Displacing the "Black Mecca": Romanticizing or Witnessing African American Historical Trajectories in the Case of the Atlanta BeltLine

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“Displacing the ‘Black Mecca’” begins by recognizing that the problem of gentrification in revitalizing center cities across the United States is complex because of the diverse ethnicities and communities that make up our cities. Instead of arguing about gentrification’s displacement of physical bodies, this project considers gentrification as a displacement of culture, collective identity, and memory. Focusing on Atlanta, Georgia, which has been heralded as the “Black Mecca of the South,” this study examines cultural gentrification of African American neighborhoods affected by Atlanta’s recent revitalization effort, the Atlanta BeltLine. African American historical trajectories in Atlanta serve a distinctive identity function in the city, narrating Atlanta as a “Black Mecca” or metaphorical origin for African American collective identity. Observing historical trajectories as spatially narrated in the landscape, this project
illustrates the value of maintaining African American historical trajectories as a moral necessity in an ethnically shared space. “Displacing the ‘Black Mecca’” argues that spatial narratives of diverse identities in Atlanta must be witnessed, rather than romanticized, in order to allow multiple narratives and ethnic identities to coexist. Romanticizing of space is the use of white racial and neoliberal framing to characterize and represent a space as neat, uncontested, linear progression through time, leading to the image of Western man as a superior being. Beyond adding people of color and marginalized groups to history books, memorials, and art exhibitions, the act of witnessing brings the past injustices, trauma, and shameful memories to the forefront so that they can be acknowledged and interrogated for the purpose of redemption. This project relies on a narrative approach to rhetorical criticism and deep mapping to analyze African American visual and discursive symbols of place memory. Using a combination of interviews and textual analysis the visual objects analyzed include public narrations of the civil rights movement and historically black neighborhoods in public-art exhibitions, neighborhood names, and the built environment. Contributing to the spatial turn in the humanities, this research provides the information necessary for addressing the past creatively and reimagining our municipal spaces in a way that allows multiple narratives and ethnic identities to coexist.

INDEX WORDS: Gentrification, History, Spatial Narratives, African American, Rhetoric
DISPLACING THE “BLACK MECCA”: ROMANTICIZING OR WITNESSING AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORICAL TRAJECTORIES IN THE CASE OF THE ATLANTA BELTLINE

by

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May 2020
DEDICATION

To everyone fighting for space in places they were never expected to be.

To everyone asking “where do I belong?”
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Foremost, I would like to thank the Great Creator for the gift of creativity and understanding. This dissertation is the use of that creativity and understanding as a gift back to God.

I am extremely grateful to my advisor, Dr. Patricia G. Davis, who inspired me as an example of resilience and wisdom throughout my doctoral education. Her feedback and positive encouragement has been a light. I greatly appreciate her writing and work, which has been a guiding example for my own.

To my committee: Thank you, Dr. James Darsey, for challenging pushing me to think deeper with every rhetorical analysis and encouraging my writing. Thank you, Dr. Holley Wilkin, for inviting me into your study on the Atlanta BeltLine and her considerate edits and revisions to my dissertation. Thank you, Dr. Jacqueline Royster for your thoughtful assessment and support of this project.

To my colleagues and friends at GSU: Thanks to my friend, Carolyn Walcott. For the past 4 years we have worked together on this doctoral journey, supporting each other and praying for each other in the thick of it. I couldn’t have done this without a friend. Thank you to all the GSU professors and faculty that have provided insightful feedback along the way. To the amazing GSU staff, including Tawanna Tookes, Marilyn Stiggers, and Gary Brown who provided much needed support along the way.

And finally, to my family and friends: My mother and father, Linda and Kevin Gittens, have been a consistent force my entire life. I thank them for believing in me first, raising me, and loving me always. My brother, Jamil Gittens, sister-in-law, and nieces, have been a continued sources of motivation and reassurance. Thanks and love to Brian Wheeler, who has spent endless
hours listening to my ideas, challenging my thought process, and cheering me on in every good and not so good moment. And to my besties, girlfriends, brothers, pastors, and ministers, who have prayed for me, encouraged me, and honored me with their friendship, I thank you.
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1 INTRODUCTION

“If blacks and whites are sincere in their announced intentions, Atlanta might well turn out to be the town that taught a nation how to live,” professed Phyl Garland in her 1971 article in Ebony Magazine, heralding Atlanta as the “Black Mecca of the South.” The metaphor “Black Mecca,” rhetorically establishes Atlanta as an origin for black culture, and Black economic and political progress. Spatial narratives originating in Atlanta have determined the historical trajectory of southern African American civil rights strategies since the Reconstruction period. However, from the expulsion of Native Americans, to post-slavery Jim Crow laws and redlining, to the creation of the 1996 Olympic city, Atlanta, Georgia has been on a continuous course toward white cultural and ideological dominance. The city’s current revitalization project, the Atlanta BeltLine, is poised to solidify the neoliberal historical trajectory through cultural gentrification processes that could displace the diverse historical trajectories of majority Black neighborhoods in the central city. As Black spatial narratives are romanticized in the wake of urban revitalization projects, the city’s history of gentrification, enduring with the Atlanta BeltLine effort, could displace this metaphoric “origin” of collective identity, leaving Black people in “The Move,” between a place of departure (the origin) and a destination (the world of possibilities).

Many of Atlanta’s historically black neighborhoods originated from two major events: the post-Civil War reconstruction period where African Americans were constrained to designated areas for black living quarters, and the era between and after the World Wars where out-migration of white Atlantans to the north of the city isolated the southern portions of the municipality to African Americans. Railroad tracks, interstate highway system, and racist framework, separated black spaces from white spaces. Yet, in spite of these barriers, African
Americans were able to garner political power and use the core of their religious and intellectual hubs, to inspire revolutionary social change in future generations. Railroad jobs in working-class neighborhoods like Pittsburgh, Mechanicsville, Blandtown, Oakland City, and Edgewood, and domestic jobs in otherwise white neighborhoods like Johnsontown, gave African Americans the income to become property owners. The creation of the Atlanta University Center (AUC) from 1929 forged a consortium amongst the former Atlanta University, Spelman College, Morehouse College, and later, Clark College (joined in 1957), Morris Brown College (joined in 1957), Interdenominational Theological Center (joined in 1959), and Morehouse School of Medicine (joined in 1983). Located on the westside, these institutions contributed to education of African Americans across the nation and the growth of a professional class of black people in neighborhoods like West End and Westview. On the east side of town, black life grew in neighborhoods like Old Fourth Ward and the prominent business district on Sweet Auburn Avenue that a 1956 published *Fortune* magazine article called “the richest Negro street in the world.” Auburn Avenue is the home of Atlanta Life Insurance Company, founded by former slave and one of the first black millionaires Alonzo Herndon, and many churches including Ebenezer Baptist Church, where Martin Luther King, Sr. and Martin Luther King, Jr. were copastors. While “Sweet Auburn’s” economic and social strength for the black community diminished in the early 20th century because of segregation laws and displacement, it as well as

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the many black enclaves growing in the 1900s, attributed to the wide consideration of Atlanta as a “Black Mecca.”

My own experience with the city of Atlanta from the time I was a teenager, reflects the city’s existence as a Black Mecca, connecting African Americans to a metaphoric origin that at once, recognizes the groups past, present, and future. In summer of 2004, my family chose Atlanta as our destination for collective remembrance of our family history. Arriving from Florida, New York, and California, we met up at the base of Stone Mountain (outside of Atlanta) for our biennial family reunion. We sat inside the hotel banquet hall listening as my uncle read out our family tree, beginning from 1815. He presented our lineage, describing how we were all connected by blood to Handy and Palace Brown McClendon who resided just two hours south of Atlanta. It didn’t dawn on me until years later, that the circumstances of slavery added unique challenges to tracing my ancestry back to its origins, as prior to the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865, my slave ancestors were likely tallies in a master’s property ledger. Stone Mountain, a palpable symbol of the Civil War history and its Confederate legacy, represented the traumatic ideology that left Handy and Palace’s forebears in bondage, and the victory that allowed them to gain a contested freedom in these united states. If narratives are formed by space, then choosing Stone Mountain as the location of collective remembrance fashioned our familial identity into the stories that make Stone Mountain meaningful to the Confederacy, the Union, and the slaves. It also designated our story as a part of a larger collective identity with those who draw their family lineage from the collective trauma of slavery and find their origins at the culmination of the Civil War and ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment.

Atlanta, though, is more than a site of cultural trauma, it is also a recognizable bastion of “the culture,” the aesthetic, art, and music that symbolize Black Life-Worlds, creative responses
to anti-Black racism and White supremacy. In the 1990s and early 2000s, we all heard about Atlanta through the collective grapevine. A city with five-bedroom homes selling for $200k; Streets buzzing with dancing, music, stepping, and parades during the annual college spring break Freaknik festival; Black business, entrepreneurship, and the best southern soul food can be found in Atlanta. Even if we had never taken a drive around I-285 circling the city, we had all been there through the music of the Dungeon Family and So So Def records. We saw the city for ourselves when Ludacris and Jermaine Dupri welcomed us and took us on a tour bus ride in their infamous “Welcome to Atlanta” video. On my first visit to the city, we went to the Atlanta Underground shopping center, popular in the 1990s for Black retail, where I ran into my teen crush Allen Iverson at the Foot Locker. We traveled to the King Center and the Historic Ebenezer Baptist Church. Atlanta seemed to be a city we were naturally drawn to as everywhere we turned we saw ourselves, our music, our art, our speech, our culture. Atlanta is a significant anchor to the symbols and traditions that brought life to the post-slavery Black experience.

The significance of Atlanta to my family and to my own identity was reinforced when we got back home. After the trip, my mother posted a picture of my dad, brother, and male cousins on the mantelpiece. The image was a consistent reminder of a time of familial unification, yet it is eerily ironic. The photo is a staged portraiture of my dad, in the middle, with his arms wrapped around the shoulders of the boys, Stone Mountain in their backdrop. Behind my father’s head are the images of the three Confederate figures carved into the mountain, President Jefferson Davis, General Robert E. Lee, and Lieutenant General Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson. There are ghosts

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in our idyllic family photo. These ghosts of Civil War’s past could be viewed as haunting figures over our mantel piece, proleptic reminders of the endless chains and oppression in a dystopic future for African Americans. However, as fraught with trauma as that history may be, when we chose Atlanta as our space for kinship, we also forged a reckoning, a meeting up of Confederate ghosts with ghosts of our own. That history that had been suppressed was brought to life and, however frightening it may be, it produces “a something-to-be-done.” As Avery F. Gordon writes about haunting,

… haunting, unlike trauma by contrast, is distinctive for producing a something-to-be done. Indeed, it seemed to me that haunting was precisely the domain of turmoil and trouble, that moment (of however long duration) when things are not in their assigned places, when the cracks and the rigging are exposed, when the people who are meant to be invisible show up without any sign of leaving, when disturbed feelings won’t go away when easily living one day and then the next becomes impossible, when the present seamlessly becoming ‘the future’ gets entirely jammed up. Haunting refers to this socio-political-psychological state when something else, or something different from before, feels like it must be done, and prompts a something-to-be-done.

Thus, my idyllic family photo stood as witness to my family’s presence in a place we were never intended to be. The photo was recognition that we were there, and we didn’t intend to leave. The ghosts of the past were being made visible by our very present experience with them, and in that visibility, we were required to do something different, to change something, to rectify the haunting, and bring forth a utopic future.

Ten years after our family reunion in Atlanta, I found myself living in metro-Atlanta, identifying with the urban-sprawl reactionary culture of driving for nearly 2 hours a day during

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5 Haunting is “one way in which abusive systems of power make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life, especially when they are supposedly over and done with (such as with transatlantic slavery, for instance) or when their oppressive nature is continuously denied (such as with free labor or national security). See Gordon, Avery F. “Some Thoughts on Haunting and Futurity.” Borderlands 10, no. 2 (2011), 3.

the daily work commute in and out of the city. Though we were caught in the present rush of city life, Atlanta has a mysterious dialectic that forces you to slow down and take witness. It’s evident in the aura of commemorative memorials to the Confederacy across the city, as well as the civil rights monuments and museums, and in the discourse and public memory of the people. There is that continued haunting that forces us to pause momentarily. It seemed people in this city had consistent ghosts urging them to “do-something.” So Atlantans are the “do-something” types.

