that mischaracterizes the slain leader. Also possible are readings of the site's central metaphor as positive and encouraging, inspiring individuals to strive for change. Others may view the site less as an inspiring memorial and more as a tourist destination. These individuals may engage with the site uncritically as a scheduled stop on their trip. Public memory then does not equate to universally consistent remembrances. Just as people come in with their own prior knowledge and expectations, they leave with their own interpretations and feelings.

CHAPTER 5

INTERPRETATION, POLITICIZATION, AND INSTITUTIONALIZATION:

A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE KING MEMORIAL'S DEDICATION CEREMONY

Originally scheduled for August 28, 2011, to mark the anniversary of King's 1963 "Dream" speech, a pair of natural disasters forced event organizers to delay the Memorial's dedication ceremony. First, earthquake damage caused organizers to change the locations of pre-dedication festivities, moving a Wednesday night gala dinner from the National Building Museum to the Washington Convention Center and a Saturday interfaith service from the Washington National Cathedral to the Basilica of the National Shrine. Next, the approach of Category 4 Hurricane Irene led organizers to postpone the event entirely. Eventually rescheduled for Sunday, October 16, the Memorial's dedication took place under clear skies and moderate temperatures and in front of tens of thousands of people gathered on the National Mall.¹ Several of the event's 28 speakers noted the ceremony's delay in their remarks, including the headline speaker President Barack Obama who began his speech, "An earthquake and a hurricane may have delayed this day, but this is a day that would not be denied."²

As V. William Balthrop, Carole Blair, and Neil Michel assert, "Ritual dedications of commemorative sites are important not only as generic cultural initiations, but as interpretive apertures."³ In other words, the rhetoric of a dedicatory speech or performance may influence how an audience member interprets a commemorative site. Unsurprisingly, in the case of the King Memorial, a number of the dedication ceremony's speakers offered guidance for

interpreting the Memorial or, at least, offered their espoused goals and hopes for the Memorial's future. Among such speakers was King's sister Christine King Farris, who spoke of one general hope for the site, namely that it would "provide a source of inspiration for people all over the world for generations to come."⁴ Other speakers also picked up on this motif, a theme I previously discussed as advanced by the King Memorial itself and the voices of its creators. But while the speakers praised the site as "the world's memorial" (MLK National Memorial Project Foundation President and CEO Harry Johnson), they concurrently and conversely also cultivated very partisan and political memories of King himself.⁵ Just as Balthrop, Blair, and Michel argued that the World War II Memorial's dedication aimed at justifying imperialism and a unilateral foreign policy, the King Memorial's dedicators linked King's public memory to contemporary political issues as diverse as education, economic justice, and LGBTQ rights.⁶ Although inconsistent with their presentation of the King Memorial as a universally appealing site, the cultivation of usable, political memories of King was very consistent with the central scholarly assumptions of public memory as purposeful, partisan, partial, and present-focused.⁷

In this chapter I analyze the dedication ceremony not only as a celebratory event, but as a sort of political forum. I divide my analysis into three parts. First, I elucidate event participants' most overt interpretations of the Memorial and its goals, contending that the somewhat exclusive group of interpreters generally read the site as unifying and inspiring. Second, I examine the speakers' efforts to cultivate a political memory of King, arguing that while most speakers drastically turned from their universal interpretations towards more partisan rhetoric, Obama actually avoided such a shift in order to maintain a usable memory for his own purposes. Third, I consider the event's varied efforts to institutionalize the memory of King, arguing that event participants attempted to place his memory within a larger mainstream national narrative.

Throughout each section and in the conclusion, I observe the mounting tensions that arose from the event's melding together of the celebratory and the political, the epideictic and the deliberative, the universal and the partisan, and the official and vernacular. As I argue that the event participants cultivated, used, and ultimately institutionalized a very political public memory of King, I also offer a partial response to Balthrop, Blair, and Michel's call for a distinction between a "politically and ethically responsible 'use' of the past in the present and an irresponsible one."⁸

Interpretation

In their most overt interpretations of the Memorial and its goals, speakers most often offered universal messages.⁹ They repeated that they hoped King's memory could inspire people around the world and they generally agreed that the Memorial meant as much to the present and future as it did to the past. These interpretations confirmed communication scholar Celeste Michelle Condit's observation that "the content of epideictic speeches tends to be relatively non-controversial and to focus on universal (i.e. broad and abstract) values." Condit clarifies, "This is not to say . . . that epideictic must avoid urging an audience to action. The actions urged must simply avoid major divisiveness."¹⁰ In this section I call attention to these universal interpretations, but also examine one notable deviation from the norm. Before discussing the interpretations offered at the event, it is insightful to review the list of participants itself.

The In/Exclusionary Participants

Just as the Memorial remembers and omits certain players from the Civil Rights Movement, the dedication ceremony included and excluded participants that one might expect to find at the event. Among the principle speakers were Master of Ceremonies Gwen Ifill (news anchor), Vincent Gray (Mayor of Washington, D.C.), Julian Bond (social activist and professor),

Christine King Farris (King's older sister), Reverend Bernice King (King's daughter), Martin Luther King, III (King's son), Dan Rather (former news anchor and correspondent), Reverend Jesse Jackson (a fellow activist with King and politician), Representative John Lewis (a fellow activist with King and current elected official), Andrew Young (activist and former Ambassador to the United Nations), Reverend Joseph Lowery (Southern Christian Leadership Conference co-founder), Reverend Al Sharpton (activist and politician), Marian Wright Edelman (children's rights activist), Ken Salazar (Secretary of the Interior), Harry Johnson (President and CEO, MLK National Memorial Project Foundation), and President Obama.¹¹ A glance at the list of speakers reveals notable politicians and public servants, celebrities, members of the King family, and activists who marched with and/or were inspired by King. While the principal speakers were mostly African American, several white speakers gave the occasion some semblance of racial variety. The speakers were also somewhat diverse in age, with the youngest being the 12-year old actor Amandla Stenberg and the oldest being the 90-year old Lowery.

The speakers seemed appropriate enough for the occasion and many of their absences would have been apparent had they not participated. But many groups were noticeably absent or underrepresented at the event. After all, dedicators interpreted the site as “[not just] for African Americans, but for Americans and citizens around this world” (Bernice King).¹² Yet only Americans spoke at the event. Bond remarked briefly on behalf of Yemeni 2011 Nobel Peace Prize recipient Tawakkul Karman, discussing the ways that King's message “[resonated] in far away Yemen and everywhere around the world,” but no foreign leaders or activists spoke for themselves.¹³ The Israeli-born American violinist Miri Ben-Ari, the only event participant born outside of the country, did not have a speaking role at the event.¹⁴ Furthermore, the event's dedicators were a somewhat racially and politically exclusive group, as only African Americans

and white Americans who were primarily affiliated with the political left delivered remarks.¹⁵ The lack of racial diversity (beyond black and white) detracted from the Memorial's professed goal of inclusiveness, but more importantly the lack of diversity may have also limited the kind of interpretations offered at the event. Certainly, critics of the site's architecture, design, placement, and/or content did not speak out with their own interpretations at the event.¹⁶

Universal or Confrontational?

Many speakers only offered their interpretations of the Memorial's general goals, including Lowery who said, "While the presence of this imposing structure forever reminds us of the long and perilous journey that the struggle has brought us through, it also points towards the future."¹⁷ Lowery's message reflected the interpretation that the sculpture of King was gazing across the Tidal Basin towards future struggles and successes. Bernice King similarly hoped people visiting the Memorial "could be propelled into action, utilizing [King's] philosophies and strategies of non-violence."¹⁸ These speakers presented purposefully vague present and future-oriented goals for the Memorial. Such remarks were congruous with Johnson's view of the site as the "world's memorial" and were also consistent with Condit's description of traditional epideictic rhetoric.

Sharpton and Obama's interpretations of the King Memorial's sculpture also urged action while remaining relatively uncontroversial. Sharpton called the sculpture "A man standing in a posture of faith," thus disagreeing with the vocal critics who derailed the statue as aloof or confrontational.¹⁹ Obama picked up on Sharpton's emphasis on faith when describing his primary hope for the site: "In the end, that's what I hope my daughters take away from this monument. I want them to come away from here with a faith in what they can accomplish when they are determined and working for a righteous cause. I want them to come away from here

with a faith in other people and a faith in a benevolent God. This sculpture, massive and iconic as it is, will remind them of Dr. King's strength."²⁰ Obama's description of what his daughters might gain from the site echoed Bernice King's and Lowery's interpretation of the Memorial's potential to inspire and engage future generations. By focusing on "faith" and "strength," along with the unspecified "righteous cause," Obama crafted an abstract, unifying message.

But while Obama and Sharpton sought to avert controversy with their interpretations of the statue, Jackson apparently welcomed it. Jackson openly agreed with critics who voiced their opinions that the King sculpture appeared confrontational. However, unlike those critics, Jackson maintained that the figure's confrontational posture was a positive feature of the monument. Jackson said, "The image of a confrontational King may not be pleasing to those who seek to wash the blood stains from history but is useful to those who value the truth of King's life more than the myth of the man."²¹ Jackson risked alienating portions of his audience who thought differently about the statue's posture, but to him the confrontational image represented the historically accurate King, as well as, in his own words, the most "useful" King. Jackson yearned for people to gain inspiration from this version of King, rather than what he deemed to be a watered down myth. Jackson's was the only overt interpretation of the site inconsistent with the view of the Memorial as universal and inclusive. But while other speakers offered abstract and unifying interpretations of the Memorial, most turned to partisan and divisive remarks at some point in their speeches. As Condit posits, "When speakers . . . make arguments which do not gain general assent, audience members feel a sense of misuse of an occasion."²² As Jackson risked with his overt interpretation, many speakers risked alienating audience members with their other less universal and more political remembrances of King.

Politicization

Many speakers took the Memorial's dedication as an opportunity to discuss a host of political issues. Several dedicators advanced their own political positions under the guise of what King would want/think/say/do, including Bernice King who repeated she could "hear [her] father" and Young who proclaimed, "That's what Dr. Martin Luther King would have you do!"²³ Even speakers who did not explicitly cite King's retrofitted opinions on contemporary issues still appropriated his words to make political arguments. Yet after many speakers cultivated a political memory of King, Obama retreated back to the universal memory, re-crafting and using that public memory to enhance his own personal ethos. In this section I examine how Obama and the other dedicatory speakers cultivated and used the public memory of King for their own purposes.

The Conduit of Justice

A number of speakers adopted language from a quotation on the nearby inscription wall: "Injustice everywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." These speakers used the quotation, imbued with universal values, to make unequivocally political points. Far from the dedicator's broad interpretations of the Memorial and its goals, many speakers used the language of "justice" and "injustice" to cultivate a partisan and usable memory of King.

In her opening remarks, Ifill first brought up the theme of "injustice" saying, "It would be easier to dwell on the adversity, the indignities, the injustice, but then perhaps we would give short shrift to the inspiration that arose from every challenge we face." She called instead for speakers to "celebrate the dream."²⁴ Ironically, the very next speaker Gray instead chose to focus on "the yolk of injustice" and added that the "dream remains unfulfilled." Gray framed the issue of District of Columbia residents' lack of representation in Congress under the language of

injustice. Gray called the nation's capital the "last remaining battlefield of the American Revolution" and said, "In 1966 Dr. King marched in our streets calling for an end to this injustice."²⁵ But while King did take a stance on this particular issue during his lifetime, other speakers associated King's call for justice with issues that originated, more or less, after King's death.

Martin Luther King, III focused on justice, rather than injustice, wrapping his entire message around the theme and linking his father's memory to the still new Occupy Wall Street Movement. He said, "The young people of the Occupy Movement all over this country and throughout the world are seeking justice." Assuming a sermonic tone he continued,

Justice for the unemployed searching for months for jobs . . . Justice for working class people barely making it. Justice for middle class folks who are unable to pay their mortgages. Justice for elders terrified that they are losing the value of their savings and their healthcare. Justice for the young people who graduate from college [and] are unemployed and burdened by student loans they cannot repay. Justice for everyone who are simply asking the wealthy and corporations to pay their fair share. . . . We must stand up for social and economic justice.²⁶

King, III's decision to tie his father's memory to the Occupy Movement was timely and controversial. The Occupy Movement, which launched in September of that year, featured demonstrators protesting various issues of perceived economic injustice. The Movement gained significant media coverage and helped lead *TIME Magazine* to name "The Protester" as its Person of the Year. But movement participants were also vilified as radicals and criticized for lacking clear goals.²⁷ King, III only linked the general goals of the Occupy Movement with those of his father, but others more closely linked King's memory to the movement.