The most recent “do-something” drive is the Atlanta BeltLine, 22-miles of walking trails, trolleys, and light rails that, once completed, will unite the 45 different neighborhoods that make up Atlanta proper and will decrease the traffic caused by urban sprawl. Ideated by Ryan Garvel in 1999, the BeltLine was purposed to bring a city that had been majorly dispersed to the suburbs back to a tighter community in the urban city center. While the original hope was that mixed-income communities would decrease concentrated poverty and diversify segregated neighborhoods, high private investment and purchasing of low cost property across the center city and historically black neighborhoods, are poised to lead to displacement of African Americans from the city.

Atlanta is just one of many historically black cities around the nation facing gentrification and displacement and for many African Americans, losing home is “the tale as old as time.” Take Charlotte, North Carolina’s Second Ward, 125th St of Harlem, New York, and U-Street in Washington, DC for instance. Known as Brooklyn Charlotte, from 1900-1968, Charlotte’s Second Ward was home to a thriving black community, including the state’s first black library,

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7 Gravel, Ryan Austin. “Belt Line - Atlanta: Design of Infrastructure as a Reflection of Public Policy.” Georgia Institute of Technology, 1999.
and the first black run, private hospital in the United States. But in the 1950s, Black neighborhoods were targeted for demolition, and Brooklyn, with its high level of blight and proximity to the city, was completely leveled by 1968, becoming a parking lot. This left 1,007 families, 216 businesses, and 12 churches back in “The Move,” in between an origin and destination they could call home.

Harlem’s 125th Street is best known for its cultural landmarks, including the Apollo Theater and Cotton Club, that brought forth performance and maintained the legacies of African American artists. But new development on the street, including large business chains like H&M, Victoria’s Secret, Bath & Body Works, and Whole Foods, have gentrified the cultural aesthetic and with rising housing prices, lead to displacement of long-time Black residents. Neoliberalization of this space made cultural gentrification obvious for residents and tourists that come to visit the landmark strip.

Then there is U-Street in Washington DC that was nicknamed the “Black Broadway” as it was home to popular African American jazz clubs and theaters. But the 1968 race riots after Martin Luther King Jr.’s death destroyed the city, leading to a blighted, dangerous and drug-

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9 Loret Savoy describes “The Move” as the place between your origin and your destination. See also Savoy, Trace: Memory, History, Race, and the American Landscape, 12. I use the term here with a subtle difference in preposition. There is the privilege of being on “The Move,” which is traveling through space and time toward you next destination. There is also the oppressive nature of living in “The Move,” this is the condition of being separated from your origin and consistently displaced from the trajectory of your journey to a supposed destination, thus, making your life one of constant movement.

infested community. Today’s U-Street has home values over $450,000 and is home to high levels of luxury housing. Urban renewal in this neighborhood so severely increased the cost of living that long-time residents had to move out.\textsuperscript{11} Efforts to present the Black heritage of the neighborhood, including the “City within a City, Greater U Street Heritage Trail” prove to romanticize the history, making the contentious politics respectable for would-be investors and gentrifiers.\textsuperscript{12}

And such is the similar case in Atlanta. While the displacement, neoliberalization, and romanticization of black Atlanta has been underway since after reconstruction, its existence as the “Black Mecca” has maintained, and cultural gentrification has not yet completed its work in the city, making it a space that could still teach “a nation how to live,” allowing for diverse races to prosper economically and politically, while maintaining their distinct historical trajectories within the spatial narrative of the city. As illustrated by gentrification processes across the United States, spaces of African American collective identity, like the Black Mecca, are not safe from encroachment and disruption when spatial power is held by the neoliberal dominant hegemony. This analysis of the Atlanta BeltLine Project and gentrification processes in Atlanta extend what we know about previous urban renewal projects. Despite efforts to service marginalized groups, neoliberal goals for economic progress inevitably propagate racialization of spaces.


More broadly, the Atlanta BeltLine reveals competing ideas about urban revitalization and the collective identity of a place. While space, place, and gentrification scholarship has aligned with the theory that neoliberalism leads to displacement of low-income, indigenous, long-term residents, and residents of color, what has not been thoroughly explored is the connection of neoliberalization of space to cultural gentrification. Much scholarship regarding Black resistance to gentrification arbitrates that Black people are simply standing in opposition to revitalization that increases property costs,\(^\text{13}\) which leads to stereotypes of poor and black residents as lazy and not invested in taking care of where they live.\(^\text{14}\) However, a rhetorical analysis of spatial narratives reveals that there are more substantive differences at contest over the collective identity of a place. We need to talk more about the conceptions of place dominant in African American rhetoric, which conceives of place as kinship, kinship as collective identity, and collective identity as power. Such discussions have led me to the following research questions: 1) What is the importance of space to African American collective identity and metaphorical origins? 2) How has the metaphorical origin been affected by the dominant neoliberal historical trajectory? 3) What has been the role of urban revitalization in the disruption of the spatial narratives of the metaphorical origin? 4) In the midst of urban revitalization, how are African American spatial narratives represented in the metaphorical origin? 5) Do these representations draw witness to or romanticize Black spatial narratives?

This dissertation takes up these questions within one central question: 1) How can African American historical trajectories be lost or maintained when the neoliberal dominant


hegemony homogenizes a metaphorical origin? More specifically, how could African American metaphorical origins in Atlanta be disrupted or protected in the wake of the Atlanta BeltLine’s path? The research reveals that metaphorical origins are significantly important to African American collective identity as they create community through remembrance of a collective trauma, provide an origination story that anchors a dispersed group, and provoke “something-to-be-done,” motivating the group toward a world of possibilities, or a utopian vision of the future. Such metaphorical origins are hindered by the neoliberalization of space. The neoliberal ideology rationalizes the progression of cities under a homogenous single trajectory dominated by the Western conception of place as land, land as capital, and capital as power. While this is the one narrative of progress publicized by the dominant hegemony, there are other trajectories that coexist and contend with it. These other historical trajectories are disrupted when the space is homogenized.

My rhetorical analysis of spatial narratives helps to reveal the connection between African American collective identity and place. African American spatial narratives can be found in material sites of meaning, such as monuments, museums, art exhibitions, place-names, and the built environment. They can also be found in the everyday vernacular as residents communicate their connection to space. In this research, I assess place-naming, a walking history museum, and sites of memory in the built environment. Worthy, in their own right, as histories of place, these narratives can also be used to analyze dynamics of power, voice, and mobility in neighborhoods affected by various stages of gentrification. As Kent Ono and John Sloop state, a critique of

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vernacular symbols makes power relations visible and can move scholarship from challenging to transforming power relationships.¹⁶

I contend that African Americans oppose revitalization efforts, not simply because of a fear of physical displacement, but because of the more substantive need to protect collective identity, which is conceptually connected to space and time (or origin). Thus, revealing that the issue isn’t with revitalization itself, but a contest over how ethnically shared places, like cities, are culturally and collectively conceived of in the United States. Diverse historical trajectories are displaced by a neoliberal single story that romanticizes the previously diverse historical trajectories in order to present them as single events in the idealized economic and racially unifying progression of the city. However, this research reveals metaphorical origins can be maintained when public spatial narratives are witnessed as continuing stories of diverse ideologies with traumatic implications to the invention and reinvention of the city. By reviewing spatial narratives of Black communities in a gentrifying city, scholars can assess African American historical trajectories as either being romanticized by the changes or witnessed because of them. As Catherine Squires asks, under what conditions might we be able to witness, rather than deny or repress, the memories of displaced people?¹⁷ A rhetorical analysis of African American symbols of place memory along the Atlanta BeltLine provides the information necessary for addressing the past creatively and reimagining our municipal spaces in a way that allows multiple narratives to coexist.


¹⁷ Squires, Catherine R. “Tubman and Jackson on the Twenty Dollar Bill: Or, Ghosts, Gossip, Mediums, and Debts,” presented at the National Communication Association: Carroll C. Arnold Distinguished Lecture, Dallas, TX, November 17, 2017.
1.1 Black Mecca and Collective Identity

Collective identity and space are inescapably connected. According to Jan Assman and John Czaplicka, a group reproduces its identity through knowledge of everyday memory and that collective consciousness is concretized through memory. However, “things do not ‘have’ a memory of their own.” Instead, our interaction with an object of memory serves as a reminder. As Maurice Halbwachs argues, space serves as an object of memory, providing images that help the group recall a common way of life. Space carries the narratives that form the group’s historical trajectory and collective existence as a unit. The research question driving this dissertation is pragmatically concerned with the continued existence of African American collective identity and thus, problematizes actions that hinder that collective identity by encroaching on spaces of collective memory. The “Black Mecca” is a metaphorical origin, a physical space of retrospective and proleptic memory that reinforces African American collective identity. One goal of this dissertation is to express the importance of the Black Mecca as a “zone of shared representation” for African Americans.

In 1971, Garland, a staff writer for Ebony Magazine, forecasted that if Atlanta became a place of “peaceful”, “prosperous”, and “sincere” racial coexistence it “might well turn out to be the town that taught a nation how to live.” Garland is noted for labeling Atlanta the “Black Mecca of the South.” She acknowledged the excitement of the city, including the growing Black

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19 Assman, “Communicative and Cultural Memory,” 17


22 Garland, “Atlanta: Black Mecca of the South,” 157
population making up more than 50% of the municipality, the rise in Black homeownership, political representation and businesses, thriving Black institutions of higher-education, and Atlanta’s storied civil rights history. At the same time, she recognized the staying power of the white political structure, lack of integrated housing and schools, and the fact that 2/3 of those in poverty in the city were black. Middle-class Black people boosted the perception of the “Black Mecca” and after the publication of Garland’s article, the moniker stuck. While Atlanta has the potential of being a “peaceful” and “prosperous” location of racial coexistence, in 1971 such potential was more available in appearances than reality. Garland’s message was that blacks and whites had to be honest about their aims for the city in order for Atlanta to “live.” These aims, motivated by greed and capitalism, would ultimately lead to the city’s destruction as black and white elites were privileged and the poor were impoverished to meet neoliberal goals.23

Whether myth or legend, the moniker “Black Mecca” has had staying power and since Atlanta has had only one white mayor since 1974, the appearance has also maintained itself. The term “Mecca” has taken on a figurative meaning, but most readily draws its linguistic history to the city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia, which is the birthplace of the Muslim Prophet Muhammad. As such it is the origin, or birthplace, of the religion. Mecca, Saudi Arabia is also a location where Muslims make pilgrimage as a religious duty. The use of the term “Mecca” to describe other places, like Atlanta, denotes it as an origin, a pilgrimage destination, and a center for those who identify with it as their birthplace.

Origins are critical for African American collective identity. Stephanie Smallwood, studying African conceptions of space and place, argues that for pre-modern Africa, collective identity is formed by origin and origin is denoted by kinship, a continuous maternal lineage.

23 Hobson, The Legend of the Black Mecca, 5
Spatial and temporal separation from kin will disconnect a person from their origin. This disconnection happened to African slaves during the Atlantic Slave Trade, leaving them alienated from collective identity and dehumanizing them into commodities.24

Lauret Savoy, who researches the contemporary terrain, asks whether origins for African Americans can be found in blood and/or memory, and she determines that neither is adequate. Instead, after tracing the blood and the memory in the landscape of the United States she is still unable to find her origin because of America’s racial history, which racialized space. She concludes that African Americans are perpetually in between or in “The Move,” never finding their physical origin or getting to a destination, alienating the Black subject.25

Together, Smallwood and Savoy’s research reflect that an African conception of place as kinship precludes the alienated African American, and an American conception of place as land is damaged by racism. Recognizing the importance of origin to Black subjectivity and that African Americans cannot maintain origins through an African conception of place or American conception of place allows us to consider that place for African Americans is conceived outside of the physical body (blood) and outside of the land. I contend that as one mode for maintaining collective identity without physical origin, African Americans conceive of metaphorical spaces, such as the “Black Mecca.” Metaphorical spaces are developed in lieu of physical origins to transform Black subjectivity back from commodity to humanity. A metaphorical space forges


cultural identity out of physical space. So, not only does gentrification threaten physical displacement, it threatens to displace collective identity created by metaphorical spaces.

Atlanta, as the metaphorical Black Mecca, is able to maintain its standing by 1) harboring the remembrance of collective trauma, which is necessary for African American collective identity, 2) providing an origination story for African American homeland post-civil war, which is a necessary anchor for dispersed people, and 3) representing a utopian vision of racial peace and prosperity, which is a necessity for motivating the community toward a collective future. Thus, the Black Mecca embodies the narrative required for a nation’s continuous existence and does so by spatially narrating the past, present, and future identity of African Americans simultaneously.

Collective identities are socially constructed and formed through collective remembrance that people across a nation or globally have, even if they don’t know one another. Identity is constituted through communication with a group of people whose unity and uniqueness is based on a “common image of their past.” The collective identity of African Americans is based in the peculiar institution of modern slavery. While the articulation of a separate African American identity didn’t occur until post-Civil War, the makings of the identity were formed by the unique experience of American slavery and the trauma of that experience. Slavery had the effect of alienating Africans from their homeland in Africa, as well as an African consciousness. Through the process of commodification, African Americans were dehumanized and lost subjectivity. It is

26 Rinaldo, “Space of Resistance: The Puerto Rican Cultural Center and Humboldt Park.”


through the memory of this trauma that a person defines herself as African American. According to Ron Eyerman, African American identity requires continuous remembrance of the trauma to sustain. Sustained remembrance links the past to the present and reproduces collective identity for future generations. The remembrance process is an act that mediates the trauma to identity caused by modern slavery. African Americans re-narrate and reinterpret the past to address the tear and build continuity with their future existence.

Because of its location in the Southern United States, Atlanta harbors the spatial narrative of the trauma and is also within a region where its remembrance is continuously reenacted and rearticulated for the purposes of mediation. Public articulation of Atlanta as the Black Mecca began with the August 1971 edition of *Ebony* magazine, which was dedicated to the South. In his publisher’s statement, John H. Johnson recollects the South drawing upon its long history starting with New England settlers’ hopes for the southern colonies, the exceptional ability of African labor, slavery in the South, on to the Civil War and Black northern migration in the early 20th century. Johnson argues that though African-Americans moved north before and after the Civil War, fleeing slavery and the “semi-slavery of the post-Civil War years,” during the civil rights movement, Black people drew their eyes back toward the South as their “point of entry” to America. While Black people migrated north, they didn’t lose recognition of their collective consciousness and identification with the South. The South became a necessary anchor and origin for African Americans as they dispersed across the nation and internationally.

According to Maurice Halbwachs, groups do not have to be connected by proximity to have a collective identity. They just need a shared spatial image. Groups stay united even after they have been dispersed from their physical location, by remembering their old home. Spatial

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29 Johnson, John H. “Publisher’s Statement.” *Ebony: The South Today*, August 1971, 33
images and, I would argue, spatial narratives, are important to collective identity as they are necessary for remembering home, even after you have been removed. The past is preserved in the physical surroundings. As Black communities disperse, either by choice or displacement, the creation of imagined places to ensure the continuation of the collective identity becomes a necessity. According to Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, “Remembered places have often served as symbolic anchors of community for dispersed people.”  

Remembered places are the “homeland” necessary for unifying people who are displaced to different locations. Because of the erosion of traditional territories, spaces are imagined, “but not imaginary.” The Black Mecca is an imagined homeland, “a symbolic anchor” of community for dispersed African Americans. A metaphorical space is an imagined space, within a non-imaginary physical space.

As a bedrock of post-bellum African American intellectual thought and identity creation, Atlanta provides a key origination story for an African American homeland. In Atlanta, W.E.B. DuBois wrote *The Souls of Black Folk*, articulating the double consciousness of the African American identity. He theorized the “New Negro,” an African American apart of the “talented tenth.” While Du Bois was a progenitor of the civil rights movement, Martin Luther King Jr, born and raised in Atlanta, Ga, has a lasting legacy as a prophetic leader of the movement. In the 1960s, as more laws were passed providing greater protections for Blacks in the South, those second generations in the North looked “backward to the land of their birth,” wondering “what the South is really like today.” In describing the South as the “point of entry” and the “land of their birth,” Johnson, founding editor of *Ebony* magazine, along with other Black people


32 Johnson, “Publisher’s Statement,” 33
identified the South as the “origin” for African Americans. He was not alone. Julian Bond, State Representative of Georgia called Northern Blacks back to the state saying, “Black people, come home. We need you … Your roots, like ours, are here.”\textsuperscript{33} Declaring a New Black South, Bond said, “black soil here – both actually and spiritually – is rich.” And then, Vice Mayor of Atlanta Maynard Jackson proclaimed, “there is a growing movement toward Atlanta as the “Mecca” of Black America.”\textsuperscript{34}

That “origin” was fraught with trauma. In the same edition of \textit{Ebony} magazine, staff writer, Lerone Bennett Jr. wrote about the South, “it is here that we first served our apprenticeship to horror.”\textsuperscript{35} The Southern coast carries the pain as the place where Blacks from Africa met the completion of their transition from human to property, the alienation of their identity, and the separation from their actual origins in Africa. However, the South serves a second purpose as the origin of a new people, African Americans. The struggle with Atlanta, Garland conceded in her article, was that the city attempted to appear as though that struggle was over. People like Maynard Jackson perpetuated that appearance, saying “I consider Georgia most advanced in race relations. That is primarily, though clearly not exclusively, attributable to the presence of Atlanta in the state of Georgia. Atlanta being the best city for black people in America.”\textsuperscript{36} However, this utopian vision of racial existence is also a necessity for Black collective identity.

\textsuperscript{33} “Black Voices of the South.” \textit{Ebony: The South Today}, August 1971, 50

\textsuperscript{34} “Black Voices of the South,” 52


\textsuperscript{36} “Black Voices of the South,” 52
Metaphorical origins provide continuation of the collective identity’s historical trajectory. African American existence is disempowered when subjected to living only in the past and the continuous repetition of displacement from locations identified as “origin” causes new tears in the social fabric that must continuously be mediated. The level of connection a collective identity has to a particular space is often recognizable by the amount of resistance the people have when it is encroached upon.\(^{37}\) Today, gentrification is the most immediate encroachment on the metaphorical space of historically displaced groups.\(^{38}\) Gentrification is a reconstruction of space that involves the expansion of more affluent or dominant groups in less affluent urban neighborhoods. Such processes are maintained through the creation of dystopic futures because information about the future determines capital valuation and investment. Dystopic futures about a place, like those about Africa, that predict deteriorating economy and decreased life expectancy, demoralize the people and make the space safe for corporations and industries to stake a claim.\(^{39}\) Eshun argues that the creation of counter futures that predict a utopia, focus the oppressed group’s attention to its potentialities by mediating the traumatic tear and responding to the structural and psychological alienation of Black identities.

Atlanta was particularly appropriate as a space of this utopian future because of the increased political and economic power of middle-class Black people in the city. In 1971, Atlanta University, now Clark Atlanta University, had the only black graduate business school. As a sign of the economic prosperity of African Americans, the richest black American, Norris B. Herndon, resided in Atlanta. He had amassed a private fortune of nearly $18 million and was

\(^{37}\) Halbwachs, “Space and the Collective Memory.”

\(^{38}\) Rinaldo, “Space of Resistance: The Puerto Rican Cultural Center and Humboldt Park.”

president of Atlanta Life Insurance Company.\textsuperscript{40} Atlanta was also the home of one of the largest Black banking institutions, Citizens Trust Co. of Atlanta, which owned a 12-story office building in downtown.\textsuperscript{41} Atlanta had a number of Black people moving up in political positions. Three years after the \textit{Ebony} publication, Maynard Jackson had been elected mayor. Beyond the economic and political growth of Black people, what made Atlanta an apt space for the “Black Mecca” metaphor was the seeming way middle-class Black people had created harmonious relations with white people. While most major cities with large black populations had race riots in 1968, after King’s death, Atlanta had not. Black restaurants, like Paschal’s, had determined to never turn away whites during segregation, which helped it to grow. And prior to Maynard Jackson’s mayoral run, he was the black vice-mayor on the staff of Jewish mayor Sam Massell. Sam Massell had also hired black Attorney Emma I. Darnell to his staff.\textsuperscript{42} While imperfect, the city was promoted to Black Mecca given its close appearance to a future Black utopia.

By spatially narrating the past, present, and future identity of African Americans, the Black Mecca provides permanence for African American collective identity. It is the enduring spatial recognition through symbols of the culture that are necessary for the continuation of a historical trajectory. Halbwachs contends that the permanent arrangement and appearance of a space provides the comforting image of continuity. Space is integral to collective identity because to lose one’s location, is to lose the support of one’s cultural tradition, and the cultural tradition provides the group’s “unique reason for existence.”\textsuperscript{43} Symbolic forms that unfold and

\textsuperscript{40} Booker, Simeon. “Black Business Is Tops In South: Banks, Savings and Loan, and Insurance Firms Total $1/2 Billion.” \textit{Ebony} 57, no. 5 (March 2002): 56–63.

\textsuperscript{41} Garland, “Atlanta: Black Mecca of the South.”

\textsuperscript{42} Garland, “Atlanta: Black Mecca of the South.”

\textsuperscript{43} Halbwachs, “Space and the Collective Memory,” 4
cohere in space guarantee a cultural existence. Since it is necessary to recover and reconstruct an
t image, even symbolic, of the places of our origins in order to continue to exist, a Black Mecca
like that of Atlanta is a necessity to African American continued collective identity. Atlanta’s
shifting ethos, characterized by urban renewal practices that utilize neoliberal ideology to
homogenize the narrative of the city, pose a threat to this collective identity.

1.2 The Atlanta BeltLine and Spatial Narration

In this work, I focus on spatial narration and the continuation of historical trajectories for
the sustained existence of a collective identity. The dissertation’s central question concedes that
there are coexisting historical trajectories and the neoliberal dominant hegemonies encroachment
on metaphorical space through acts of gentrification forces the displacement of marginalized
historical trajectories. Considering that Atlanta is a metaphorical space of black collective
identity, the city carries several integral African American spatial narratives. Cultural
gentrification, by way of the Atlanta BeltLine urban renewal project, homogenizes the
trajectories onto a singular path, leading to the romanticizing of Black trauma.

Research on the central problem of cultural gentrification meets at the intersection of
go geography and communication studies. I specify the term cultural gentrification to express the
process by which affluent people move into a space of cultural identification and displace their
cultural images and symbols. The study of cultural gentrification relies on an understanding of
the geography of memory, which “locates history and its representations in space and

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44 Halbwachs, “Space and the Collective Memory.”
landscape,“45 and the narration of collective identity within that space. The historical trajectory is the culture’s narrative as it moves through time. A trajectory’s spatial position in regard to other trajectories affects its evolution, movement, and make up. Using spatial narratives, David J. Bodenhamer helps us to conceive of historical trajectories as discursive. Rather than stories having settings, narratives are inscribed in space and spatially situated. Tracking the narrative of people as it unfolds in space and bumps into, converges, and interconnects with other spatial narratives allows scholars to assess the effects of power on cultural narratives.46

Critical assessments of the relationship of historical trajectories to each other provide insight into uneven power dynamics. This reflects the goals of the spatial turn in communication scholarship, which calls for scholars to “interrogate the spatiality of power.”47 Spatial power today is located with the Western and North American dominant hegemony. Their conception of power is based in the capitalist marketplace, which compresses space, creating an inside and outside, an “us” vs “them.” The Western experience of capitalism determines our understanding and experience of space and disregards the influence that race and gender have on the experience of space. From this perspective, space and time is conceived as linear human progression through time under one narrative of continued increases in power and control over nature. When whiteness meets other races, ethnicities, or societies who have not gained the level of control over nature and capital as it has, the perception is that these groups are just behind. The West

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equates space with land and sea, and conceives of “other places, people, and cultures as simple phenomenon on the surface”\textsuperscript{48} who may be at an earlier stage of the single narrative of human progression from origin to destination.