Bernice King was one such speaker who again used the "justice" language of her father saying, "Perhaps the postponement [of the dedication ceremony] was a divine interruption to remind us of the King that moved us beyond the dream of racial injustice to the action and work

of economic justice.” As she continued, Bernice King quoted her father and also adopted language of the Occupy Movement. She said,

Perhaps God wanted to remind us that forty-three years ago . . . that [King] was in the midst of starting a poor people’s campaign where he was galvanizing poor people from all walks of life to . . . *occupy* this place until there was change in the economic system and a better distribution of wealth. In fact over forty-three years ago [King] told us that we must become “maladjusted to certain social ills.” We should never adjust to the one percent controlling more than 40% of the wealth. We should never adjust to an unprecedented number of people being unemployed.²⁸ (Italics mine)

By citing divine providence, Bernice King moved beyond her father’s most famous address to make his memory germane to the Occupy Movement. Furthermore, she combined King’s words (e.g., “economic justice,” “social ills”) with those of the Occupy Movement (e.g., “occupy,” “the one percent”) to create the impression that her father’s beliefs were synonymous with those of the movement. Jackson went even further than Bernice King opining, “Forty-three years after Dr. King planned an occupation on this same spot, he would say to the Occupiers of Wall Street . . . you are the children and offspring of Dr. King’s Poor People’s Campaign.”²⁹ Jackson authorized members of the movement as the descendents and heirs of King’s work. Moreover, Jackson (as one of King’s fellow activists) and King’s children (as his biological descendents) legitimized the Occupy Movement’s goals by tying them to King’s supposedly universal value of “justice.”

Sharpton connected King’s memory to the Occupy Movement and a laundry list of political issues by discussing the “fight for justice today.” Sharpton ranted, “Justice is not trying to change the voting rights act and deny us in 34 states our right to vote with voter ID laws. Justice is not executing people on recanted testimonies. Justice is not sending children to schools that are not funded. Justice is not one percent of the country controlling 40% of the wealth.”³⁰ Within the span of 30 seconds, Sharpton cited contentious voter ID laws enacted by Republican

controlled legislatures and the controversial execution of Troy Davis from September of that year, in addition to issues related to education and the economy.³¹ Sharpton charged, “We will not stop until we get the equal justice Dr. King fought for,” thereby linking King’s vision of justice to the vision he described. More than anything, Sharpton saw King’s memory as a tool for bringing up the issues for which he wanted to advocate. Sharpton outright said, “Dr. King was not just a historic figure, he was a conduit of a spirit of justice.”³² King as a “conduit,” or instrument, or channel for a message of justice was more important to Sharpton (and seemingly for the other speakers about whom I just wrote) than King as a historical figure.

At least two speakers felt that such a view of King was inappropriate. Wright Edelman discounted King’s theoretical opinion on current issues charging, “Dr. King is not coming back. We’re it.”³³ Julian Bond seemed to agree when he described his experience talking to people about King:

Since [King] died, a constant question I’ve received whenever a racial advance occurred was “What would Dr. King have said about this?” What would he say when America elected its first black president? Would he think that this achievement was a confirmation of his dream? Would he say that these things would not have happened if he had not lived? I’ve always felt he’d be pleased whenever any element of racial progress occurred. But he wouldn’t think that Nirvana had come. And he wouldn’t try to claim credit for everything.³⁴

By refraining from inventing positions for King to take on contemporary issues, Edelman and Bond attempted to put questions of King’s political positions to rest. But these speakers were in the minority, as others continued to treat King as a conduit of justice, employing his memory to make points on a litany of other issues including bullying, racial profiling, immigration reform, LGBTQ rights, and the corporatization of the news media.³⁵

The President as King

For many speakers, the event was as much about Obama as it was about King. Nearly halfway through the event Lowery was greeted with cheers when he humorously remarked, “We haven’t got all day. I’ve got to go hear a fellow speak named Barack Obama.”³⁶ Other speakers mentioned Obama’s election as a “redemptive moment” (Jackson) and a “down payment” on King’s Dream (Lewis).³⁷ In his own dedicatory remarks, Obama also spoke as much about himself as he did about King. Obama continued in the path of the other speakers by focusing on both the past and the present, insisting that “Our work, Dr. King’s work, is not yet complete.”³⁸ Throughout the speech Obama conflated “King’s work” with “our work” and, moreover, *his own* work. Through an extended analogy linking himself to King, Obama cultivated and used a memory of King for the purpose of enhancing his own ethos. Importantly, in order to craft a memory useful for such a purpose, Obama retreated from the previous speakers political remarks and offered rhetoric largely consistent with Condit’s description of epideictic discourse as uncontroversial and universal.

Through encouraging audience members to see past King’s great speeches to his hard-fought actions, Obama also recalled an image of himself. For example, when describing the reasons for celebrating King’s legacy Obama offered, “It is right for us to celebrate Dr. King’s marvelous oratory, but it is worth remembering that progress did not come from words alone. Progress was hard.”³⁹ As King, Obama had often been described as a skilled orator by both friends and foes. But to that point in his first term in office, Obama also faced critics who charged that the President was an effective speaker but not an effective leader. Therein, Obama responded to such critics, introducing oratory as “right . . . to celebrate,” while also insisting that “progress was hard.” Obama continued throughout the speech to relate himself to King as both a

speaker and a leader. He said, “We forget now, but during his life, Dr. King wasn’t always considered a unifying figure. Even after rising to prominence, even after winning the Nobel Peace Prize, Dr. King was vilified by many, denounced as a rabble rouser and an agitator, a communist and a radical.” Obama may as well have been reciting his own biography, as the President, too, quickly rose to prominence, won the Nobel Peace Prize, and was vilified in nearly identical language. He continued, “[King] was even attacked by his own people, by those who felt he was going too fast or those who felt he was going too slow; by those who felt he shouldn’t meddle in issues like the Vietnam War or the rights of union workers.” Again Obama drew distinct parallels between his Presidency and King’s career, perhaps asking audience members to connect Obama’s positions on labor rights and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan to King’s positions on issues such as class politics and the Vietnam War. Significantly, Obama took the comparison a step further saying, “We know from his own testimony the doubts and the pain [King’s decisions] caused him, and that the controversy that would swirl around his actions would last until the fateful day he died.”⁴⁰ Obama’s attribution of doubt and pain to King might have caused some audience members to see the same characteristics in the President. If audience members perceived Obama’s and King’s accomplishments as similar (as many already had), they might also identify the two as similar in their personal qualities.⁴¹ Audience members, seeing Obama and King as alike, might also come to believe that Obama, although a polarizing figure at the time, might eventually come to be unifying and beloved as King.

Alongside Obama’s efforts to present himself as a unifying figure came the necessity of championing King’s memory as unifying. The politically charged remembrances of King from other speakers might also make Obama into a political, rather than universal, figure. Therefore, Obama treaded lightly when speaking for King on a variety of issues and spoke in relatively

uncontroversial terms. For instance, he said, “[King] tells us that we have a duty to fight against poverty, even if we are well off; to care about the child in the decrepit school even if our own children are doing fine; to show compassion toward the immigrant family, with the knowledge that most of us are only a few generations removed from similar hardships.”⁴² Importantly, Obama spoke for King on general ideas, rather than specific policies. Unlike other speakers, Obama eschewed endorsing the Occupy Movement, avoided promoting policies, and refused to vilify his detractors.

In ways that further identified himself and King as unifying and reconciling figures, Obama adopted some of King’s language and incorporated his own famous campaign vocabulary of “change.”⁴³ He said, “[King] understood that to bring about true and lasting change, there must be the possibility of reconciliation; that any social movement has to channel this tension through the spirit of love and mutuality.” By combining his words with those of King, Obama also linked their ideologies. He continued, “And so on this day, in which we celebrate a man and a movement that did so much for this country, let us draw strength from those earlier struggles. First and foremost, let us remember that change has never been quick. Change has never been simple, or without controversy . . . Change requires determination.”⁴⁴ Obama encouraged audience members to see King’s “change” from the Civil Rights Movement as comparable to Obama’s political vision of “change.” Audience members, who saw Obama as similar to King and saw “change” as comparable to the outcome of the Civil Rights Movement, might come to see “change” as inevitable and worth fighting for in spite of its slow, stubborn nature.

Clearly, Obama’s notion of a politically solvent memory of King was very different from that of other speakers. For other speakers, the politicization of King’s public memory meant adapting it to advocate positions on various controversial issues. For Obama, the politicization

of the memory meant returning to the universal in an effort to promote himself and his own ideology as such.

Institutionalization

As discussed in Chapter Four, the King Memorial's inclusion on the National Mall helped privilege and institutionalize the memory of King. In her dedicatory remarks, Bernice King explicitly discussed the institutionalization of King's memory as her mother's foremost goal saying, "It was vitally important to [Coretta Scott King] that his life, words, and principles become institutionalized."⁴⁵ Through the remarks and performances of several dedicators, the commemorative ceremony also helped institutionalize King's memory as a chief part of the nation's hegemonic establishment.⁴⁶ In this section I examine how event participants institutionalized King's memory as a part of a larger national narrative of progress and how they turned him from a vernacular voice to a hegemonic figure.

A Chapter in the Story

Many speakers commented on the Memorial's placement on the National Mall, advocating that the placement ultimately allowed King's memory to become a part of a larger national narrative of progress. Salazar advocated, "We have a duty to make sure that all of America's story is told, not just a part of it. And with the dedication of this Memorial, we are honoring a critical chapter in America's story."⁴⁷ Honored with a Memorial on the "front yard of America" (Lewis), King's story became its own chapter in the nation's larger narrative; one situated alongside chapters about presidents and war heroes.⁴⁸ Christine King Farris, especially excited about her brother's placement next to specific presidents, exclaimed, "I am overjoyed and humbled to see this great day, when my brother Martin takes his symbolic place on the National Mall near America's greatest presidents including Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Jefferson,

and Franklin Roosevelt.”⁴⁹ Obama pointed out the noteworthiness of King’s placement near such figures, reminding audience members that King, a black preacher never elected to office, now stood among monuments to soldiers and the nation’s political leaders. Obama justified King’s placement adding, “[King] gave voice to our deepest dreams and our most lasting ideals . . . [and] stirred our conscience and thereby helped make our union more perfect.”⁵⁰ For Obama, King’s story belonged on the Mall because like the stories of various presidents and wars, his story concerned the perfection of the union and progress of the nation. Thus also for Obama, King concurrently fit in and stood out among the surrounding monuments. As someone who helped make the “union more perfect,” King’s goals and overall effect on the nation could be judged as comparable to those of the other icons memorialized on the Mall. As an African American social activist, King also remained unique. Consistent in theme but unique in detail, King’s story fit as a chapter in “America’s story” as recited by the National Mall.

Surely the entirety of “America’s story” is impossible to tell, at least within the confines of the National Mall. Indeed, only select stories of certain wars, presidents, and other figures and events are depicted on the landscape. Additionally, the King Memorial does not come close to recounting the entire story of the Civil Rights Movement. Obama clarified the Memorial’s meaning beyond its included inscriptions and physical components saying, “this memorial is not for [King] alone. The movement of which he was a part depended on an entire generation of leaders.” He named Rosa Parks, Dorothy Height, Benjamin Hooks, Fred Shuttlesworth, and the “multitudes of men and women whose names never appear in history books,” declaring, “To those men and women, to those foot soldiers for justice, know that this monument is yours, as well.”⁵¹ But even accepting the Memorial as synecdochical for such people still omits major figures and events of the “story.”

Remarks by Obama, Salazar, and others positioning King as an important figure in “America’s Story,” did more than privilege and institutionalize King’s memory. With their remarks the speakers also seized King from his place as a vernacular leader and placed him alongside Lincoln and Jefferson as a national hero. Indeed, Lowery proudly declared, “[King] has become a father of the country.”⁵² But King’s memory made the transition from vernacular to hegemonic in other ways at the dedication ceremony, as well.

From Vernacular to Hegemonic

Gwen Ifill introduced Jackson, Lewis, and Young as individuals who “walked beside Dr. King and have lived his legacy in the years since.”⁵³ While this group of speakers did not speak about institutionalizing King’s memory, they symbolically helped in the process because they had each, more or less, made the actual transition from being vernacular voices to being members of the establishment themselves. Jackson, who described himself as a “disciple” of King, unsuccessfully ran for the Presidency and helped his son campaign in a successful bid for a seat in the House of Representatives.⁵⁴ Lewis, who recounted his experience marching with King on the National Mall, transitioned from social activism to a long term in the House of Representatives. Finally Young, who supported King as a member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, also served as Mayor of Atlanta, Georgia, a Congressman, and US ambassador to the United Nations. Lewis remarked on his own journey and the state of the nation saying, “I hear too many people saying that 48 years later that nothing has changed. Come and walk in my shoes; Dr. King is telling you that we have changed. That we are better people. We’re a better nation.”⁵⁵ Lewis, now an empowered and privileged part of the American government by virtue of his elected position as a U.S. Congressman, defended the nation and its people against criticism from the vernacular. Lewis, Jackson, and Young all

represented ways that the official institutions of the US government were carrying on King's legacy. As the living remnants and stewards of King's legacy, their privileged positions in society helped the establishment adopt the public memory of King.

Event participants consummated the process of institutionalizing the Memorial's privileged memories of King and the Civil Rights Movement immediately following Obama's address. The President linked arms with First Lady Michelle Obama, Vice President Joe Biden, Second Lady Jill Biden, and others for a rendition of the famous civil rights anthem, "We Shall Overcome." The song, led by a large racially diverse choir, saw the entire crowd link arms, sway from side to side, and sing,

We shall overcome,
We shall overcome,
We shall overcome some day
Oh, deep in my heart
I do believe
We shall overcome some day.⁵⁶

The sight of an African American President singing the song at the dedication may have also signaled to some that "some day" was today and that the nation had indeed "overcome." In spite of the many issues laid out by the President and other speakers, the late appearance of the hopeful song may have led some to believe that the real work was behind them. Ultimately, the President singing the song at a national event of commemoration transformed the song from a civil rights anthem into an institutionalized national anthem and further transformed King from a voice of protest into an institutionalized national icon.

Conclusion and Implications

This chapter yields several conclusions and implications. First, the interpretations of the site offered by event speakers primarily demonstrate the plurality of meanings available to observers. While most of the speakers agreed for the most part in their broad interpretations,

Jackson's more unique interpretation of the sculpture's posture reveals one alternative reading. Additionally, Obama's insistence that the Memorial also commemorates individuals such as Rosa Parks and Fred Shuttlesworth gives credence to the idea that visitors may project their own meanings onto the site, even when those meanings are not physically included in the Memorial itself. Depending on prior knowledge and expectations, visitors may interpret the Memorial as inclusive of a wide range of people, places, events, and ideas. The more universal interpretations offered of the site, for instance as a Memorial "for the world," also encourage individuals to project their own meanings onto the Memorial, an opportunity many of the speakers took advantage of when offering their more political renderings of King's memory.

The most obvious finding is that dedicators cultivated and used partisan, present-focused public memories of King and the Civil Rights Movement. Many public memory scholars offer similar conclusions, noting the uses of the past to address contemporary exigencies. Perhaps more unique to this case study are the number and variety of political causes advanced under the name of King.⁵⁷ Immigration, voting rights, LGBTQ rights, financial reform, and the corporatized media are only some of the issues overtly mentioned by the event's speakers. Perhaps the promoted memory of King as a national or universal hero allowed speakers to appropriate his memory in attending to such a range of issues. The Memorial and its dedicatory speakers, presenting King's generic ideals as transcendent and his selected words as needless of context, allowed speakers to appropriate King's words and even to invent King's thoughts on issues as they pleased.

On a related note, in previous chapters I have mentioned the "ownership" of King's memory. The issue certainly arose in the dedication ceremony, as speakers claimed knowledge of King's views often by virtue of their relationship to King (e.g., son, sister, daughter, disciple,

fellow marcher, or admirer). But perhaps Obama's identification with King, along with his place as the most privileged speaker at the event, made him the interpreter, inheritor, and owner-in-chief. As Shawn Parry-Giles and Trevor Parry-Giles assert, "no other individual possesses authority and power to influence collective memory more than the President of the United States."⁵⁸ The authors' assertion is bolstered in this case by the ways others linked the two together throughout Obama's presidency and by the ways Obama identified with King in his own address.

Obama and others were able to claim "ownership" of King's memory and politicize it in certain ways without much contestation, in part because of the exclusive line-up of event participants. The lack of ethnic, racial, and political diversity among dedicators allowed for a one-sided political forum and also detracted from the professed vision of the Memorial as inclusive, universal, and belonging to the world. The lack of certain voices also allowed the event to go by without mention of any perceived flaws in the Memorial's various visual and textual components.

Additionally, the dedication ceremony advanced and supplemented the institutionalization of King's memory. The presence of activists-turned-elected officials, such as Lewis and Young, along with the first African American President symbolically and actually represented a shift from the vernacular to the hegemonic. The discussion of King's story as a chapter in a larger American narrative also institutionalized King and portions of the Civil Rights Movement. Yet as the speakers canonized King's memory as a chapter in "America's Story," they forgot to publish some of the details. While the event participants sang the uplifting "We Shall Overcome," recalled famous lines from King's works, and named prominent Civil Rights leaders, they left unsung other anthems and poems, ignored certain speeches and writings, and

excluded the names of more controversial movement leaders. The actual history of the Civil Rights Movement was often omitted in favor of certain memories.

The omission of history, along with the present-focused and partisan use of King's memory, suggests that I return to Balthrop, Blair, and Michel's call for a distinction "between legitimate appropriation and irresponsible exploitation of the past for present 'use.'"⁵⁹ Indeed, this case emphasizes the possible usefulness of such a distinction, as rhetors attributed ideas and positions to King on a host of issues. I end this chapter by offering an incomplete, two part, answer to Balthrop, Blair, and Michel's call. First, I suggest that historians and historically inclined rhetoricians are most qualified to judge the use or misuse of a memory for present and/or political purposes. The skills and knowledge of a historian are necessary to do so and they are more likely to be interested in the accuracy of memories. In this case, for example, only the expansive historical knowledge of King's political positions, as well as his public and behind-the-scenes activities, would enable someone to begin making the case that a dedication speaker was appropriately citing his memory. But at the same time, historians only offer interpretations and may not agree on what distinguishes the appropriate use of a memory from the inappropriate. Perhaps though, rigid distinctions are unnecessary as historians and critical scholars should have the opportunity to advance their own analyses on a case-by-case situation. My second suggestion for those interested in a more rigid critical framework is to begin with the broader question of the ethical use of persuasive discourse. Combining public memory scholarship with literature that attempts to separate rhetoric from propaganda, for example, might lead to more conclusive theories on the use or misuse of memories.⁶⁰ In total, this is a point of heuristic value that I further discuss in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Now that he is safely dead let us praise him,
build monuments to his glory,
sing hosannas to his name.
Dead men make such convenient heroes.
They cannot rise to challenge the images
we would fashion from their lives.
And besides,
it is easier to build monuments
than to make a better world.

--Carl Wendell Hines¹

The words of African American poet Carl Wendell Hines concerning the memory of Martin Luther King, Jr. remain as potent today as they did when first published in 1977. These words also recall many of the themes, criticisms, and findings discussed in the previous five chapters. Situated in the interdisciplinary field of public memory studies, this dissertation attended to the memory of Martin Luther King, Jr. as cultivated by the King National Memorial, its surrounding landscape, and many of its supplementary texts. While other scholars have observed the memory of King and the Civil Rights Movement, this study made new contributions by concentrating on King's memory as constructed at the national level by entities such as the National Parks Service and the President of the United States. Furthermore, as scholars, activists, educators, and members of the media continue to mourn the lack of depth of knowledge of King's life and/or the glossing over of his ideals, this study's robust approach significantly enriched the field of scholarship concerned with King's public memory.

Additionally, this dissertation contributed to public memory scholarship by reviewing, using, and supplementing literature on the ways one can study a memory site.

Throughout this study I have argued that the King Memorial helps construct and institutionalize the public memory of King in concurrently universal, inclusive, political, and partisan ways, ultimately becoming a contentious site of remembrance. I sought answers to questions such as: How do the Memorial's various components add contour to King's public memory? How might the site's visitors, critics, and producers arrive at different, sometimes conflicting interpretations of the site? How do related discursive texts influence the Memorial's cultivation of King's public memory? Furthermore, I specifically contended that the Memorial and its related texts support different claims to "ownership" of King's memory. I argued that the site reconciles the memory of King and the Civil Rights Movement with a "mainstream" national narrative of progress, institutionalizing King and turning him from a vernacular voice to a hegemonic figure. Finally, I advanced the case that the Memorial and its related discourse universalize King's memory, turning the site into a contentious and contested rhetorical battlefield. I conclude my analysis in the following chapter by first, reviewing the results of each preceding chapter, in turn recapitulating the answers to my research inquiries. Next, I return to my larger contentions to offer further implications on King's public memory and the overall field of memory studies. Third, I discuss the study's limitations and suggest future directions for related research.

Study Results

I utilized a multi-faceted approach throughout this study, acknowledging that rhetorical memory sites and, indeed, all rhetorical artifacts support multiple meanings and interpretations. Using Carole Blair, Marsha S. Jeppeson, and Enrico Pucci, Jr.'s term of "multivocal rhetoric,"

and drawing from the discussion of polysemy by scholars including Celeste Michelle Condit, my analysis sought to account for many potential readings of the King Memorial.² Moreover, I also heeded Victoria E. Sanchez and Mary E. Stuckey's assertion that "Many . . . texts contain both hegemonic and emancipatory messages, with considerable tensions created between them."³ Throughout my study I sought to uncover such tensions inherent in the King Memorial and its surrounding and supporting texts. Before discussing the total results and implications of my study, it is beneficial to review the findings of each chapter.

Chapter Two provided a literature review of public memory scholarship. I began the chapter by distinguishing public memory from other forms of memory and from history. I followed by articulating three propositions of assumed traits of public memory: (1) public memory is situated in concrete sites and artifacts; (2) public memory is purposeful, partisan, and partial; and (3) public memory responds to present circumstances by educating and identity-building. I concluded the chapter by examining scholarship closely related to my own study, namely analyses focusing on memory sites and artifacts related to King and/or the Civil Rights Movement. In total, Chapter Two delineated the scope and form of public memory, presenting a theoretical framework for my study.

Chapter Three recounted the history of the King Memorial, discussing issues related to its origins, location, design, and funding. While the project took many years to launch, the professed goals of the Memorial's original producers (e.g., various members of Congress and Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity) were consistently universal in theme. However, the selection of the Memorial's location and design caused conflict among the project's various creators and observers. Disputes over the Memorial's proximity to the Lincoln Memorial, the employment of a Chinese sculptor and use of Chinese granite, and the inclusion of a paraphrased quotation were

some of the issues that complicated the collaborative process of building the Memorial and led to tensions in the site's final form. Additionally, fundraising problems led to some questioning the motives of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, the King Family, and various corporations for their perceived attempts to "own" King's memory. Chapter Three served multiple purposes by unveiling conflicts related to the Memorial, while also amassing privileged and vernacular interpretations of the site.

Based primarily on my own visit to the King Memorial, Chapter Four offered a rhetorical analysis of the site's textual composition, visual design, and surrounding landscape. I tendered a multivalent reading of the site consistent with Blair, Jeppeson, and Pucci's insistence on locating the "multiple, frequently conflicting messages" of a memory site.⁴ I also incorporated Greg Dickinson, Brian L. Ott, and Eric Aoki's concept of the experiential landscape, observing how the physical and cognitive surroundings of the King Memorial might influence how visitors interpret the site.⁵ The King Memorial's de-contextualized inscriptions, abstract visual metaphor, and placement on the National Mall help construct and institutionalize a public memory of King as a national/universal hero. But while the Memorial enables universal and positive interpretations, the site's layout, the King statue's physical appearance, and the controversially paraphrased quotation also allow for more awkward and pessimistic readings of the Memorial. Meanwhile, the site's many omissions encourage visitors to forget some of King's actual positions and actions, as well as other prominent strands and leaders of the Civil Rights Movement. Also significantly, Obama's presence in the site's physical and cognitive landscapes links the President to King's memory. Through each of these observations, I argued that the Memorial places more emphasis on the present than the past and does more to inspire than to educate.