The contemporary dominant narrative of the West is directed by a neoliberal ideology. Neoliberalism, an abstract symbol that stands for the normative order, ideology, and political reasoning, places everything within business logics and economic value, promoting the free market, privatization, deregulation, and reduction of social welfare.\textsuperscript{49} Within this order, people are commodified, discussed as statistics and dollars necessary as labor value. The dominant deliberative strategy argues for individual progression and competition, rather than communal or public interest. Instead of representing “the people” as their constituents, government leaders represent the capitalist class, those who own the means of production.\textsuperscript{50} The permeation of this ideology as common sense inhabits space, making neoliberalism the normative logic used in determining social and spatial relations.\textsuperscript{51}

Spatial logics are also influenced by racism, the ideology that any one race is superior to another. Black studies and cultural geography scholars align conclusively on the argument that race is lived through space and spatialization of race has been used by the dominant hegemony to reproduce racism through the unjust enrichment of white Americans and unjust impoverishment of people of color.\textsuperscript{52} Rather than perceiving space as an “empty vessel within which social

\textsuperscript{48} Massey, “Opening Propositions,” 4


processes are located,”53 these scholars perceive space as being actively produced and shaped by racist social policies like stop-and-frisk, anti-immigration, housing discrimination and policies that lead to segregated neighborhoods.

Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods theorized that there are black geographies, racialized “demographic patterns shaped by historical precedent”54 that determine the material and physical geographies of human environments. They argue that essentialism has set a hegemonic norm that erases and excludes the struggles and concerns of black communities. Thus, lived citizenship is worked out through space, as the hegemonic order maps out exclusion and rejection through spatial assignments. Black geography scholars separated themselves from hegemonic geography by perceiving place not as “the location of cooperation, stewardship, and social justice” but as “sites to be dominated, enclosed, commodified, exploited, and segregated.”55

Historical research on the spatial landscape and segregation in Atlanta reveals racism and neoliberalism at play in the construction of the city, beginning with the theft and expulsion of Native Americans: Under the bounds of kinship, the Muskogee Creek and Chickasaw native tribes settled the land where today’s Kennesaw Mountain and Stone Mountain take root. The tribes located themselves in a collective identity. To be a member of the tribe was to share a common way of life, communication symbols, and networks.56 Tribal space was determined by


55 McKittrick and Wood, “No One Knows the Mysteries at the Bottom of the Ocean,” 6

social commonality, rather than territorial boundaries. But in the 16th century, the British forcefully removed the tribes from the region and necessitated the enforcement of territorial lines. Native tribes were expelled. By the 19th century, at the pre-dawning of modern industrialization, a Western community emerged at the terminus point where the United States Western Railroad and Atlantic Railroad crossed, marking the central area that became Atlanta. The colonizers equated their “sense of place” to the fixed coordinates of the rail connection. “Terminus,” as the city was named back then, was the “end-of-the-line,” a depot station. It was a locale for a people on The Move. Construction continued on the railroad, extending it from the Zero Mile Post into Southeast and internal Georgia. With this growth, the depot station evolved from being a place of transit and movement, to become a destination for some and an origin for others.

After decades of oppressing and pressuring remaining Native Americans to give up their land, the state of Georgia with the power of U.S. forcefully removed remaining tribes from the state in the 19th century. The city, now governed by railroad men, continued to grow. By 1850, it had metastasized to a population of 2,058 white people and 511 black people, with 493 of them slaves.57 During the Civil War, Atlanta (as it was renamed in 1847) became an important manufacturing, distribution, and transportation hub for the Confederate Army. On September 2, 1864 the city lost in the final battle with Union forces and the railroad depots, homes, and businesses were demolished when Union Army General William Tecumseh Sherman had many buildings and homes burned down.58 There was a need to rebuild and newly freed blacks


flocked to Atlanta where Union troops offered protection from whites. They took up home in areas along the railroad tracks that were unwanted by whites. These areas, known as “the bottoms,” had horrible conditions as they subsumed the environmental hazards of building and industrialization of the Reconstruction Era.⁵⁹ Even still, freed blacks set stakes and built up their communities around the railroads and the newly founded black educational hubs, Atlanta University (founded 1865) and Morehouse College (opened in Atlanta in 1867). The Black population grew to 67,796 by 1920, and the White population grew to 137,785.⁶⁰ While both the whites and the blacks in the area were largely poor and uneducated, the Black communities continued to grow and form a communal identity. The railroad lines were markers of their locations.

White supremacy was the hegemonic order of the South coming out of the Civil War. Racist ideology, coupled with the New South’s advocacy of industrial development, heightened the oppressive spatial environment for newly freed black people in Atlanta. Jim Crow laws of the early 20th century decreased black mobility by constraining them to designated neighborhoods.⁶¹ Redlining, the practice of refusing home loans to specific racial groups, throughout the nation kept African Americans out of homeownership and maintained segregation. White Americans gained new prosperity and economic relief after the Great Depression through President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal policies, which included establishment of the Federal Housing Authority, making homeownership affordable to the majority of America. Though Atlanta had two black mayors in the 20th century, Maynard Jackson (1974-1982; 1990-1994) and Andrew

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⁵⁹ Hobson, The Legend of the Black Mecca.
⁶⁰ Hobson, The Legend of the Black Mecca.
⁶¹ Hobson, The Legend of the Black Mecca.
Young (1982-1990), both demonstrated neoliberal common sense in their economic practices. Specifically, according to Hobson, Andrew Young used a neoliberal style of government that contributed to the standard neoliberal model of “urban renewal” and “gentrification” in Atlanta.62

The existence of historical trajectories clashing in the dominant public sphere may be best studied and uncovered by the rhetoricity of the Atlanta BeltLine, the city’s post-modern drive to unify the 45 disparate neighborhoods created by the railroad lines. Since the 19th century, Atlanta’s neighborhood growth had been highly determined by the railroad lines. Boundaries between neighborhoods were demarcated by the location of the major and minor lines, inevitably creating 45 different neighborhoods that are seemingly isolated from each other by transit. The Atlanta BeltLine project seeks to reunite those neighborhoods, each with a distinctive historical trajectory, along a singular future path determined and designed by the dominant hegemony. Using the neoliberal conception of progress as land development, the BeltLine adds to the revolving loop of temporary placement and continuous displacement of African American collective identities, leaving them in “The Move.”

Ryan Gravel proposed the idea for the BeltLine in his master’s thesis, written while he was a student at Georgia Institute of Technology. Gravel considered Atlanta to be the symbol of the contemporary, modern city. But he was troubled that it had placed the automobile, and the interstates and roads on which it traversed, as the method of expansion. Like the railroad before it, highways, not “public interest,” according to Gravel, determined Atlanta’s city design.63 In the 1920s transit availability and discriminatory FHA loans allowed white residents of the central city to disperse to the suburbs, creating the sprawl we know today as metropolitan Atlanta, and

62 Hobson, The Legend of the Black Mecca, 162
63 Gravel, Ryan Austin. “Belt Line - Atlanta: Design of Infrastructure as a Reflection of Public Policy.” Georgia Institute of Technology, 1999
leaving the central city to the urban poor and African-Americans through processes of racism and redlining. In the 1940s, Interstates 75 and 85 were purposefully designed around eastside Atlanta to separate the white business district from black neighborhoods.\footnote{Gravel, Ryan Austin. 1999. \textit{“Belt Line - Atlanta: Design of Infrastructure as a Reflection of Public Policy.”} Atlanta: Georgia Institute of Technology, 1} The interstate system and the 1967 Model Cities initiative federal project inevitably led to the deterioration of the black business district on Auburn Avenue.\footnote{Hobson, The Legend of the Black Mecca, 73} While black people continued to shape culture, network, and make their own place within the city, they struggled to progress economically due to the concentration of poverty, disinvestment, and systemic oppression plaguing their communities.

The urban poor and Blacks remained \textit{in} “The Move”\textsuperscript{’} in the city center. Whites were \textit{on} “The Move,” traveling in and out of the city at leisure for work and play. And by the 1990s, those who had left the city for the periphery during the period of white flight were returning. The city tore down much of Atlanta’s public housing in preparation for the 1996 Olympics and employees of companies headquartered downtown moved back.

After spending a semester in Paris, Gravel imagined a new design of Atlanta’s infrastructure to relieve the issues that racism and transit design had created. His goal was also to reinforce downtown Atlanta as the center city by layering transit around it. He reimagined the unused rail lines as a walkable path and a streetcar path that could unite the neighborhoods. Gravel proposed the Atlanta BeltLine as a 22-mile loop of trails, streetcars, and parks that connect the largely disconnected Atlanta neighborhoods. At its inception it was touted as an ambitious project and has continued to win awards across the nation as an urban renewal project reviving communities.
The Atlanta BeltLine project is now set at odds with the communities it seeks to revive as Gravel’s initial goals to protect historically Black neighborhoods in Atlanta from gentrification have been subverted. When those “profound physical spaces”66 between the 45 neighborhoods were made public, investors came in droves, purchasing properties and building homes and businesses, all in anticipation of the capital the BeltLine would bring. Gravel’s futurist visions drew more power away from those marginalized communities, as it drew investors into them. Despite original promises of affordable housing and alleviation of displacement risks, the project has contributed to the affordable rental housing crisis in Atlanta.67

A study by the Atlanta Journal Constitution in conjunction with Georgia State University, Emory University, the University of Georgia, and Kennesaw State University students found that on the eastside of Atlanta, where the BeltLine first opened up, average rents over 12 years have increased by 59 percent. While an Affordable Housing Trust Fund had been established to keep Black and low-to-middle income residents from displacement, the money allocated for affordable housing was not spent and the funding from the city for low-income residents was not processed. There was initially allotted to be 5,600 affordable homes and apartments within the BeltLine tax allocation district68 by 2030. But, as of February 2019, there

66 Gravel, “Belt Line - Atlanta: Design of Infrastructure as a Reflection of Public Policy,” 15


68 A Tax Allocation District is a “redevelopment and financing tool by which governments can provide financial assistance to eligible public and private redevelopment efforts within an officially designated area or TAD. Increases in property tax revenues, which are generated primarily from new investment in the district, are allocated to pay infrastructure costs or certain private development costs within TAD.” The BeltLine TAD was created on December 31, 2005 to extend for 25 years. See “Tax Allocation District (TAD) | Atlanta, GA.” Accessed May 18, 2020. https://www.atlantaga.gov/government/departments/city-planning/office-of-zoning-development/plans-and-studies/tax-allocation-district-tad and BeltLine Ordinance (Atlanta City Council), Ordinance 05-O-1733 § (2005).
are only 1,640 affordable units. This number includes new units and preserved units.69 Residents, BeltLine Inc, and the city are aware that their goal of reaching the 5,600 affordable homes by 2030 is precarious.

Because of these and other mismanagement issues regarding the Atlanta BeltLine, working-class residents within its path are getting pushed out. As Daniel Immergluck warned, the redevelopment initiative is having adverse effects on lower-income residents who have difficulty affording higher taxes but want to remain in the area.70 Lower-income renters are also affected as their leases increase to reflect the increased tax rate and property value. As of 2017, estimates said that the project needed 10,000 affordable housing units, which is nearly double the initial 5,600-unit goal.71

With the complete displacement and replacement of historically Black neighborhoods by 2040 on the loom, there is a necessity that researchers from all disciplines assess this problem to quell the consequences. Current research on gentrification of African American neighborhoods spans various fields of research and discusses multiple defense strategies, including advocating policies that stabilize rent and property tax, mobilizing community resistance movements,72

69 “Subarea 2 Master Plan Update.” presented at the Southwest + Southeast Study Group, Atlanta, February 4, 2019.