Chapter Five examined the King Memorial's dedication ceremony as supplementary rhetoric that has the potential to influence how visitors interpret the site. The analysis revealed that while many of the speakers' most over interpretations presented the Memorial as unifying and inspiring, they also cultivated very partisan memories of King, tying his legacy to various contemporary political causes. Rather than linking King to modern-day issues, Obama connected King's ideology and biography to his own, thus cultivating a memory of the icon that could serve to enhance his own ethos. Obama and other speakers also helped institutionalize King's memory by noting the Memorial's placement on the National Mall and King's own placement among other national heroes such as Lincoln and Jefferson. Furthermore, by situating King's memory as part of a national narrative of progress and by featuring speakers that transitioned from outsider/activists to insider/elected officials, the dedication ceremony also helped King transition from a vernacular voice to a hegemonic leader in public memory. Chapter Five's three-pronged focus on the interpretation, politicization, and institutionalization of King's memory enriches an understanding of how the King Memorial functions.

This study's multi-faceted approach attended to critical, popular, and official interpretations of the King Memorial. Explicating and analyzing these interpretations has led to many implications concerning the public memory of King and public memory studies in general. While each chapter made cogent arguments and offered their own answers to my research questions, a combined reading of these analyses leads to larger results and implications. Herein, I return to my larger arguments, drawing from the results of each chapter to offer a fuller discussion of King's public memory as cultivated by the King Memorial and its related texts. First, I discuss the implications of my argument that the Memorial and its related texts support different claims to the "ownership" of King's memory.

Claims of Ownership

Over one year after the King Memorial opened to the public, the January 21, 2013 edition of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* featured a segment on the coinciding celebrations of Barack Obama's second inaugural and MLK Day. The segment asked "What Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Would Have Wanted" and presented commentary by gun rights, pro-life, and Occupy Wall Street activists claiming that King would have agreed with their respective positions. Gun Appreciation Day organizer Larry Ward said, "I believe that Gun Appreciation Day honors the legacy of Dr. King . . . The truth is I think Martin Luther King would agree with me if he were alive today." "Senior Black Correspondent" Larry Wilmore responded by pleading for people to stop invoking King in political arguments, saying "Dr. King is dead . . . so you don't get to use him as your imaginary black 'yes man.'"⁶

The segment humorously brought forth the issue of politicizing and even "owning" King's memory. This study has demonstrated the ways that various individuals cultivated a political memory of King, linking him to a host of positions on major and contentious political issues. In Chapter Five I revisited Balthrop, Blair, and Michel's call for a distinction "between legitimate appropriation and irresponsible exploitation of the past for present 'use.'"⁷ Certainly, to prevent King from becoming the "imaginary black 'yes man,'" certain distinctions could be helpful. Here I reassert that critics looking to make such distinctions might require the skills of a historian and might broaden their starting positions by surveying scholarship that distinguishes ethical from unethical suasion.⁸ However, I leave the discovery of such distinctions to future scholars. Instead, throughout this dissertation I have attempted to point out the many instances where King's memory has been politicized. I discussed the implications of this politicization, but now leave it to readers to judge whether King's memory has been misused.

Perhaps more significant than the use of King's memory are the varied claims to its ownership. Throughout the process of imagining, designing, raising funds for, and building the King Memorial, many individuals and groups claimed King's memory for their own. For example, some African Americans, such as artist Gilbert Young, responded harshly to the use of a Chinese sculptor on the project by asserting, "King is ours."⁹ Others such as Alpha Phi Alpha responded by asserting that King belonged to the entire world, but then also claimed ownership for themselves in many ways by promoting its members to leadership positions on the project throughout its completion, sometimes being criticized for mishandling King's memory. The King Family, who literally owns the rights to many of King's words, was also criticized throughout the Memorial's completion for dishonoring King's memory. Meanwhile, a fundraising campaign saw large corporations donate to the project and, in a sense, own part of the Memorial. Such instances saw critics rail against the Memorial's use of corporate dollars and question if King would be happy with the Memorial at all.¹⁰ The Memorial's dedication ceremony speakers also made some claims to memory ownership by virtue of their relationship to King (e.g., disciple, son, daughter, and follower). These ethos enhancing moves helped various speakers in their previously described efforts to use King's memory for their partisan agendas.

Given the nation's sordid history of slavery and King's legacy of fighting against racial inequality, any efforts (intentional or otherwise) to treat his memory as chattel, or property, are troubling. Additionally, while many rhetors appropriated King's memory in efforts to recast King in political contexts, the Memorial's bookstore and fundraising efforts, in Kent A. Ono and Derek T. Buescher's sentiments, "made it possible to recast the figure . . . within a western, capitalist frame."¹¹ In other words, fundraising efforts allowed patrons to own a piece of the

King Memorial, while the bookstore encourages visitors to own pieces of King. King's image and words are commodified and sold through posters, postcards, books, films, magnets, and other products. In consideration of King's positions on issues of economic justice, this type of ownership and transformation of his memory is also problematic.

Chief among those claiming ownership of King's memory was Obama, who identified with King throughout his dedication address and also served, as rhetoricians Shawn Parry-Giles and Trevor Parry-Giles would note, as the "chief interpreter of public memory."¹² Obama's own claims to authority over King's memory were made possible by the Memorial and its surrounding experiential landscape. Although the Memorial's universal themes inherent in its design and text supplement the idea that the Memorial belongs to all of humankind, the site subtly endorses Obama as the principle inheritor and owner of King's memory. The cognitive landscape of the Memorial links Obama to King in many ways, as visitors might recall media discussions of Obama as the fulfillment of King's "dream."¹³ Obama's physical presence at the Memorial (on the shelves of the bookstore and at the dedication ceremony) and in its surrounding physical landscape (at the White House or elsewhere in Washington) further privilege Obama's connection to King. Obama helped recast King's memory in both political and capitalist frames through his oration and through his appearance in items at the bookstore. But Obama also helped recast King's memory in another significant way: from vernacular voice to hegemonic leader.

From Vernacular to Hegemonic

Obama's claim to ownership over King's memory, coupled with his position as President, enabled him to institutionalize King's memory in many ways. Furthermore, the Memorial's

placement on the National Mall and its universalization of King's ideals also transform King from a vernacular presence to a part of a hegemonic national narrative of progress.

I discussed the Memorial's placement on the National Mall in Chapter Three and Chapter Four. For the Memorial's producers, conflict over deciding where to place the Memorial on the National Mall was as heated as any discussion over its design or inscriptions. In many ways, the placement of the Memorial seemed as important as its other features (if not more so). The eventual location adjacent to the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial and in a supposed "line of leadership" with the Lincoln and Jefferson Memorials was highlighted by the Memorial's producers on their website, in brochures, and in other supplementary texts. As I discussed in Chapter Four, the site's location places King's memory next to those of its surrounding figures. Situating King next to Jefferson and Lincoln not only compares the three individuals, but also their ideals (e.g., equality and freedom) and works (i.e., "I Have a Dream," The Declaration of Independence, and the Gettysburg Address). The Memorial's grand design and immediately surrounding physical landscape (e.g., the cherry blossom and American elm trees) also allow the King Memorial to fit in on the National Mall and thus to fit in with the other figures memorialized there.

As discussed in Chapter Five, Obama and other speakers commented on the Memorial's placement in their dedicatory remarks. Moreover, they treated the National Mall as a landscape that tells "America's story" and discussed the King Memorial as reciting a chapter of that story. Placing King's story in an official national narrative further compared his goals, accomplishments, and ideals to other national icons including George Washington, Lincoln, and Roosevelt. Such comparisons are significant because of the ways King differed from these men. Where they were white Presidents that rose through the ranks in the military or political realm,

King was an African American social activist and preacher who was never elected to a federal office. While the placement next to presidential memorials is more often noted, the King Memorial is also located near monuments to war.¹⁴ Again, the differences between King and war veterans are more pronounced than their similarities. King, an activist who practiced and preached non-violence and stood up to national injustices, now stands next to veterans who physically fought in war contexts on the nation's behalf. But as King is now compared to presidents, so too is he deemed comparable to soldiers of the nation's wars. The commonality between the presidents, soldiers, and King, in Obama's words, was that they all "helped make our union more perfect."¹⁵

The King Memorial then tells the story of the betterment of the nation, as do the others around it. Within the national story, King serves as a central leader much like Washington or a World War II hero. The Civil Rights Movement then serves as a necessary event to move the nation forward, much like the Civil War, the New Deal, or World War II. The National Mall's memorials explain that Lincoln had to lead the nation through the Civil War in order to end slavery and re-unite the nation; that Roosevelt and the nation had to suffer through the Great Depression and World War II in order to attain greater peace and prosperity; and that King and his fellow activists had to endure the trials of the Civil Rights Movement in order to advance racial equality. The telling of King's story by Obama, as both King's heir apparent and President, and by figures such as John Lewis, who made the literal transition from activist/outsider to elected official/insider, served to turn King's memory from vernacular to hegemonic. The Memorial's placement on the National Mall cemented that turn, placing King's memory in the hegemonic landscape of America.

Potential positive implications from King's shift to hegemonic are many. As Lewis remarked in his dedicatory address, "I hear too many people saying that 48 years later that nothing has changed. Come and walk in my shoes, Dr. King is telling you that we have changed. That we are better people. We're a better nation."¹⁶ Marking and institutionalizing changes in racial equality and other areas is significant and worthwhile. Additionally, institutionalizing King's philosophy of non-violence is also considerably important. But more negative consequences are also possible. For example, while the Memorial legitimizes the strategy of non-violence, it also seems to justify the strategy of war. To be sure, the King Memorial displays an inscription denouncing the Vietnam War, and the site's dedication ceremony saw some invent anti-war positions for King in regards to the ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.¹⁷ However, by standing amongst numerous war memorials on the National Mall and by being placed alongside such "heroes" in the national narrative, the National Mall suggests that strategies of non-violence and war are equally legitimate.

Additionally, King's placement next to truly hegemonic figures in America's past may serve to silence some of his criticisms about the nation's government, instead of legitimizing all of his views. The statue's depiction as silent and still and the site's inscriptions, devoid of context and reeking of universal themes, fail to introduce many points of criticism King had that may be unresolved. Still, as the Lincoln Memorial has long stood as a site where Lincoln's memory has been re-appropriated by vernacular voices (such as King's), the King Memorial may now have the potential for similar use. Thus King's memory, even transformed from vernacular to hegemonic, may still be of use to various activists. The site's potential usefulness to the hegemonic and vernacular introduces this study's final implication concerning the Memorial as a contentious and contested battleground.

The Contentious and Contested

Throughout this study I have demonstrated the contentious and contested dynamics of the King Memorial. This observation is interesting and, perhaps, perplexing in consideration of the site's universal themes inherent in its visual and textual features and in the words of its producers and dedicators. Still, the Memorial has been contentious throughout its history.

As I thoroughly observed in Chapter Three, the Memorial's origins saw conflict and compromise over its location and design. Organizations argued over the Memorial's location, each with a different idea of where King would fit best symbolically on the National Mall. While the Memorial's design easily gained approval from the same organizations, the selection of a Chinese sculptor and eventual design of King's statue drew heavy criticism from other individuals and groups. Finally, the most heavily covered disagreement concerned the inclusion of the paraphrased "Drum Major" quotation. That controversy still brews today, as plans are underway to remove the quotation. These conflicts all arose in spite of the project's organizers' publicly professed motives of creating a unifying Memorial with universal appeal.

In Chapter Four I discussed how the Memorial also creates conflict through the familiar dialect of remembering and forgetting. While the remembering/forgetting pairing is, as Carole Blair, Greg Dickinson, and Brian Ott say, "an assumptive cliché in public memory studies," the omission of historical context from the Memorial allows for conflict over interpreting the Memorial's meaning.¹⁸ Whereas Philip Wander's concept of the "Third Persona," indicates that rhetoric "negate[s] through silence," Blair, Dickinson, and Ott recognize that memory sites cannot be all inclusive and that public memory is constituted by the whole of a memory field, rather than one site or artifact. But I add that the omission of details still makes a difference, as visitors come to memory sites with different knowledge and expectations. For example, I noted

Obama's projection of figures such as Rosa Parks and Fred Shuttlesworth onto the site in Chapter Five. Yet individuals with less knowledge of the Civil Rights Movement might not connect those figures to the site, as they are not mentioned by name on its walls. Others might project figures including Malcolm X on the Memorial's walls, while more still might come only with limited knowledge of King's "Dream" speech at hand. The lack of context for understanding enables conflicting interpretations of the Memorial.

Similarly, the Memorial's included inscriptions are fragmented from larger texts and stripped of context in order to "seem more important than the whole from which [they] came."¹⁹ Aside from the conclusion that the Memorial's pedagogical functions fall wayside to the site's inspirational goals, this observation again demonstrates the site's creation of conflict in its efforts to promote the universal. Most obviously, the paraphrased "Drum Major" quotation, arrogant rather than abstract, fails in its aim to be read as universal. But as I observed in Chapter Five, even the most universal quotations (e.g., "Justice anywhere...") may be used for different partisan purposes. Again, the quotations imbued with universal values but stripped of their context enable wildly different interpretations.

As demonstrated through Chapter Three and Chapter Four's differing interpretations by the site's dedicators and critics, and as noted in my own analysis of the site in Chapter Four, the King Memorial encourages conflicting interpretations. I submit that the King Memorial's insistence on the universal is actually the driving force behind the contentious and competing readings. The Memorial's concentration on the universal endeavors to cultivate a memory of King as, in historian Vincent Gordon Harding's words, "the convenient hero."²⁰ The Memorial's cultivation of the universal hero or national savior does not quell historians' concerns over the loss of understanding who King actually was, but it does allow for claims of ownership over his

memory. Thus, I come full circle with my analysis. The cultivation of a universal memory of King also allows for his memory to be owned and used for a variety of partisan and political purposes. Ultimately, the universal leads the King Memorial to its place as a contentious and contested battlefield.

Limitations and Areas of Future Research

While this dissertation has made significant contributions to understanding public memory and the specific memory of Martin Luther King, Jr., this study is also limited in many ways and leaves open a variety of paths for future research.

Notably, this study examined King's public memory as cultivated by a national memorial and its related texts. Although I offered a multi-faceted approach, I could not possibly include analyses of each text related to the monument. Articles of criticism, speeches of praise, and other fragments of the site remain available for rhetorical analysis. Additionally, further research could take a more focused approach through an in-depth analysis of discourse I did study. For example, employing a different lens to examine Obama's dedicatory address might reveal more about how the President used King's memory to his political advantage. Other scholars might be interested in other artifacts and events that I briefly mentioned throughout the study, such as Glenn Beck's 2010 rally at the Lincoln Memorial and the Rocky Mount City Memorial to King, that might be worthy of rhetorical analysis on their own right.

While I briefly discussed Gallagher's research on Atlanta's national remembrance of King, another interesting study might compare and contrast the two sites. Similarly, interesting studies might compare the King Memorial with other King or Civil Rights related museums and monuments throughout the country. Other comparative analyses could examine the King Memorial and its dedication ceremony with another memorial from the National Mall and its

corresponding dedication. Such a study might yield deeper understanding of the differences and similarities of commemorating a non-elected, non-violent activist and a president or a war hero.

I have already mentioned the potential usefulness of theoretically differentiating the use from the misuse of public memory. Much work can be done towards that cause for scholars interested in the idea. However, this dissertation invites other approaches from memory studies scholars, as well. I discussed remembering and forgetting throughout the study, but did not dwell on the potential positive implications of the King Memorial's omissions. Perhaps future research might follow memory scholar Bradford Vivian's lead in examining forgetting as a "form of negation," but also potentially "a productive and even desirable aspect of collective life, ethics, and decision making."²¹ In the main, I have also combined the approaches of memory scholars, most notably including Balthrop, Blair, and Michel and Dickinson, Ott, and Aoki.²² By examining the visual and textual components of a memory site, its surrounding experiential landscape, its historical-contextual background, and various supplementary and/or critical discourse, I have provided the template for a fuller approach to studying a memory site. This approach is especially useful for multivocal readings of sites where scholars wish to amass various interpretations. Some critics might attempt this approach for memorials that seem difficult to interpret, as recovering the apparent motives of its creators and the readings of critics or privileged interpreters might enable a better understanding.

Conclusion

Throughout this dissertation I have analyzed the King Memorial and its supporting texts' cultivation of the public memory of Martin Luther King, Jr. I have discussed the ways that the Memorial's various components and related texts affect King's public memory and how various individuals arrive at different kinds of readings of the site. I argued that the site supports various

claims to “ownership” of King’s memory, that it institutionalizes King as a hegemonic figure in a national narrative, and that it creates contention through the universalization of certain of King’s ideals.

The issues discussed throughout this dissertation have continued to present themselves since the King Memorial’s opening and dedication in 2011. King’s memory continues to be institutionalized and universalized, most notably in recent months by President Barack Obama. At his second inaugural, Obama further identified with King and helped institutionalize his memory by taking the oath of office on both King’s and Abraham Lincoln’s Bibles.²³ Again, Obama linked King’s legacy to his own and to Lincoln’s, continuing to situate King as a figure in official national memory. Two months later Obama laid a small stone from the King Memorial on the grave of Yitzhak Rabin, an Israeli Prime Minister assassinated for his efforts to make peace with the Palestinians.²⁴ In addition to seeing Obama use King’s memory once again, this act also continued to promote King’s memory as unifying, universal, and relevant to the entire world.

The King Memorial itself continues to be a contentious site of memory. While celebrating MLK Day in 2013, people continued to engage in debate over the Memorial’s not-yet-removed paraphrased quotation and the King sculpture’s image.²⁵ In March 2013 an apparent rift developed between the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial Project Foundation and members of the King family. The organization responsible for the King Memorial was forced to drop King’s name from their title, becoming known only as the Memorial Foundation.²⁶

As familiar issues re-appear, rhetorical critics must diligently investigate the potential promise and problems associated with the cultivation of King’s public memory. So too must

activists and teachers take note. King's works and words alike hold valuable lessons. Herein, advocates for those lessons find a call to teach, to inform, to re-sculpt memory, and to reassert the importance of history.

NOTES

Chapter 1: Introduction

¹ Barbie Zelizer, "Reading the Past Against the Grain: The Shape of Memory Studies," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 12, no. 2 (1995): 214.

² Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*," *Representations* 26 (1989): 22, 9.

³ Rhetorical scholars Carole Blair, Greg Dickinson, and Brian L. Ott describe rhetoric as "the study of discourses, events, objects, and practices that attends to their character as meaningful, legible, partisan, and consequential." Rhetorical scholarship in the field of memory studies observes artifacts or texts (e.g., commemorative addresses and memory sites or objects) in such a way, understanding those artifacts to be varyingly consequential. Carole Blair, Greg Dickinson, and Brian L. Ott, "Introduction: Rhetoric/Memory/Place," in *Places of Public Memory: The Rhetoric of Museums and Memorials*, ed. Greg Dickinson, Carole Blair, and Brian L. Ott (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2010), 2.

⁴ See Bernard J. Armada, "Memorial Agon: An Interpretive Tour of the National Civil Rights Museum," *Southern Communication Journal* 63, no. 3 (1998): 235-243; Carole Blair and Neil Michel, "Reproducing Civil Rights Tactics: The Rhetorical Performances of the Civil Rights Memorial," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (2000): 31-55; Victoria J. Gallagher, "Memory and Reconciliation in the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 2, no. 2 (1999): 303-320; Victoria J. Gallagher, "Remembering Together? Rhetorical Integration and the Case of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial," *Southern Communication Journal* 60, no. 2 (1995): 109-119; and Beth A. Messner and Mark T. Vail, "A 'City at War': Commemorating Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.," *Communication Studies* 60, no. 1 (2009): 17-31.

⁵ Harry E. Johnson, "The President's Letter," *BuildtheDream.org*, accessed September 9, 2012, http://www.mlkmemorial.org/site/c.hkIUL9MVJxE/b.1190535/k.5E36/The_Presidents_Letter.htm.

⁶ Martin Luther King, Jr., "I Have a Dream," in *I Have a Dream: Writings and Speeches that Changed the World*, ed. James M. Washington (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1992), 105.

⁷ Photo by Nikki Kahn, "The Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial," *Washington Post* (September 28, 2011), http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/scenes-before-a-memorials-debut/2011/08/21/gIQAXIqcVJ_gallery.html#photo=15.

⁸ Photo by Another Believer, “Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial,” *Wikimedia Commons* (July 15, 2012), http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Martin_Luther_King,_Jr._Memorial_01_-_July_2012.JPG.

⁹ Paul Needham, “Martin Luther King Memorial: A ‘Made in China’ Design Comes to DC,” *Huffington Post* (August 12, 2011), accessed September 9, 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/08/12/martin-luther-king-memorial_n_925341.html.

¹⁰ Gene Weingarten and Michael E. Ruane, “Maya Angelou Says King Memorial Inscription Makes Him Look ‘Arrogant,’” *Washington Post* (August 30, 2011), accessed September 9, 2012, http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/maya-angelou-says-king-memorial-inscription-makes-him-look-arrogant/2011/08/30/gIQAIYChqJ_story.html. The memorial’s inscription, “I was a drum major for justice, peace and righteousness,” comes from a 1968 sermon where King actually said, “If you want to say that I was a drum major, say that I was a drum major for justice. Say that I was a drum major for peace. Say that I was a drum major for righteousness. And all the other shallow things will not matter.” Martin Luther King, Jr., “The Drum Major Instinct,” in *I Have a Dream: Writings and Speeches that Changed the World*, ed. James M. Washington (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1992), 191.

¹¹ As I describe in greater detail in Chapter Five, these speakers discussed contemporary political issues including voting rights, education, immigration, and economic justice.

¹² Jasmyne Cannick, as quoted in Daniel B. Wood, “Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Decline in What Younger Generations Know About Him,” *Christian Science Monitor* (January 16, 2012): 1, accessed September 12, 2012, <http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/2012/0116/Martin-Luther-King-Jr.-and-the-decline-in-what-younger-generations-know-about-him>.

¹³ Marcus Brown, as quoted in Wood, “Martin Luther King, Jr.,” 1.

¹⁴ Scott A. Sandage, “A Marble House Divided: The Lincoln Memorial, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Politics of Memory, 1939-1963,” *Journal of American History* 80, no. 1 (1993): 166.

¹⁵ Vincent Gordon Harding, “Beyond Amnesia: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Future of America,” *Journal of American History* 74, no. 2 (1987): 469.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Throughout this study I use variations of the words universal and universalize. I typically use universal as a descriptor before words such as values, ideals, and messages. By universal, I mean broad, abstract, and supposedly relatable to all or most people. I likewise use the word universalize to describe the action of making values, ideals, and messages broad, abstract, and relatable.

¹⁸ Such celebratory or, in classical terms, epideictic rhetoric has been deemed worthy of study by rhetorical scholars since Aristotle first outlined it in *Rhetoric*. Described by Aristotle as discourse concerning praise and blame, Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca add that epideictic rhetoric preserves and promotes collective values. Memory studies scholars understand epideictic rhetoric to include public memory sites and other material artifacts, in addition to more traditionally analyzed discursive texts. See Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts (New York, NY: Cosimo, Inc., 2010), 1358b-1359a; and Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*, trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1971), 48.

¹⁹ Victoria E. Sanchez and Mary E. Stuckey, “Coming of Age as a Culture? Emancipatory and Hegemonic Readings of *The Indian in the Cupboard*,” *Western Journal of Communication* 64, no. 1 (2000): 78.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Carole Blair, Marsha S. Jeppeson, and Enrico Pucci, Jr., “Public Memorializing in Postmodernity: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial as Prototype,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 77, no. 3 (1991): 264.

²² This study also heeds Ceccarelli’s discussion of polysemic readings of rhetoric by engaging in a “close reading of receptional fragments in conjunction with a close reading of the text.” Leah Ceccarelli, “Polysemy: Multiple Meanings in Rhetorical Criticism,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 84, no. 4 (1998): 410.

²³ William V. Balthrop, Carole Blair, and Neil Michel, “The Presence of the Present: Hijacking ‘The Good War’?,” *Western Journal of Communication* 74, no. 2 (2010): 171.

²⁴ Ibid., 171-72.

²⁵ Dana L. Cloud defines hegemony as “the process by which a social order remains stable by generating consent to its parameters through the production and distribution of ideological texts that define social reality for the majority of the people.” I describe King’s memory as becoming hegemonic to demonstrate its power to promote the privileged and dominate values and messages of the nation. I juxtapose hegemonic, official, and privileged with vernacular. Bernard J. Armada says “vernacular cultural expressions . . . come from ordinary people who often oppose the representations of official culture,” and adds that “vernacular groups tactically appropriate or even ignore attempts to forge an unquestioned adherence to the status quo.” Dana L. Cloud, “Hegemony or Concordance? The Rhetoric of Tokenism in ‘Oprah’ Winfrey’s Rags-to-Riches Biography,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 13, no. 2 (1996): 117; and Armada, “Memorial Agon,” 237.