71 Mariano, Conway, and Ondieki, “How the Atlanta BeltLine Broke Its Promise on Affordable Housing.”


rebuffing developer plans, and the Black elite’s adopting of defensive development. Missing from this research is spatial narration as a form of cultural maintenance to resist the neoliberal and racist ideologies that perpetuate displacement of people of color. This missing information occurs because gentrification research lacks a critical attention to cultural displacement. Research that does consider cultural displacement of African Americans has focused on socio-spatial personal identity construction and touristic narratives that idealize resident history. My research extends those projects by exploring how African American historical trajectories can be lost or maintained within contemporary urban redesign projects.

1.3 Romanticizing and Witnessing: Place-Names, Memorials, and the Built Environment

In this narrative approach to rhetorical analysis of African American symbols of place memory along the Atlanta BeltLine, I examine spatial narratives in the city of Atlanta and use their spatial and temporal structure to investigate how neoliberalization of a city disrupts African American historical trajectories. Spatial narratives can be found in “symbolically charged spaces,” or spatial markers. Spatial markers are complex arrangements of a location.

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74 Boyd, “Defensive Development: The Role of Racial Conflict in Gentrification.”
75 Cahill, “Negotiating Grit and Glamour: Young Women of Color and the Gentrification of the Lower East Side.”
78 Bodenhamer, “Narrating Space and Place,” 14
including memorials, streets, buildings, place-names, monuments, art, vernacular, and landscape. In this research, I will assess the configuration of spatial narratives in a place-name, a walking history museum, and sites of memory in the built environment.

Place-names as rhetorical devices have been under studied in the field of communication. However, critical rhetorician Raymie McKerrow, in his exposition of the rhetoricity of space, acknowledges that place-names establish boundaries and recall memory. Referencing the importance of place-names for the Apache, McKerrow states that names “compress time in that space,”79 bringing forward the past into the present. While the names hold history and memory, they also act as a rhetorical instrument of meaning.80 There are particular neighborhoods in Atlanta that are important in terms of their racial and historical symbolism, and have uniquely been made visible and at the same time vulnerable due to the gentrification advanced by urban renewal and prospecting on the BeltLine promises. However, displaced and current residents of these neighborhoods are excavating history and forging the path to restoring historical place-names as a form of resistance. My critique of African American spatial narratives in place-names uncovers the past that is memorialized by the name, reflects on the ways in which the past is affecting the present meaning of the space, and how changes in place-name manufacture amnesia of past traumas.

Adding complexity to our understanding of spatial narratives and their interaction with place, the walking history museum reflects the use of place-as-rhetoric, which acknowledges the location as part of the message. The Atlanta BeltLine’s Art on the BeltLine projects provide space for visual, musical, and performance art on the trails and in the parks. They have used this

79 McKerrow, “Space and Time in the Postmodern Polity.” 280
80 Rofe, Matthew W, and Gertrude Szili. “Name Games 1: Place Names as Rhetorical Devices.” Landscape Research 34, no. 3 (2009): 361–70.
program to include visual projects of Atlanta’s Black history, allowing artists and historians to
inscribe a historical message within the gentrified space. Specifically referencing social
movements, Endres and Senda-Cook reveal that rhetors use places rhetorically in three ways: 1) to
reconstruct meaning of a place, 2) to use a place repetitively to construct how others know the
place, and 3) to use the pre-existing meaning associated with a place to add to their message.81

Expanding from their work on traditional protest movements, my analysis of a walking history
museum uses the Atlanta BeltLine as a “backdrop”82 for the history exhibition. Thus, revealing
that the location of the history museum along the BeltLine alters the historical narrative of the
movement and reconstructs the narrative of future progress. Depending on perspective, the
walking history museum can dually function to draw witness to the past, while romanticizing the
future.

To enlarge our understanding of where memory is inscribed in place, the built
environment, or physical building and construction of a place, can also be used as symbolic
representations of culture and history of those who live and have lived there. Urban renewal
projects like the Atlanta BeltLine change the built environment, thus affecting the aesthetic
experiences residents and visitors have with the space. In his study of the rhetorical power of
tourism in the United States in forming Americans’ national identity, Gregory Clark argued that
the national landscape works as an aesthetic setting or scene, where Americans forge collective
identity through the process of identification with common places in the environment. The
landscape works to project a shared identity and prompt visitors to adopt that identity. Thus, the

81 Alderman, Derek, and Joshua F. J. Inwood. “Street Naming and the Politics of Belonging: Spatial
Injustices in the Toponymic Commemoration of Martin Luther King Jr.” Social & Cultural
Geography 14, no. 2 (2013): 211–33.

82 Endres and Senda-Cook, “Location Matters: The Rhetoric of Place in Protest.” 260
shared experiences Americans have in the setting function rhetorically to produce collective identity. However, while the built environment allows us to engage in critical practice of local remembrance in sites of memory and forge a logos of cultural belonging in American society, urban revitalization can also be used to instigate the invisibility of people and cultures. To reveal this dual function of space, we must diverge from Clark’s research on tourism of sites of memory across the national landscape because it does not make consideration for diverse experiences with the landscape that deviate from the dominant white understanding of the space.

Instead, I focus on the position and spatial narrative associated with sites of memory. The combination of both spatial awareness and storytelling gives us an appreciation of how changes in the arrangement of the built environment and businesses exclusive to majority white subcultures romanticize the historical trajectory of African American lived experiences within the place. My analysis of the built environment along the Westside trail portion of the larger BeltLine trail system, chronologically and spatially situates the transformation of the neighborhood, fostering invisibility of black spaces of collective memory and encouraging the visibility of exclusively white, social performance industries. In doing so, the revitalizing built environment romanticizes history, prompting belonging majorly for white men, while excluding women and the larger black working and professional class from the collective spatial narrative.

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Together, these three spatial markers interconnect to illustrate how African American spatial narratives instituted through place-naming, history exhibitions, and the built environment can be disrupted by the neoliberal single story or used as rhetorical devices for maintaining the metaphorical “Black Mecca.” For the Atlanta BeltLine and the future progression of the city, the three cases reflect the multiple and diverse past, present, and future trajectories that are possible for Atlanta, decentering the neoliberal trajectory in space, place, and time.

This brings us to answering the central question of this dissertation: How can African American historical trajectories be lost or maintained when the neoliberal dominant hegemony homogenizes a metaphorical origin? I argue that spatial narratives are lost when they are romanticized and maintained when they are witnessed.

Though not explicitly defined in public memory and space and place scholarship, romanticizing of space can be articulated as the use of white racial and neoliberal framing to characterize and represent a space as a neat, uncontested, linear progression through time, leading to the image of Western man as superior being. The white racial frame is the dominant worldview, determining our understanding of racial stereotypes, narratives, images, and emotions and inclines us toward discriminatory actions. This framing constitutes identity by using white memory to construct the past in such a way that the dominant hegemony is seen as benevolent, whole, and harmonious. From this frame, the experience of the white patriarchy is privileged, while people of color are given supporting roles or dehumanized. This frame works

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in conjunction with neoliberal framing, which manufactures the public’s consent of private interests,\textsuperscript{90} including market determination, commodification, individualization, and competition\textsuperscript{91} to serve capital interest. Utilizing the white racial frame and a neoliberal framing, spaces are developed and revitalized to look like “common sense” and the expected progression for society.

To be successful in manufacturing the public’s consent of revitalization efforts, the spatial narrative presented by developers, the government, city planners, and policy makers must close off conflict and debate. Such representations are not difficult when public memory has already been manufactured toward amnesia of trauma. According to Victoria Gallagher,\textsuperscript{92} history is made acceptable when problems of the past are presented as progress, rather than framed within current failings. Memories that contest progress or present radical features of individuals are omitted to emphasize that past mistakes have been cleared up or made whole. Romanticizing represents the dominant hegemony as “benevolent, whole, harmonious,”\textsuperscript{93} or the white savior.\textsuperscript{94} Rather than presenting contested ideas or feelings, radicals are represented as cooperative or necessary toward the progression of the white patriarchy. The issue with such histories is that they reduce the possibilities of our societies to a single story and frame. It limits

\begin{footnotesize}

\textsuperscript{91} Phelan, S. Neoliberalism, Media and the Political. Springer, 2014.


\textsuperscript{94} Davis, Laying Claim: African American Cultural Memory and Southern Identity.
\end{footnotesize}
production and imagination of what the world could be, for the sake of protecting White superiority.

On the other hand, witnessing space is the responsible act of decentering white and neoliberal framing to acknowledge past errors, explore trauma, make uncomfortable, and bring visibility to the complexity of humanity for the sake of producing and remapping space. Beyond adding people of color and marginalized groups to history books, memorials, and art exhibitions, the act of witnessing brings the past injustices, trauma, and shameful memories to the forefront so that they can be acknowledged and interrogated for the purpose of redemption.95

In discussing the rhetorical power of visibility in Life magazine photographs of the Selma Marches of 1965, Gallagher and Kenneth Zagacki reveal that witnessing enables viewers to “recognize --- and confront the implications of -- themselves, their values, and their habits in actions and experiences of others.”96 While romanticizing is a process of creating amnesia, forgetting an unresolved or contested past, or reconfiguration, witnessing requires us to face our dark past and haunting memories. To do so spatially, would mean to bring forward the spatial narratives, past and current, that make us uncomfortable and require us to interrogate the social order that shaped the trauma, representation, and invisibility of a culture or community.

Witnessing is also important as an instrument that moves us from viewership to action through humanizing. In their discussion on visibility, Gallagher and Zagacki (argue that common humanity is made visible when we interrogate demeaning tropes and stereotypes that present others as inferior, increase recognition of complexity of human beings, and challenge our view of

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95 Davis, Laying Claim: African American Cultural Memory and Southern Identity.

what democracy is and what is actually occurring in America. By doing so, in the words of Gordon Parks, *Life* magazine’s first African American photographer, we are propelled to move “from an evil interlude to the conviction that there must be a better day(7).” Witnessing moves us from the trauma to the hope of reparation, reconciliation, and moral reckoning. Witnessing a space allows collective identities with historical trajectories in that space to be recognized as having a history, being a part of the spatial history, and extending the future of that space. City redesigns draw witness to a marginalized historical trajectory when they dispel stereotypes and challenge the presence or absence of democratic values within the revitalization process and outcomes.

This dissertation decenters the neoliberal spatial narrative to uncover the coexisting spatial narrative(s) of African Americans and critically evaluates how, if, and to what extent changes occurring in neighborhoods along the BeltLine romanticize or draw witness to those historical trajectories. In the following chapters, I use a narrative approach to rhetorical criticism of these historical narratives by charting them against the current spaces they inhabit. Each successive chapter includes an explanation of the integration of geography, qualitative, and rhetoric method used to assess the case.

Chapter two highlights place naming as a form of romanticizing the past through erasure. Place naming processes engage cultural politics that give voice to some and silence others. The historically black neighborhood of Blandtown, named for Samuel Bland, a Black man who purchased 4 acres of land in 1872, began undergoing gentrification in the early 2000s as

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developers purchased much of the dilapidated homes and drug houses in the area and replaced them with luxury homes. While Blandtown was once a thriving, low-income Black neighborhood, 1960s changes to its zoning from small single family residential to heavy industrial, hindered Black residents and homeowners and the population dropped by 71.9% between 1960 and 1990. This reflects a practice employed in other US cities to use industrial zoning as a buffer between black space and white space. After the near complete displacement of former black homeowners in Blandtown, the area was recognized as an industrial space. However, investors and gentrifiers set their sights on the neighborhood in the 21st century in anticipation of the BeltLine construction, and the neighborhood became known as “West Midtown” in signage and popular conversation. Meanwhile, the neighborhood still holds the proper name of Blandtown in city records. As a local artist works to reclaim the name “Blandtown” in popular tongue, the case provides an interesting study for understanding interconnectivity of narrative trajectories. It presents a unique view of how history is determined for a locale after the original place-makers have long departed. And as the first of the three case studies, the study of Blandtown reveals the long process of gentrification, proclaiming that though the Atlanta BeltLine has brought a magnifying glass to gentrification, it is not the author or originator of its course.

In chapter three, a walking history museum is brought to the fore to represent how a history can be used to witness the past, while also providing a romanticized view of what the

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future holds for African Americans within the space. Understanding Atlanta’s long connection to civil rights, author and historian Karcheik Sims-Alvarado curated an exhibition along the Atlanta BeltLine titled “Images of America: Atlanta and the Civil Rights Movement.” The temporary exhibition includes 60 images along a total of 4 miles of the BeltLine’s Eastside and Westside trails. It offers an interesting visual juxtaposed to the present urban renewal project as the Eastside and Westside trails have glaring economic and cultural differences. My rhetorical analysis of the spatial narratives created by the Civil Rights Walking Museum and its interaction with the trajectories of the historically Black and low-income Eastside trail, and historically upper- to middle-class white Westside Trail acknowledges the complexities of spatial histories and the effects of multiple trajectories on each other. Chronologically, this chapter represents the goals of equality and opportunity necessary.

In chapter four, I turn to the changing urban landscape and built environment of the Atlanta Westside trail, establishing the way urban renewal in a local Black neighborhood romanticizes black history by making black spatial narratives invisible. The Westside trail is transforming West End with the reformation of a 22-acre warehouse space into a local spot catered to the craft brewing subculture, known as the Lee + White development. Encompassing a ½ mile of the Westside trail, Lee + White is centered on the new gateway to the neighborhood. Understood within the racialized history and social context of the beer and alcohol industry in Atlanta and the spatial context of West End’s shifting built environment, the Lee + White development, dubbed “Malt Disney,” provides a legible text for unveiling how cultural gentrification is dependent upon and intertwined with racism of the past. In this chapter, I complete a rhetorical analysis of the chronological and spatial deep map of the West End, providing a clear view of how space and built environment are used to separate black and white
culture and subordinate Black memorial narratives, leading to the exclusion of black people from cultural belonging through identification with the space.

In Chapter Five, I conclude by revealing the broader contributions of this research. The results are twofold: 1) by accessing the spatial narrative of the marginalized, urban designers, policy makers, and community leaders can reimagine the public space in a way that allows multiple narratives to coexist, 2) a method of rhetorical analysis that determines whether a historical trajectory will be displaced or maintained because of city changes can provide a critical process for evaluating future city designs with the goal of continuing heterogenous trajectories and collective identities. The concluding chapter comes full circle to provide guidance on future use of these integrative methods of rhetoric, geography, and qualitative research in gentrification and urban revitalization studies.

In this research, I seek to readjust our gaze to view Atlanta not as transit crossings, interstates, highways, railways, or physical land of conquest. Rather, I will look directly at kinships, the spaces created through social connectivity of bodies upon bodies and people within space, methods of communication, and aesthetic renderings of identification, which comprise the collective identities of the disparate neighborhoods of Atlanta. I will do this by observing the BeltLine as a text and specifically researching three spatial narratives within that text.

The chapters are organized chronologically to highlight African American construction of belonging to place post-Civil War, during the civil rights movement, and after the movement. Each of these spatial narratives is positioned within the historical lineage that established the metaphor of Atlanta as the “Black Mecca.” They are 1) the lost historically Black neighborhood of Blandtown, 2) the 4-mile long “Images of America: Atlanta and the Civil Rights Movement, 1944-1968” art exhibit along the BeltLine, and 3) the historical and spatial narrative of West
End’s built environment. Here I seek to reveal if these spatial narratives romanticize or draw witness to African American collective identities.

These three cases address three communicative modes for responding to cultural gentrification: place naming, memorializing, and building. Each case analysis results in a theory of spatial narratives that addresses how spatial narratives can be rhetorically constructed to enable identification, transcendence, and ultimately, a sense of belonging and citizenship, for African Americans in cities undergoing urban renewal. Following this thread, we learn that as we choose to witness, rather than romanticize history, we move closer to building diverse spaces where cultures see a substance of themselves in the public, transcend differences between themselves and differing others, and form an identifiable belonging.
Black Atlantans often use the term “Old Atlanta” and “New Atlanta,” to differentiate those Atlantans that were born and raised in the city prior to the 1996 Olympics, and those that migrated after. Sometimes, when you say “Beltline” to someone from Old Atlanta, it is not the “BeltLine,” Gravel’s 22-mile loop of trails and streetcars that they assume you are referencing, but the original “belt lines”, the four railroad lines that arrange in a rough circle outside of the center city. The railroads are what they remember first because they worked them, they laid the tracks, kept them maintained, and even cut the grass around them.

The belt line elucidates as much about Atlanta’s formation as the BeltLine will explain about its future. The city was founded in expectancy of the railroad junction between the Western & Atlantic Railroad in 1837 connecting trade routes into the southern United States. Toward the Civil War’s end, On September 1, 1864, Union General William Tecumseh Sherman followed the Western & Atlantic Railroad south, fighting along the way, until he captured Atlanta for President Abraham Lincoln. Before heading to Savannah, he burned the city and destroyed the railroads. During Reconstruction Atlanta’s railroads were rebuilt and the economy expanded. New line systems linked at the junction, which amounted to congestion and back-ups along the train routes for passengers and freight to Atlanta. To relieve the traffic along the commute, four companies built the four railroads that would become the belt line; they were the Seaboard Air Line Belt Railway, Louisville & Nashville Belt Railroad, Southern Railway Decatur Street Belt, and Atlanta & West Point Belt Line (Figure 2.1). I start this dissertation here: At a black neighborhood that formed after the Civil War at the Seaboard Air Line Belt Railway.
In 2014, artist Gregor Turk having been commissioned by Art on the Atlanta BeltLine, developed public-art along the future space of the Northside BeltLine that would cross through his neighborhood, Blandtown, which sits along the Seaboard Air Line Belt Railway tracks. Using billboards, Turk lined the future trail with images of General Sherman’s eyes making a statement that intersected public memory of the Civil War battle that won Georgia from the confederacy with the current conception of Atlanta’s present and future outlook. Once the temporary art
installation was over, Turk was inspired to reuse one of the billboards, this time to engage another portion of our memory, one of neighborhood identity. As more gentrifiers started buying up property around Turk’s 1943-built studio, the references to the area as “West Midtown” lead him to create a signpost for his front yard. He covered the billboard with an image of an Indian-head test pattern, a symbol he remembered from the 70s and 80s, used by television stations to note that they were “off the air.” Across the test signal image he inscribed the words “Welcome to the Heart of Blandtown.”

Turk’s billboard represents the ambiguity of the neighborhood’s name. Luxury condominiums, apartments, single-family homes and retail spaces being built in Blandtown in the wake of urban renewal, use the name “West Midtown” in their signage and public documentation, erasing the vestures of the working class black neighborhood “Blandtown” that formed around the belt line. The billboard begs the questions, as gentrifiers without a connection to Blandtown’s past move in and developers continue tearing down and building up, is Blandtown going “off-the-air”? And like television networks that signed back on air in the morning, what will Blandtown be when it comes back? Gregor’s symbolic actions, along with those of other members of the neighborhood, have led to a continued struggle for reclaiming the name “Blandtown” in popular vernacular. These symbolic choices made regarding the name of Blandtown, one of the first free-black settlements in Atlanta and a space where all original black residents have been displaced, provide insight into the power of place-names to romanticize or draw witness to collective identities and multiple historical trajectories in diverse spaces. Such judgment is most appropriately found through a narrative approach to understanding Blandtown’s place-name, a historical narration that began in 1870. This rhetorical consideration
of naming a historically black neighborhood demonstrates that drawing witness requires a commemoration of the dialectical tensions embodied in realistic spatial narratives.

A map of the city of Atlanta (2013)\textsuperscript{100} will reflect the city’s racial divide, with majority white suburbs to the north, and southern suburbs housing a majority black population. Of all the historically black settlements in Atlanta, Blandtown was one the furthest northern suburbs\textsuperscript{101} and throughout its existence it has grappled with pressures from industrialization and gentrification. Eventually industrialization won and forced the displacement of black residents between the 1950s and 1990s. By the early 2000s with the development of Atlantic Station\textsuperscript{102} about 2 miles east of the neighborhood and excitement of the BeltLine, Blandtown gained development attention once again and it is now a fully gentrified Atlanta suburb. The neighborhood still deals with the pressures of industry in a mixed industrial and residential setting. The dialectical tensions, or ideological struggles revealed discursively, that have shaped Blandtown’s identity for the past 150 years are both racial and neoliberal. However, the history of these tensions has all but been forgotten under the popularized name “West Midtown.”

\textsuperscript{100} Cable, Dustin A. “Racial Dot Map.” University of Virginia: Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, Rector and Visitors of the University of Virginia, 2013. https://demographics.virginia.edu/DotMap/.

\textsuperscript{101} Map of Atlanta: Areas Occupied Chiefly by Negroes (Atlanta-Fulton County Joint Planning Board, 1959), https://atlmaps.org/project/explore.

\textsuperscript{102} The Atlantic Station development project became a vision in 1997, prior to the formation of the Atlanta BeltLine Project. Atlantic Station is a redevelopment of the once contaminated site of a steel mill that was open from 1901-1998. Today, Atlantic Station encompasses 138 acres and is a center for shopping, luxury housing, and restaurants, west of midtown Atlanta. See also De Sousa, Christopher, and Lily-Ann D’Souza. “Atlantic Station, Atlanta, Georgia: A Sustainable Brownfield Revitalization Best Practice.” University of Illinois at Chicago: Institute for Environmental Science and Policy, 2013. And Chamberlain, Lisa. “Building a City Within the City of Atlanta.” The New York Times, May 24, 2006, sec. Real Estate.
The power of names as more than just signifiers of a place has become an area of interest in multiple fields of scholarship, including geography, anthropology, psychology, and communications. Star Vanguri, editor of the volume “Rhetorics of Names and Naming,” attests that place-names circulate cultural narratives that are rhetorically influential in linking the past to the present through commemorative naming. Current research in rhetorical onomastics and place has focused on street naming. Derek H. Alderman’s extensive research on Martin Luther King Jr street names reveals the ways in which the power over naming reflects social injustices, giving some the ‘right to participate’ and others the ‘right to appropriate.’ In another example, Derek Handley reveals how claiming the name of a street corner can be used to declare the space in a counter-hegemonic move of resistance to gentrification. But beyond understanding who has the power to name and how they use this power, it is a necessity to reflect on how a name narrativizes a space in such a way that could potentially romanticize the past, leading to repetitions of past injustices because the moral lessons have been erased. I put forward that commemorative names can draw witness to a space and the dialectical tensions of the past in such a way that provides meaning for the future “something-to-be-done” by focusing on shared relationships with land.


104 According to Alderman and Inwood the ‘right to appropriate’ is the right to “rework the spatial and social relations that have historically reproduced racially segregated urban space (220)” and the ‘right to participate’ is the right of citizens to “assert their use-rights and directly challenge the hegemony of property rights and the valuing of urban space as a commodity to exchange (224).” See Alderman, Derek, and Joshua F. J. Inwood. “Street Naming and the Politics of Belonging: Spatial Injustices in the Toponymic Commemoration of Martin Luther King Jr.” Social & Cultural Geography 14, no. 2 (2013): 211–33.

By directing attention to the relationship different cultures have had with shared land, a narrative of a location can reflect the true performance, or what critical theorist Homi Bhabha calls, the realities of history that formed the space. Bhabha argues that nations are formed by the discursive act of narration. A nation develops from the story that is told and most widely the nation’s story is an arbitrary construction of linear progress that makes quasi-fictive connections without ambiguity or contradictions. But in the realities of history, a nation is formed by a lived story that is repetitive, recursive, ambiguous, and often conflicting. The arbitrary story builds an “us vs them” dynamic, centering its “nationness” on those things that are outside of it.106 Here, I apply Bhabha’s theory of narrating a nation to the local level to the limited extent that just as a nation is a “system of cultural signification” and “representation of social life,”107 so is a local municipality so long as it can be understood by the “large cultural systems that preceded it.”108 For these local purposes, the neighborhood represents the cultural and social life of a smaller community within a larger/national cultural system of competing ideologies. I argue that for a neighborhood, to allow multiple diverse historical trajectories to live, the narrative must be formed in such a way that brings that which has historically been “outside” within, allowing for the dialectical conflicts and ambiguity to be mediated and challenged within the narrative. I propose that a narrative approach to assessing place-names reveals “West Midtown” as an arbitrary construction of neighborhood identity, and the reclamation of “Blandtown” gives


107 Bhabha, “Introduction: Narrating the Nation,” 1

opportunity to a dialogically coherent commemorative name that functions to create temporal continuity between the past and the present.