²⁶ In a “composite reading,” I take rhetorical scholar’s Michael Calvin McGee’s cue that “apparently finished discourse is in fact a dense reconstruction of all the bits of other discourses from which it was made.” The “bits of other discourses,” or “fragments,” most obviously

include the various visual and textual components of the Memorial. I discuss this further in Chapter Four. Michael Calvin McGee, "Text, Context, and the Fragmentation of Contemporary Culture," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 54, no. 3 (1990): 279.

²⁷ Brett Zongker, "MLK Memorial: Thousands Gather in D.C. for Dedication Ceremony," *Huffington Post* (October 16, 2011), accessed April 2, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/10/16/mlk-dedication-thousands-_n_1013836.html.

Chapter 2: The Scope and Form of Public Memory

¹ Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Routledge, 1982), 33.

² Francis Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 2, 37. See also, Cicero, *On the Ideal Orator (De Oratore)*, trans. James M. May and Jakob Wisse (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001), 2.350-360 (218-221); and Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. James H. Nichols (London: Cornell University Press, 1998), 249c-250d (54-55).

³ Francis Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 37.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 387-89.

⁶ Greg Dickinson, "Landscapes of Consumption, Landscapes of Memory: The Rhetoric of Modern Urban Consumption" (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 1995), 65.

⁷ Zelizer, "Reading the Past Against the Grain," 215.

⁸ Edward S. Casey, "Public Memory in Place and Time," in *Framing Public Memory*, ed. Kendall R. Phillips (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2004), 21.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 25, 35.

¹² Blair, Dickinson, and Ott, "Introduction," 6.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Casey's description of "flashbulb memories" seems to reflect an intersection between the personal and the public, as individuals share a common memory (i.e., the event itself), but also hold their own unique memories (i.e., where they were and what they were doing when they heard about the event). Casey, "Public Memory in Place and Time," 23-24.

¹⁶ See Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992) and Kendall R. Phillips, introduction to *Framing Public Memory*, ed. Kendall R. Phillips (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2004).

¹⁷ Nora, "Between Memory and History," 8.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

¹⁹ Dylan Trigg, *The Memory of Place: A Phenomenology of the Uncanny* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2012), 72.

²⁰ Bernard Bailyn, *On the Teaching and Writing of History* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1991), 75.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

²² Phillips, introduction to *Framing Public Memory*, 2.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Carl Becker, as quoted in Bailyn, *On the Teaching and Writing of History*, 7.

²⁵ Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 3.

²⁶ Blair, Dickinson, and Ott, "Introduction," 9.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ David Thelen, "Memory and American History," *Journal of American History* 74, no. 4 (1989): 1119.

²⁹ Zelizer, "Reading the Past Against the Grain," 217.

³⁰ Charles E. Morris III, "My Old Kentucky Homo: Lincoln and the Politics of Queer Public Memory," in *Framing Public Memory*, ed. Kendall R. Phillips (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2004), 99.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 101-102.

³² Dominick LaCapra, "Rhetoric and History," *History and Criticism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 42-43, quoted in Morris, "My Old Kentucky Homo," 101.

³³ Morris, "My Old Kentucky Homo," 101.

³⁴ Zelizer, "Reading the Past Against the Grain," 215.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 216.

³⁶ For a discussion on the various meanings of the word "rhetoric," see Donald C. Bryant, "Rhetoric: Its Functions and Scope," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 39, no. 4 (1953): 401-24.

³⁷ This grouping of assumptions is partially based on the six positions advanced in Blair, Dickinson, and Ott, "Introduction," 6. The authors theorize that "(1) memory is activated by present concerns, issues, or anxieties; (2) memory narrates shared identities, constructing senses of communal belonging; (3) memory is animated by affect; (4) memory is partial, partisan, and thus often contested; (5) memory relies on material and/or symbolic supports; [and] (6) memory has a history." After reviewing the authors' list and surveying public memory literature, I present the traits that I determined to be (largely) uncontested and most significant.

³⁸ Mitchell Reyes, review of *Places of Public Memory: The Rhetoric of Museums and Memorials*, ed. Greg Dickinson, Carole Blair, and Brian L. Ott, *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 14, no. 3 (2011): 595.

³⁹ Zelizer, "Reading the Past Against the Grain," 232.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ See Barbara A. Biesecker, "Remembering World War II: The Rhetoric and Politics of National Commemoration at the Turn of the 21st Century," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 88, no. 4 (2002): 393-409; Carole Blair and Neil Michel, "The AIDS Memorial Quilt and the Contemporary Culture of Public Commemoration," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 10, no. 4 (2007): 595-626; and Victoria J. Gallagher and Kenneth S. Zagacki, "Visibility and Rhetoric: Epiphanies and Transformations in the Life Photographs of the Selma Marches of 1965," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 37, no. 2 (2007): 113-35.

⁴³ Dickinson, "Landscapes of Consumption," 49.

⁴⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (London: Penguin, 1961), 214.

⁴⁵ Nora, "Between Memory and History," 22, 9.

⁴⁶ Nathan Wachtel, "Memory and History: Introduction," *History and Anthropology* 12, no. 2 (1986): 212.

⁴⁷ See Jason Edward Black, "Memories of the Alabama Creek War, 1813-1814," *American Indian Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (2009): 200-29; Blair, Jeppeson, and Pucci, "Public Memorializing in Postmodernity;" Blair and Michel, "Reproducing Civil Rights Tactics;" Greg Dickinson, Brian L. Ott, and Eric Aoki, "Memory and Myth at the Buffalo Bill Museum," *Western Journal of Communication* 69, no. 2 (2005): 85-108; Greg Dickinson, Brian L. Ott, and Eric Aoki, "Spaces of Remembering and Forgetting: The Reverent Eye/I at the Plains Indian Museum," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 3, no. 1 (2006): 27-47; Gallagher, "Memory and Reconciliation in the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute;" Gallagher, "Remembering Together?;" Marouf Hasian, Jr., "Remembering and Forgetting the 'Final Solution': A Rhetorical Pilgrimage Through the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 21, no. 1 (2004): 64-92; Tamar Katriel, "Sites of Memory: Discourses of the Past in Israeli Pioneering Settlement Museums," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 80 (1994): 1-20; Stephen A. King, "Memory, Mythmaking and Museums: Constructive Authenticity and the Primitive Blue Project," *Southern Communication Journal* 71, no. 3 (2006): 235-50; and Kenneth S. Zagacki and Victoria J. Gallagher, "Rhetoric and Materiality in the Museum Park at the North Carolina Museum of Art," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 95, no. 2 (2009): 171-91.

⁴⁸ The American Association of Museums estimates that 850 million visitors travel to museums each year. See "Frequently Asked Questions about Museums," accessed April 22, 2012, <http://www.aam-us.org/aboutmuseums/abc.cfm#visitors>.

⁴⁹ See Messner and Vail, "A 'City at War.'"

⁵⁰ Gallagher, "Memory and Reconciliation," 305.

⁵¹ Dickinson, Ott, and Aoki, "Spaces of Remembering and Forgetting," 29.

⁵² Gallagher, "Memory and Reconciliation," 305.

⁵³ Michael Calvin McGee suggests viewing rhetoric as "a thing, a material artifact of communication." Michael Calvin McGee, "A Materialist's Conception of Rhetoric," in *Explorations in Rhetoric: Studies in Honor of Douglas Ehninger*, ed. Ray E. McKerrow (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1982): 45.

⁵⁴ Zelizer, "Reading the Past against the Grain," 232.

⁵⁵ Blair, Jeppeson, and Pucci, "Public Memorializing in Postmodernity," 263.

⁵⁶ Nora, "Between Memory and History," 12.

⁵⁷ Cicero, *On the Ideal Orator*, 2.299-2.300 (206).

- ⁵⁸ Blair, Dickinson, and Ott, "Introduction," 18.
- ⁵⁹ Armada, "Memorial Agon," 236.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid.
- ⁶¹ Blair, Dickinson, and Ott, "Introduction," 18.
- ⁶² Dickinson, Ott, and Aoki, "Spaces of Remembering and Forgetting," 29.
- ⁶³ Dickinson, Ott, and Aoki, "Memory and Myth at the Buffalo Bill Museum," 88.
- ⁶⁴ Dickinson, Ott, and Aoki, "Spaces of Remembering and Forgetting," 30.
- ⁶⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶⁶ Hasian, "Remembering and Forgetting the 'Final Solution,'" 74.
- ⁶⁷ Dickinson, Ott, and Aoki, "Spaces of Remembering and Forgetting," 41.
- ⁶⁸ The *Challenger* disaster refers to the January 28, 1986 space shuttle accident that led to the deaths of seven crew members. Chris Bergin, "Remembering the Mistakes of Challenger," *NasaSpaceFlight.com* (January 28, 2007), accessed April 2, 2013, <http://www.nasaspaceflight.com/2007/01/remembering-the-mistakes-of-challenger/>.
- ⁶⁹ Carole Blair and Neil Michel, "Commemorating in the Theme Park Zone: Reading the Astronauts Memorial," in *At the Intersection: Cultural Studies and Rhetorical Studies*, ed. Thomas Rosteck (New York, NY: Guilford, 1999), 29-83.
- ⁷⁰ Armada, "Memorial Agon," 241.
- ⁷¹ Ibid.
- ⁷² Bruce E. Gronbeck, "The Rhetorics of the Past: History, Argument, and Collective Memory," in *Doing Rhetorical History: Concepts and Cases*, ed. K. J. Turner, (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1998), 57.
- ⁷³ Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1991), 3.
- ⁷⁴ Nora, "Between Memory and History," 12.
- ⁷⁵ Gallagher, "Memory and Reconciliation," 308.

⁷⁶ Dickinson, Ott, and Aoki, "Memory and Myth at the Buffalo Bill Museum," 89.

⁷⁷ Gallagher, "Memory and Reconciliation," 311.

⁷⁸ Dickinson, Ott, and Aoki, "Memory and Myth at the Buffalo Bill Museum," 88.

⁷⁹ Gallagher, "Remembering Together," 111.

⁸⁰ Biesecker, "Remembering World War II," 394. See also, Tom Brokaw, *The Greatest Generation* (New York, NY: Random House, 2001); and *Saving Private Ryan* (DreamWorks SKG and Paramount Pictures, 1998).

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., 404.

⁸³ Ibid., 406.

⁸⁴ Hasian, "Remembering and Forgetting the 'Final Solution,'" 80.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 85.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Zellizer, "Reading the Past Against the Grain," 226.

⁸⁸ Shawn J. Parry-Giles and Trevor Parry-Giles, "Collective Memory, Political Nostalgia, and the Rhetorical Presidency: Bill Clinton's Commemoration of the March on Washington, August 28, 1998," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 86, no. 4 (2000): 417-437. The authors give a more detailed of the Lewinsky scandal, an affair Clinton engaged in with a White House intern, and foreign policy issues, including U.S. bombings in Afghanistan and the Sudan.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 418, 419.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 419.

⁹¹ Ibid., 420.

⁹² Blair and Michel, "Reproducing Civil Rights Tactics," 32, 40.

⁹³ Ibid., 40.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 41.

⁹⁵ Gallagher, “Memory and Reconciliation,” 303.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 315.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Gallagher, “Remembering Together,” 110.

⁹⁹ Messner and Vail, “A City at War,” 17.

¹⁰⁰ Gallagher, “Remembering Together,” 116.

Chapter 3: “Building the Dream:” A Historical-Contextual Analysis of the King Memorial

¹ “Controversial MLK Statue to Return to Rocky Mount Park,” *WRAL.com* (May 15, 2007), accessed January 12, 2013. <http://www.wral.com/news/local/story/1417407/>.

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⁴ Gallagher, “Remembering Together,” 110-14.

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NewsArticle.aspx?ID=43309. For examples of Memorial related legislation and its related discussion, see 102 Cong. Rec. S15095, *THOMAS* (October 23, 1991), accessed February 14, 2013, <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?r102:56:./temp/~r102h8qIJx::>; 103 Cong. Rec. E922, *THOMAS* (April 7, 1993), accessed February 14, 2013, <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?r103:1:./temp/~r103Fw4fvc::>; 104 Cong. Rec. H11572, *THOMAS* (September 27, 1996), accessed February 14, 2013, <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?r104:1:./temp/~r104iX1dFJ::>; and 104 Cong. Rec. S12439, *THOMAS* (October 21, 1996), accessed February 14, 2013, <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?r104:2:./temp/~r104YxQR7a::>.

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¹¹ “History of the Memorial.”

¹² Willis, “Long Road for MLK Memorial.”