Gentrification is a process that begins long before the physical urban renewal changes we see today. The story of Blandtown and the narrative of the neighborhood name, centers this research in the understanding that while Atlanta BeltLine is not the progenitor of gentrification and displacement, it provides a contemporary moment for society to evaluate history and identity in space. In this chapter, I will explore the literature on narrative coherence and collective identity, revealing the importance of dialogical coherence to diverse historical trajectories. Next, I discuss the narrative approach used to excavate a deep map of Blandtown that links the past to the present. Then, I critically assess the major dialectical conflicts from Blandtown’s history, providing evidence from that past that reveals racializing and neoliberalizing of Blandtown’s space. Finally, utilizing archival material and interview data, I will excavate the history and the metaphorical meanings associated with “West Midtown” and “Blandtown.” Comparing the two different associations, I will commence with an analysis of “Blandtown’s” spatial narration formed by the oral stories of displaced and current residents. This chapter reveals the requirement of dialogical coherence, incorporating the recursive, repetitive, contradictory, and conflicting into one cohering story anchored to place. I argue that when the buildings and the people that make up the indigenous culture have been displaced, witnessing can occur when accurate history is excavated, and neighborhood names are rhetorically enacted for commemorative naming and dialogical coherence.
2.1 Narrating Neighborhood Identity and the Problem of Narrative Coherence

Narrative coherence refers to the structure of a narrative. According to Walter Fisher, the rationality and probability of a historical narrative is determined by whether it coheres in such a way that leaves it free of contradictions. Coherence is particularly important because stories are meant to be told and audiences seek to understand and find logic in the stories they hear. Such rationality leads to practical wisdom that inspires lived actions based on the moralizing theme of the narrative. The problem of this non-contradictory view of narrative coherence is that it doesn’t reflect that the reality of history is inconsistent and conflicting. Regarding history of places, the spatial identity is formed by multiple narratives that may have conflicting values and ideologies. The practice of seeking narrative coherence often leads to homogenous, romanticized stories that valorize the group in power, and cover up the lessons that should be learned from the past. If spatial narrative coherence is unsuccessful in arranging diverse historical trajectories, it is because the dominant narrative does not incorporate the dialectical differences within the space.

This problem of narrative coherence has been most prominently discussed in psychology and business management research. In his study of organizational narratives, Andrew Brown attests that most organizations have an agent that constructs the narrative for their audience. However, such narratives normally undermine marginalized voices, leading to a more quasi-fictive story about the organization. While groups actually have multi-voiced identities, created discursively through the social trading of stories, the one that is communicated is often

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monolithic, creating the impression of continuity, homogeneity, and linear progress. Dan Mcadams, studying self-identity, also reveals that though we rationalize our life-stories to have cohering meaning that explains how we came to be and who we are, in actuality the self is more dialogical. He argues that the “dialogical self” incorporates the different voices, supporting both separation and coherence within one life-story. Considering the dialogical self we can better understand the dialogical identity of our neighborhoods. The marginalization of conflicting voices forms the quasi-fictive story of the neighborhood identity and gives the impression of linear progress. Narrative coherence in neighborhood storytelling is a reflection of the ideology of those in power, and not the true identity of the neighborhood. Such a focus on non-contradictory coherence leads to romanticizing the spatial narrative.

Seeking narrative coherence without contradiction is particularly detrimental to the conception of ethnically shared places like the “Black Mecca.” When Phyl Garland said that Atlanta “might well turn out to be the town that taught a nation how to live,” she also attested that it would not occur unless whites and blacks were sincere about their aims for the city. The neoliberal objective, motivated by capitalism, is the exigence for the spatial narrative for Atlanta and its gentrifying neighborhoods. This neoliberal purpose leads to homogenizing the spatial narrative under a conception of continuous economic progress. The unfortunate result of neoliberalizing space is that “the nation’s ideal desire to build a perfect community necessarily


112 Mcadams, “The Problem of Narrative Coherence.”

implies a violent repression of what it constitutes as its imperfect other,"¹¹⁴ says American studies scholar Katrine Dalsgard in her interpretation of Toni Morrison’s *Paradise* (1998). In the novel, Morrison’s narration of the fictive black neighborhood Ruby reveals that when traumatic events or unwanted people of the past are disregarded as “other” or “out of line” with the essentialist views of progress, the people of that neighborhood will stop taking responsibility for the problems. Cohering stories disrupt diverse historical trajectories by breaking links to the past that provide lessons learned for the future and collective connection to place.

So, can spatial narratives in ethnically diverse places ever cohere? Yes. Theories by Bhabha on narrating a nation reveal that spatial narratives can have what I will refer to as *sublime coherence*. This is the idea that by bringing the “other” within the story, the contradictions can be mediated and dealt with. This notion harks back to the theory that narrative witnessing forces a “something-to-be-done.” In order to mediate the dialectical tensions without erasing the differences, “something-has-to-be-done” to support the multiple voices within the story. The ideology and moral reasoning suggested by the narrative attributes to lived actions. It forms a recognizable moral imperative that can be applied to the formation and conception of ethnically diverse spaces.

Bhabha reveals that there are two types of stories, the pedagogical and the performative. The pedagogical story is based on accumulative temporality, or linear progression told to give the story coherence. It is an arbitrary, quasi-fictive construction that separates language from reality. Its lived effect is toward forgetting and obligates people to the state’s aims, which are, I

argue, ideologically neoliberal and racialized. On the other hand, the performative story is based on the repetitious, recursive, double narrative movement of history that occurs in reality. It is a liminal narrative, holding a position that includes those that are “in-group” and “out-group.” Marginal discourse is a necessity for the performative narrative. The marginal voice lives in the pedagogical representation and exemplifies the ambiguity of historical trajectories.\textsuperscript{115} For the practice of witnessing, we seek the performative story.

The challenge then for sublime coherence is integrating the discourse of cultural difference into present cultural performances. Citing Foucault, Bhabha argues that integration goes beyond seeking visible cultural differences (like adding people of color to street art). Integration requires cultural difference to be incorporated into the narration of the nation. What emerges, Bhabha says, is “a hybrid national narrative that turns the nostalgic past into the disruptive ‘anterior’ and displaces the historical present – opens it up to other histories and incommensurable narrative subjects.”\textsuperscript{116} In this case study, the goal is to anchor cultural difference in the narration of the neighborhood so that the dialectical tensions can be renegotiated in the lived space. Using Bhabha’s terms, the neighborhood association and residents of Blandtown are in “a position to translate the differences between them [the past and the present, race and gender] into a kind of solidarity.”\textsuperscript{117} Forming such a solidarity is a rhetorically sublime act, according to Lauret Savoy,\textsuperscript{118} as it articulates oneness where there would otherwise be separation.

\textsuperscript{115} Bhabha, “DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation.”
\textsuperscript{116} Bhabha, “DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation.” 318
\textsuperscript{117} Bhabha, “DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation.” 320
I argue that sublime coherence can be formed for Blandtown, a space where original black residents have been displaced, by uniting the liminal past and present in such a way that allows the people of the present to draw on their shared connection to place. Such work is important for anchoring collective identity and maintaining continuity. For Blandtown, uniting the past to the present draws witness to the practices of neoliberalism that leads to displacement, and forces the group to deal with the issues of the past in the present. What I am suggesting is that neighborhood identity in ethnically shared spaces can successfully possess multiple historical trajectories within one spatial narrative when they translate the conflict, trauma, and joys of the past to oneness with place.

2.2 Narrative Approach and Critical Analysis

The goal of this chapter is to explore spatial narratives produced by place-names. As discussed earlier, place-names narrate space with culture, ideology, and heritage and can be used for commemorative naming in an act of witnessing black collective identities. Blandtown serves as a useful location for this study. Blandtown, officially located between Huff Road, Marietta St, and Howell Mill Road on the Westside of Atlanta, was one of the northern most black suburbs in the city until the population progressively decreased from displacement between the 1960s-1990s. Unlike some of the southwest Atlanta black suburbs that have fostered heavy attention from historians interested in the black business, education, and finance districts, Blandtown has been left unexcavated. What is known is that the neighborhood was once a growing and thriving lower-class black area whose residents found employment with the belt line railway. Yet, they were displaced because of zone changes that favored industry over black residential homes.

Despite the loss of material details of the location’s past black identity, some gentrifiers, in preparation for Atlanta BeltLine construction, have become involved in reclaiming its name for popular consumption, which has materialized in questions regarding the future identity of the neighborhood, the need to anchor to a past, and determining which past is to be remembered when the original black residents have been displaced. These questions are materially recognizable in the signage used to brand the area as “West Midtown” and countering signs that read “Blandtown.” Thus, Blandtown provides a unique illustration of the problems of narrative coherence versus dialogical coherence in ethnically diverse spaces. Using a narrative approach to critical analysis, I excavate the major dialectical tensions of Blandtown’s history and the metaphorical meaning of the names “Blandtown” and “West Midtown.” By examining how place-naming can draw witness, we can gain greater insight into how we use neighborhood names as acts of narrative commemoration for marginalized collective identities.

Newspaper and government archival data, and interviews with current residents, business owners, and former indigenous residents, provide a means for identifying the tensions and the competing narratives of the neighborhood circulated by the names. Maps and Atlanta Journal Constitution newspaper articles were collected from the Atlanta History Museum. Property deeds from the Georgia Archives and the Fulton County Clerk of Courts were used to discover original residents. In order to verify family names, locations, and associations, census data was retrieved from Ancestry.com.

To understand the associated meanings of “Blandtown” and “West Midtown” interviews were completed with displaced residents and current residents actively involved in the neighborhood association. There are few living original black residents that were alive during Blandtown’s prime as a thriving black neighborhood, 1870-1970. Three original residents were
found, and one passed away during the time of this research study. The current residents invited for interviews were invited from the Blandtown Neighborhood Association. These five individuals underwent one interview session that lasted between one and two hours. Along with other questions, they were asked about their knowledge of the neighborhood’s history, vision of Blandtown’s future in light of the BeltLine, and associated meanings they give to the name “Blandtown” vs “West Midtown (see Appendix for full list of questions).” Note that to maintain anonymity interviewee names have been omitted.

To form the historical narrative of the neighborhood, the history of Blandtown from 1870 to the present is compiled using the collected data and analyzed for trends. Specifically, the data was assessed to determine the major conflicts in Blandtown’s past. The conflicts can be categorized as 1) neoliberal, the residents versus industry, and 2) racial, black space vs white space. The narrative associated with “West Midtown” is determined by the current history presented to new residents and investors, as well as interviewee descriptions. The narrative associated with “Blandtown” is determined by primary data regarding original residents, the oral history for the residents interviewed, and interviewee descriptions of “Blandtown” as a place-name. In this study, I work to unmask the naming of Blandtown and understand the cultural narrative that is being circulated by the “West Midtown” nomenclature.

I argue that sublime, cohering narratives symbolized by the name “Blandtown” work to witness the conflicting, contradictory, and recursive past. I develop this analysis over the next three sections. The first section explores the dialectical tensions associated with the performative spatial narration of Blandtown. The second section situates the pedagogical cohering narrative produced by “West Midtown” as a false narrative that romanticizes space. The third section
assesses the dialogically cohering narratives of “Blandtown” as expressed discursively by current residents and displaced indigenous residents during interviews.

2.3 Performing Space: Blandtown’s Dialectical Tensions

Bhabha argues that a nation, in performance is recursive, repetitive and double-voiced. The history of Blandtown includes two major trends, racial and neoliberal. The racial trend exposes the conflicts between white and black space. The neoliberal tensions are represented by conflicts between residents and industry. Taken as a whole, an analysis of the trends reveals the interconnections of systemic racism with neoliberalism. Confirming that white economic domination occurs at the expense of marginalized, racialized “others.” Below, I outline the performative historical narration of Blandtown within these two, interconnected dialectical tensions.