¹³ “History of the Memorial.”

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¹⁵ Associated Press, “Planners Reject Site for King Memorial,” *Tuscaloosa News* (July 2, 1999), 1D.

¹⁶ “History of the Memorial.”

¹⁷ Dewan, “Larger Than Life, More to Fight Over.”

¹⁸ For a discussion on the statue, along with the history of African Americans appropriating the memory of Lincoln at the Lincoln Memorial, see Sandage, “A Marble House Divided.”

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 166.

²⁰ Photo by Kevin Clark, “On Emancipation Day in D.C., Two Memorials Tell Very Different Stories,” *Washington Post* (April 15, 2012), http://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/on-emancipation-day-in-dc-two-memorials-tell-very-different-stories/2012/04/15/gIAj3u9JT_story.html.

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²² Molotsky, “Panel Approves Site for Dr. King Memorial.”

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⁶⁹ As quoted in Sandage, “A Marble House Divided,” 166.

⁷⁰ Nick Carbone, “Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial ‘Drum Major’ Quotation to Be Corrected,” *Time.com* (January 14, 2013), accessed January 15, 2013, <http://newsfeed.time.com/2012/01/14/martin-luther-king-jr-memorial-drum-major-quote-to-be-corrected/>.

Chapter 4: The Rhetorical Form and Force of the King Memorial

¹ Dickinson, Ott, and Aoki, “Memory and Myth at the Buffalo Bill Museum,” 91.

² I use the term “postmodern,” not as a school of criticism or thought, but as a descriptor of the commemorative site. Blair, Jeppeson, and Pucci describe two conditions for postmodern monumentality: “first, that postmodern monuments eschew metanarrative sanction. Second . . . that the postmodern monument must at least differentiate itself substantially from modernist attempts at memorializing,” which the authors describe as functionalist and/or self-referent. That is, modern monuments often draw attention to their own architecture, design, or function instead of the person, event, or thing that they commemorate. A postmodern monument refers instead to what it commemorates and encourages multiple readings. Blair, Jeppeson, and Pucci add, “The significance of classification, though, is less important in its own right than its implications for the posture assumed by the critic in reading the monument.” Blair, Jeppeson, and Pucci, “Public Memorializing in Postmodernity,” 279, 281.

³ *Ibid.*, 270.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 269.

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⁷ Blair, Jeppeson, and Pucci, “Public Memorializing in Postmodernity,” 269-70.

⁸ Dickinson, Ott, and Aoki, “Spaces of Remembering and Forgetting,” 31.

⁹ Black, “Memories of the Alabama Creek War, 1813-1814,” 207.

¹⁰ McGee, “Text, Context, and the Fragmentation of Contemporary Culture,” 283.

¹¹ Similarly, I add, a reading of the National Park as a large “text” would be inadequate without considering each Memorial as a fragment.

¹² Blair and Michel, “Reproducing Civil Rights Tactics,” 32.

¹³ This composite reading is largely consistent with Jim A. Kuypers, Marilyn J. Young, and Michael K. Launer’s of fragments “combined and read as a *composite narrative*, the aggregate of smaller narratives and thematic fragments found . . .” Jim A. Kuypers, Marilyn J. Young, and Michael K. Launer, “Composite Narrative, Authoritarian Discourse, and the Soviet Response to the Destruction of Iran Air Flight 655,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 87, no. 3 (2001): 307.

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¹⁶ Gallagher, “Remembering Together,” 116.

¹⁷ Sandage, “Marble House Divided,” 143, 136.

¹⁸ Gallagher, “Remembering Together,” 118.

¹⁹ Mark Hugo Lopez and Paul Taylor, “Dissecting the 2008 Electorate: Most Diverse in U.S. History,” *Pew Research* (April 30, 2009), accessed February 14, 2013, <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2009/04/30/dissecting-the-2008-electorate-most-diverse-in-us-history/>; Lydia Warren, “Record Number of Hispanic and Asian Voters Head to the Polls to Help Obama Secure Second Term – As His Support Among Whites Plummet,” *Daily Mail* (November 7, 2012), accessed February 14, 2013, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2229225/Presidential-election-2012-Record-number-Hispanic-voters-head-polls.html>.

²⁰ For example, see Barack Obama, “Pre-Inauguration Address at the Lincoln Memorial,” January 18, 2009, transcript, *American Rhetoric*, <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/barackobama/barackobamapreinaugurallincolnmemorial.htm>; Barack Obama, “Nobel Prize for Peace Speech and Lecture,” December 10, 2009, transcript, *American Rhetoric*, <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/barackobama/barackobamanobelprizespeech.htm>; and Barack Obama, “Second Presidential Inaugural Address,” January 21, 2013, transcript, <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/barackobama/barackobamasecondinauguraladdress.htm>.

²¹ “Most Blacks Say MLK’s Vision Fulfilled, Poll Finds,” *CNNPolitics.com* (January 19, 2009), accessed October 16, 2012, <http://www.cnn.com/2009/POLITICS/01/19/king.poll/index.html>.

²² By “performative,” I mean how visitors interact with the site. That is, the site’s layout and appearance encourage certain interactions and actions by observers. In a sense, visitors become performers at the site.

²³ National Mall and Memorial Parks, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial* (Washington, D.C., n.d.), 2.

²⁴ National Mall and Memorial Parks, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial: The Inscriptions* (Washington, D.C., n.d.), 1.

²⁵ McGee, "Text, Context, and the Fragmentation of Contemporary Culture," 280.

²⁶ The Inscriptions Pamphlet provides additional context for each quotation. For some quotations, the pamphlet gives a full citation. For others, the pamphlet briefly details the occasion for their utterance or writing. From my observations, few people picked up the piece of supplementary rhetoric.

²⁷ Historian Peter B. Levy called Rosa Park's initial refusal to give up her seat the "shot . . . heard round the world" of the Civil Rights Movement. The larger boycott captured national media attention and introduced King as a leader to many. Peter B. Levy, *The Civil Rights Movement* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), 9, 10-11.

²⁸ "Design Elements."

²⁹ The King Memorial's water feature begs comparison to that of Montgomery, Alabama's Civil Rights Memorial. Blair and Michel describe the corresponding feature as, "a convex curved, black granite wall, approximately nine feet tall and forty feet long, with water rushing down its face at waterfall speed." The structure bears a shortened version of King's "Waterfall" quotation. The King Memorial's water feature pales in comparison. Blair and Michel, "Reproducing Civil Rights Tactics," 38.

³⁰ "Design Elements."

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Dominique Browning, "Michelle Obama's 'American Grown,' and More," *New York Times* (June 1, 2012), http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/03/books/review/michelle-obamas-american-grown-and-more.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0. The reunion was later canceled. Rachel Cooper, "Black Family Reunion 2012 in Washington, DC," *About.com*, accessed January 22, 2013, <http://dc.about.com/od/specialevents/a/BlackFamilyReun.htm>.

³³ Kent A. Ono and Derek T. Buescher, "Deciphering Pocahontas: Unpackaging the Commodification of a Native American Woman," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 18, no. 1 (2001): 24.

³⁴ Hasian, "Remembering and Forgetting the 'Final Solution,'" 66.

³⁵ I mention only three prominent names to indicate some of the most glaring omissions. I admittedly “forget” to include many movement leaders.

³⁶ Philip Wander, “The Third Persona: An Ideological Turn in Rhetorical Theory,” *Central States Speech Journal* 35, no. 4 (1984): 209-10.

³⁷ Harding, “Beyond Amnesia,” 468. I would add conservative too, as only the most extreme would find nothing agreeable in the King Memorial’s inscriptions or design.

Chapter 5: Interpretation, Politicization, and Institutionalization: A Rhetorical Analysis of the King Memorial’s Dedication Ceremony

¹ Michael E. Ruane and Michelle Boorstein, “Earthquake Alters MLK Plans,” *Washington Post* (August 24, 2011), http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post_now/post/earthquake-alters-mlk-plans/2011/08/24/gIQAHWIvBJ_blog.html.

² Barack Obama, dedicatory remarks in *Martin Luther King Memorial Dedication*, C-SPAN video and transcript, 3:22:36, Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial, October 16, 2011, <http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/302020-1>.

³ Balthrop, Blair, and Michel, “The Presence of the Present,” 171.

⁴ Christine King Farris, dedicatory remarks in *Martin Luther King Memorial Dedication*, C-SPAN video, 3:22:36, Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial, October 16, 2011, <http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/302020-1>.

⁵ Harry Johnson, dedicatory remarks in *Martin Luther King Memorial Dedication*, C-SPAN video, 3:22:36, Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial, October 16, 2011, <http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/302020-1>.

⁶ Balthrop, Blair, and Michel, “The Presence of the Present,” 191-96.

⁷ See discussion in Chapter 2, where I describe three traits of public memory: (1) public memory is situated in concrete sites and artifacts; (2) public memory is purposeful, partisan, and partial; and (3) public memory responds to present circumstances by educating and identity-building.

⁸ Balthrop, Blair, and Michel, “The Presence of the Present,” 195.

⁹ By overt interpretations, I mean direct comments about understanding the Memorial’s features, goals, and accomplishments.

¹⁰ Celeste Michelle Condit, “The Functions of Epideictic: The Boston Massacre Orations as Exemplar,” *Communication Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (1985), 292. For a discussion of epideictic rhetoric as “a genre of rhetoric particularly conducive to transmitting collective memory,” see

Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles, “Collective Memory, Political Nostalgia, and the Rhetorical Presidency,” 419.

¹¹ Other speakers and performers included the Reverend Doctor Joe Samuel Ratliff; Mary Mary singers Erica and Trecina Atkins-Campbell; Poet Nikki Giovanni; General Motors Chairman and CEO Dan Akerson; Founder of the Tommy Hillfiger Corporation Tommy Hillfiger; MLK National Memorial Foundation Executive Leadership Council Co-Chairman Gary Cowger; violinist Miri Ben-Ari; Poem-Cee performers Black Picasso and DJ Stylus; actor Cicely Tyson; 12-year old actor Amandla Stenberg; actor/singer Diahann Carroll; Secretary Treasurer of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees Lee Saunders; Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity General President Herman “Skip” Mason; singer Aretha Franklin; and singer and pianist Stevie Wonder.

¹² Bernice King, dedicatory remarks in *Martin Luther King Memorial Dedication*, C-SPAN video, 3:22:36, Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial, October 16, 2011, <http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/302020-1>.

¹³ Julian Bond, dedicatory remarks in *Martin Luther King Memorial Dedication*, C-SPAN video, 3:22:36, Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial, October 16, 2011, <http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/302020-1>.

¹⁴ I do not mean to depreciate Ben-Ari’s role as a performer; I only want to draw attention to the conspicuous absence of non-American speakers.

¹⁵ The only possible exceptions to this statement include the Israeli-born Miri Ben-Ari (who played the violin and did not speak) and the corporate sponsors (e.g., Akerson and Cowger) whose political persuasions were kept personal.

¹⁶ As I discuss in the next section, the lack of political diversity also allowed political remarks to go uncontested from conservative viewpoints at the event.

¹⁷ Joseph Lowery, dedicatory remarks in *Martin Luther King Memorial Dedication*, C-SPAN video, 3:22:36, Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial, October 16, 2011, <http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/302020-1>.

¹⁸ B. King, dedicatory remarks in *Martin Luther King Memorial Dedication*.

¹⁹ Al Sharpton, dedicatory remarks in *Martin Luther King Memorial Dedication*, C-SPAN video, 3:22:36, Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial, October 16, 2011, <http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/302020-1>.

²⁰ Obama, dedicatory remarks in *Martin Luther King Memorial Dedication*.

²¹ Jesse Jackson, dedicatory remarks in *Martin Luther King Memorial Dedication*, C-SPAN video, 3:22:36, Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial, October 16, 2011, <http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/302020-1>.

²² Condit, "The Functions of Epideictic," 289.

²³ B. King, dedicatory remarks in *Martin Luther King Memorial Dedication*; and Andrew Young, dedicatory remarks in *Martin Luther King Memorial Dedication*, C-SPAN video, 3:22:36, Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial, October 16, 2011, <http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/302020-1>.

²⁴ Gwen Ifill, dedicatory remarks in *Martin Luther King Memorial Dedication*, C-SPAN video, 3:22:36, Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial, October 16, 2011, <http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/302020-1>.

²⁵ Vincent Gray, dedicatory remarks in *Martin Luther King Memorial Dedication*, C-SPAN video, 3:22:36, Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial, October 16, 2011, <http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/302020-1>.

²⁶ Martin Luther King, III, dedicatory remarks in *Martin Luther King Memorial Dedication*, C-SPAN video, 3:22:36, Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial, October 16, 2011, <http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/302020-1>. Cheryl Wharry discusses the distinct features of African American sermonic discourse, including "rhyme, tempo, pitch, and formulaic language." Cheryl Wharry, "Amen and Hallelujah Preaching: Discourse Functions in African American Sermons," *Language in Society* 32, no. 2 (2003): 204. See also, Geneva Smitherman, *Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1986).

²⁷ Andrew Ross Sorkin, "Occupy Wall Street: A Frenzy That Fizzled," *New York Times* (September 17, 2012), <http://dealbook.nytimes.com/2012/09/17/occupy-wall-street-a-frenzy-that-fizzled/>. The Arab Spring and other protests throughout the world also influenced *TIME*'s Person of the Year decision.

²⁸ B. King, dedicatory remarks in *Martin Luther King Memorial Dedication*.

²⁹ Jackson, dedicatory remarks in *Martin Luther King Memorial Dedication*.

³⁰ Sharpton, dedicatory remarks in *Martin Luther King Memorial Dedication*.

³¹ For further background on controversies surrounding Voter ID Laws and Troy Davis, see Pam Fessler, "The Politics Behind New Voter ID Laws," *NPR.org* (July 18, 2011), <http://www.npr.org/2011/07/18/138160440/the-politics-behind-new-voter-id-laws>; and CNN Wire Staff, "Troy Davis Put to Death in Georgia," *CNN Justice* (September 22, 2011), <http://www.cnn.com/2011/09/21/justice/georgia-execution/index.html>.

³² Sharpton, dedicatory remarks in *Martin Luther King Memorial Dedication*.

³³ Marian Wright Edelman, dedicatory remarks in *Martin Luther King Memorial Dedication*, C-SPAN video, 3:22:36, Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial, October 16, 2011, <http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/302020-1>.

³⁴ Bond, dedicatory remarks in *Martin Luther King Memorial Dedication*.

³⁵ Bernice King commented on several of these issues in rapid-fire fashion saying, “We should never adjust to violence of any form, bullying or being bullied. We should never adjust to policies and practices that profile people because of their color, their ethnicity, or their nation of origin.” Martin Luther King, III linked his father to a position on LGBTQ rights, describing him as “a champion of human rights and social justice for all people regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation or nationality.” Finally, Dan Rather spoke on the “corporatization, the politicalization and the trivialization of the news.” See B. King, dedicatory remarks in *Martin Luther King Memorial Dedication*; King, III, dedicatory remarks in *Martin Luther King Memorial Dedication*; and Dan Rather, dedicatory remarks in *Martin Luther King Memorial Dedication*, C-SPAN video, 3:22:36, Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial, October 16, 2011, <http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/302020-1>.

³⁶ Lowery, dedicatory remarks in *Martin Luther King Memorial Dedication*.

³⁷ Jackson, dedicatory remarks in *Martin Luther King Memorial Dedication*; and John Lewis, dedicatory remarks in *Martin Luther King Memorial Dedication*, C-SPAN video, 3:22:36, Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial, October 16, 2011, <http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/302020-1>.

³⁸ Obama, dedicatory remarks in *Martin Luther King Memorial Dedication*.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ For examples of articles comparing Obama to King, see Lara Seligman, “Obama’s Close Ties to Martin Luther King Jr.,” *National Journal* (August 11, 2011), <http://www.nationaljournal.com/mlk/obama-s-close-ties-to-martin-luther-king-jr--20110811>; and “King and Obama: Eleven Things in Common,” *BET News* (August 23, 2011), <http://www.bet.com/news/national/photos/2011/08/king-and-obama-11-things-in-common.html#!081011-news-national-martin-luther-king-barack-obama-1>.

⁴² Obama, dedicatory remarks in *Martin Luther King Memorial Dedication*.

⁴³ Although a broad and abstract word, I would argue that “change” carries specific connotations when used by Obama since he built his 2008 presidential campaign around the themes/words of

“change” and “hope.” I assert that these terms are also ideographs, defined by Michael Calvin McGee as “the basic structural elements, the building blocks of ideology.” Heather Stassen and Benjamin Bates add, “although the terms appear vague at the surface, members of a community will be able to understand the ideograph’s exact nuances and subtleties as understood within that community.” By using the ideograph of “change,” Obama links his ideology to King’s. Michael Calvin McGee, “The ‘Ideograph’: A Link Between Rhetoric and Ideology,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 66 (1980): 7; and Heather Stassen and Benjamin Bates, “Constructing Marriage: Exploring Marriage as an Ideograph,” *Qualitative Research Reports in Communication* 11, no. 1 (2010): 1.

⁴⁴ Obama, dedicatory remarks in *Martin Luther King Memorial Dedication*.

⁴⁵ B. King, dedicatory remarks in *Martin Luther King Memorial Dedication*.

⁴⁶ By “hegemonic establishment” and “institution,” I refer to the official customs, laws, stories, and organizations of the U.S. government. But as Jason Edward Black mentions, “‘institutions’ like the church, media, news media, NGOs, nonprofits, and the like can be also considered ‘institutional.’” I add that such institutions could also be considered in various cases, hegemonic. Jason Edward Black, “U.S. Governmental and Native Voices in the Nineteenth Century: Rhetoric in the Removal and Allotment of American Indians” (PhD diss., University of Maryland, 2006), 50.

⁴⁷ Ken Salazar, dedicatory remarks in *Martin Luther King Memorial Dedication*, C-SPAN video, 3:22:36, Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial, October 16, 2011, <http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/302020-1>.

⁴⁸ Lewis, dedicatory remarks in *Martin Luther King Memorial Dedication*.

⁴⁹ King Farris, dedicatory remarks in *Martin Luther King Memorial Dedication*.

⁵⁰ Obama, dedicatory remarks in *Martin Luther King Memorial Dedication*.

⁵¹ Obama, dedicatory remarks in *Martin Luther King Memorial Dedication*. Briefly, Rosa Parks, Dorothy Height, Benjamin Hooks, and Fred Shuttlesworth are some of the most often publicly remembered activists of the Civil Rights Movement. They are also notable here as each had passed away within the six-year period prior to the speech. Shuttlesworth’s death came most recently, only days before the event on October 5, 2011. See E. R. Shipp, “Rosa Parks, 92, Founding Symbol of Civil Rights Movement, Dies,” *New York Times* (October 25, 2005), <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/10/25/us/25parks.html?pagewanted=all>; Margalit Fox, “Dorothy Height, Largely Unsung Giant of the Civil Rights Era, Dies at 98,” *New York Times* (April 20, 2010), <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/21/us/21height.html>; Emma Brown, “Former NAACP Leader Benjamin L. Hooks Dies at 85,” *Washington Post* (April 16, 2010), <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/04/15/AR2010041505771.html>; and Jon Nordheimer, “Rev. Fred L. Shuttlesworth, and Elder Statesman for Civil Rights, Dies at 89,”

New York Times (October 5, 2011), http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/06/us/rev-fred-l-shuttlesworth-civil-rights-leader-dies-at-89.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

⁵² Lewis, dedicatory remarks in *Martin Luther King Memorial Dedication*.

⁵³ Ifill, dedicatory remarks in *Martin Luther King Memorial Dedication*.

⁵⁴ Jackson, dedicatory remarks in *Martin Luther King Memorial Dedication*.

⁵⁵ Lewis, dedicatory remarks in *Martin Luther King Memorial Dedication*.

⁵⁶ Dedication Choir, performance in *Martin Luther King Memorial Dedication*, C-SPAN video, 3:22:36, Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial, October 16, 2011, <http://www.c-span.org/program/302020-1>.

⁵⁷ Scholars might also examine this phenomenon, of individuals speaking on behalf of King with his visage in the background, through the idiom of haunting, described by Joshua Gunn as “denot[ing] a conceptual repertoire for listening to and speaking about the dead.” Joshua Gunn, “Review Essay: Mourning Humanism, or, the Idiom of Haunting,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 92, no. 1 (2006): 79.

⁵⁸ Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles, “Collective Memory, Political Nostalgia,” 419.

⁵⁹ Balthrop, Blair, and Michel, “The Presence of the Present,” 196.

⁶⁰ See Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O’Donnell, ed., *Readings in Propaganda and Persuasion: New and Classic Essays* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006).

Chapter 6: Conclusion

¹ Carl Wendell Hines, “Now That He is Safely Dead,” in *Drum Major for a Dream*, ed. Ira G. Zepp and Melvin D. Palmer (Thompson, CT: 1977), 4, quoted in Vincent Gordon Harding, “Beyond Amnesia: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Future of America,” *Journal of American History* 74, no. 2 (1987), 468.

² Blair, Jeppeson, and Pucci, “Public Memorializing in Postmodernity,” 264; Celeste Michelle Condit, “The Rhetorical Limits of Polysemy,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 6, no. 2 (1989): 103-122; Ceccarelli, “Polysemy,” 395-415.

³ Sanchez and Stuckey, “Coming of Age as Culture?,” 78.

⁴ Blair, Jeppeson, and Pucci, “Public Memorializing in Postmodernity,” 269.

⁵ Dickinson, Ott, and Aoki, “Spaces of Remembering and Forgetting,” 31.

⁶ “What Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Would Have Wanted,” *The Daily Show with John Stewart*, featuring John Stewart and Larry Wilmore (January 21, 2013), <http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/mon-january-21-2013/what-dr--martin-luther-king-jr--would-have-wanted>.

⁷ Balthrop, Blair, and Michel, “The Presence of the Present,” 196.

⁸ For example, see Jowett and O’Donnell, ed., *Readings in Propaganda and Persuasion: New and Classic Essays*.

⁹ See Fulbright, “State NAACP Joins Protest of Chinese Artist Chosen for MLK Monument.”

¹⁰ See Watkins, “Five Questions Dr. King Might Ask.”

¹¹ Ono and Buescher, “Deciphering Pocahontas,” 25.

¹² Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles, “Collective Memory, Political Nostalgia, and the Rhetorical Presidency,” 420.

¹³ For example, see “Most Blacks Say MLK’s Vision Fulfilled, Poll Finds.”

¹⁴ Again, the Memorial’s website and supplementary pamphlets made more of the site’s position in a “line of leadership” with the Jefferson and Lincoln Memorials. Meanwhile, speakers at the site’s dedication also talked more often about the site’s placement near presidential memorials.

¹⁵ Obama, dedicatory remarks in *Martin Luther King Memorial Dedication*.

¹⁶ Lewis, dedicatory remarks in *Martin Luther King Memorial Dedication*.

¹⁷ See King, III, dedicatory remarks in *Martin Luther King Memorial Dedication*; and Jackson, dedicatory remarks in *Martin Luther King Memorial Dedication*.

¹⁸ Blair, Dickinson, and Ott, “Introduction,” 18.

¹⁹ McGee, “Text, Context, and the Fragmentation of Contemporary Culture,” 280.

²⁰ Harding, “Beyond Amnesia,” 468.

²¹ Bradford Vivian, “On the Language of Forgetting,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 95, no. 1 (2009): 90.

²² See Balthrop, Blair, and Michel, “The Presence of the Present;” Dickinson, Ott, and Aoki, “Memory and Myth at the Buffalo Bill Museum;” and Dickinson, Ott, and Aoki, “Spaces of Remembering and Forgetting.”

²³ Paige Lavender, "Obama Inauguration Bible: President, John Roberts Inscribe Traveling King Family Bible," *Huffington Post* (January 21, 2013), accessed March 28, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/01/21/obama-inauguration-bible_n_2523130.html.

²⁴ Ian Johnston, "Obama Lays Stone from MLK Memorial on Grave of Israeli PM Slain for Trying to Make Peace," *NBC News* (March 22, 2013), accessed March 28, 2013, http://worldnews.nbcnews.com/_news/2013/03/22/17413043-obama-lays-stone-from-mlk-memorial-on-grave-of-israeli-pm-slain-for-trying-to-make-peace?lite.

²⁵ Hampton Dellinger, "Righting Two Martin Luther King Memorial Wrongs," *The Atlantic* (January 21, 2013), accessed March 28, 2013, <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2013/01/righting-two-martin-luther-king-memorial-wrongs/266944/>.

²⁶ Melanie Eversley, "Dispute Between King Family, Memorial Foundation Denied," *USA Today* (March 27, 2013), accessed March 28, 2013, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/03/27/king-foundation-family/2026545/>.

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