2.3.1 Racialized Space

The racialization of space is a major trend reflected throughout the United States and in the formation of Blandtown. Space is actively produced and shaped by racist social policies. Blandtown reflects a black geography, or a racialized demographic pattern “shaped by historical precedent” in Atlanta. The racial pattern forming Blandtown is produced by separatist ideology, which forges distinct black spaces and white spaces.

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120 Bhabha, “DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation.”


Officially, Blandtown is the entire area between Marietta Street (to the West), Howell Mill Road (to the East) and Huff Road to the South. However, when spoken of in pre-1990s news articles, maps, and real estate sales, the Blandtown area is sometimes referenced as the smaller “negro settlement” roughly between Fairmont (to the West) Ashby (to the East), Morris Avenue (to the North) and just beyond Huff Road (to the South) by the Seaboard Air Line Railroad lines (Error! Reference source not found.).

Figure 2.2 Map of Blandtown Boundaries. The black boundaries represent the official bounds of Blandtown. The green bounds represent the connotation of Blandtown’s bounds as a negro settlement. The pink line shows the projected future location of the BeltLine trail. Street map from Google Maps (2020).
After the Civil War, Blandtown became a place for Black people, likely because it was an unwanted portion of unincorporated land. Seven years after the Emancipation Proclamation, on October 2, 1872 free plasterer Samuel Bland (1821 – unconfirmed), a “mulatto” according to 1880s census data, purchased 4 acres of land for $200 from Rev. Francis A Kimball who owned 26 acres in that area. In 1873, Samuel willed the acreage to his “mulatto” wife, Lavinia “Viney” Bland (1821-1914). The small plot of lower level land sat between the property of white owners A.K. Seago and F.A. Kimball. It is written that the Bland family was thought of highly by their white neighbors and “Aunt Viney” was the midwife for many of the white children’s births in Cook District, as it was known at the time.124 Viney retained the complete 4 acres until 1892.

In 1891, Viney invested in 12 stocks of the Southern Mutual Building and Loan Association (SMBLA), but she requested an advance on her shares prior to their maturity, thus losing a portion of the land for payment on the stock-backed loan the next year. In 1892, she sold another portion of the land for $800 to the Georgia Northern Railway Co., which was later bought by the Southern Railroad Company in 1966. Viney’s son Felix bought another 1/8th acre of adjacent land from a black landowner in an adjoining lot. In 1901, Felix purchased a portion of the land from his mother for $90 and Viney willed the rest of the land to her children, Felix, Richard, Cherry, and Charlie. By 1923, Felix was the last living of his siblings. Prior to her death Cherry in 1920 sold a portion of her land to R.A. Sims and the Blandtown Christian Church. Felix sold his land to R.A. Sims in 1918. At the time of death, Cherry’s last living heirs, two children and a grandson were deeded the land.125

124 Mabelle Pickert, History of Cook’s District in Fulton County, Atlanta, Ga, 1956.

125 Other documents show that at some point Felix Bland came to organize a church, the Rocky Mountain Christian Church (Pickert, 1956). He was the Reverend, but the church stopped operating in 1951.
Having been retained by the Blands for at least 50 years, the area became known as Blandtown and the street they lived on, Bland St.\textsuperscript{126} The neighborhood was home to an elementary school for black students, three or four churches,\textsuperscript{127} 1,410 homes, and a population of approximately 5,500 by 1956.\textsuperscript{128} Prior to 1921, the black children traveled more than a mile over dangerous railroad tracks to get to Rockdale Park School. However, after St. Peters’ Church trustees offered some space in their building, the Fulton County commission provided equipment and teachers for a school in Blandtown in 1921.\textsuperscript{129} In 1924, parents and businesses put their money together to purchase a lot and build a two-room school. In 1934, they added one and a half rooms to the building. By 1956 the enrollment was 138, and there were 5 teachers.\textsuperscript{130} Former residents were proud as they referenced the work the community did to establish a home in this often environmentally inhospitable portion of Atlanta.

An early resident who first moved to Blandtown with his parents from Virginia in the 1920s and found their home in a small plot of land recounts, “We weren’t there because it was the best place to be. We were there because it was the only place Black people were allowed to be.” At the time the neighborhood had no running water, no inside toilet, and no electricity. It was a plot of unwanted ground surrounded by heavy industrial business owners, railroad lines

\textsuperscript{126} District 17 Landlot 188 (Fulton County Board of Assessors, 1970-1980), Book 186, Kenan Research Center.

\textsuperscript{127} Historical records and interviews data contradict on the number of churches. In some cases, the discrepancy may be because of church name changes. The following churches are cited as having been in Blandtown, Rocky Mountain Christian Church (ceased operation in 1951, Pickert 1956), Greater Bethel Methodist Church, Blandtown Christian Church, and St. Peter Baptist Church. It is unclear where Rocky Mountain Christian Church and Blandtown Mountain Christian Church are the same.

\textsuperscript{128} Pickert, History of Cook’s District in Fulton County, Atlanta, Ga.

\textsuperscript{129} “Colored School Offered County in Blandtown,” \textit{Atlanta Constitution}, September 2, 1920.

\textsuperscript{130} Pickert, History of Cook’s District in Fulton County, Atlanta, Ga.
and white residents in neighboring areas. A fire struck Blandtown on March 13, 1938, “destroying 15 houses, a church and two restaurants.” The newspaper stated that the blaze started in a neighbor’s home and was easily spread by the wind because the “negro settlement” was on rolling ground with no building or trees to break the gust. Such information reflects the continued danger that black residents faced there.

The space for blacks was made ever more distinctive as real estate agents designated surrounding properties as white only. An advertisement for an auction sale of lots bordering the black area of Blandtown on April 22, 1911 read, “The property is restricted to Whites and no negroes can ever own this property, thus insuring its character and worth.” While it was left as industrial designation on the 1938 Home Owners’ Loan Corporation Residential Security map (largely recognized as the map used for redlining), city government maps of Atlanta used for city planning sessions of the 1950s designate Blandtown as “Negro Occupied” or a “Negro Residential Area.

In the Atlanta Constitution articles from the first decade of the 1900s, Blandtown residents were described as “vagrant” and living “profligate existences” at the “negro settlement.” Such characterizations continued into the mid-part of the century as patrolmen

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136 The Atlanta Constitution, September 6, 1906:4
stalked residents of Blandtown, taking them to jail on Sunday if they were found not attending church services. A report from Blandtown youth says that two county patrolmen told a youth “to go to church or to jail.” When the youth didn’t go to church he was threatened by the officers and taken to jail where he stayed for 11 days.137

Socially, neighboring white areas attempted to distance themselves from the stigmas of poverty and crime that characterized Blandtown. After a murder in Blandtown in 1914, it was reported in the Atlanta Constitution that neighboring “citizens” on Howell Mill road “want it understood that Blandtown…is not located on the Howell Mill road.” The writer quoted a Howell Mill resident as saying, “our people are not the sort who do such a thing.”138

Distinguishing the assumed white “citizen” on Howell Mill Road from Blandtown’s “negro settlement,” the article writers in these first decade 20th century papers rhetorically marked the difference between white space and black space. The spatial assignment was also used to characterize white people as “citizens” and black people as inhabitants of the area.

Even today, in a more affluent and gentrified Blandtown, if we look at it from the scope of greater Atlanta, it becomes a centering point for Atlanta’s segregated geography. One interviewee, a current resident of Blandtown described the moment she noticed the separation between black and white space in Atlanta and the significance of Blandtown to this spatially. She noted that the Atlanta Police Department (APD) breaks Atlanta into six defined zones used to distribute officer assignments and manage response times. Each of these zones has public safety meetings with residents in the area. In March 2019, the Blandtown zone was realigned, giving Blandtown’s neighborhood association president a distinct view of the two zones between which

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Blandtown lies. Prior to March, Blandtown was part of Zone 2, encompassing majority white and affluent neighborhoods to the North including Buckhead. The resident remembers walking into a Zone 2 meeting and immediately noticing that she was the youngest person in the room of retired white men and women. She recalls,

“I’m not saying they were assholes. But there was no diversity around that table. It was an old white man talking to a bunch of old white people. And I was one of them [laughs]. But I’m the only one that seemed to notice this. I walked in… I was like… is this the city of Atlanta? Or am I finding myself transported to East Cobb somehow. It was bizarre.”

At the Zone 2 safety meeting populated by the white patriarchy the safety discussion revolved around decreasing car break-ins. But in March, Blandtown was moved to Zone 1, largely encompassing areas southwest of Zone 2, with majority black (at least 80% of the population is black)\(^{139}\) and a greater population of lower income families (average income is less than $46,789).\(^{140}\) When the interviewee walked into her first Zone 1 meeting she was now representing one of the more affluent areas in her zone and she and a friend were the only white people around the table. She also recognized that there was a different set of problems. “As a community they were getting together, talking about how do we get people to actually call 911.” She recalls,

“And just as I sat at that first meeting and went ‘holy shit this is two Atlantas right here.’ I just went from one Atlanta to the second Atlanta and Blandtown is a crucible for that. Blandtown is like one little piece that reflects that dichotomy.”

Blandtown sits in the middle of white, affluent Atlanta to the North, and black, less affluent Atlanta to the Southeast. While Blandtown started as a “negro settlement”, any remnants


\(^{140}\) “Community Profile.”
of that past are basically far gone as it has been gentrified. According to census tract data made available by the Association of Religion Data Archives, the annual growth rate was 5.8% from 2012-2017. Approximately 70% of housing units in the area were built after year 2000, which reflects the amount of new development in Blandtown and indicates higher income levels. The largest race in the area is White (non-Hispanic), accounting for 59.8% of the population. Majority of the (%) units are renter occupied, with 75.4% of renters spending $1,000-$1,499 a month for rent. The average household income is between $60,539 and $76,163. Comparatively, to the southwest of Blandtown, the average income is less than $46,786. And neighborhoods directly north of Blandtown have higher income averages upwards of $102,392.\textsuperscript{141} The change in racial diversity and income of the area can largely be explained by the neoliberal trend in Blandtown’s history.

\textbf{2.3.2 Neoliberalizing Space}

Blandtown’s past and present history have a common conflict that goes beyond race, the tension between industry and residents. Prior to gentrifying, Blandtown residents were displaced because of a neoliberal political system that prioritized the voice of business over homeowners and renters.

After reconstruction, Blandtown became an industrial hotbed. The 1895 Cotton States and International Exposition was held for 100 days at what today is Piedmont Park. It was used to promote the city and southeast United States to businesses and investors around the world. There were two previous expositions in the 1890s, but the 1895 one was the most ambitious. At the exposition Booker T. Washington made his famed “Atlanta Compromise Speech” assuaging white fears of the Black race and encouraging African Americans to join agricultural and

\textsuperscript{141} “Community Profile.”
mechanical fields. This exposition led the way for industry growth in Blandtown and provides a frame for understanding the political and economic plan that still drives Atlanta today.

It was during the final decade of the 19th century that Blandtown would become an industrial area. According to research by Larry Keating, in the 1890s Seaboard Air Line Railroad company built a number of secondary tracks west of Blandtown. Other industries came into the area including stockyards, a mill, and a fertilizer factory. These businesses made the area inhospitable to local residents, but African Americans moving from other southern states like the Carolinas and Virginia were able to find jobs at the railroads there. The black workers developed the neighborhood and community. Residents that lived in the area from the 1920s to the 1960s recall the awful smells from the fertilizer plant and slaughterhouse. They were aware that they lived in unhealthy conditions.

Until 1952, Blandtown had been unincorporated, but the racial and neoliberal political strategy lead Mayor William B. Hartsfield to expand the city. In the mid-twentieth century, the city of Atlanta was experiencing large amounts of white flight, moving the white population to northern unincorporated suburbs and decreasing Hartsfield’s political power. In order to dilute black voting strength, Hartsfield initiated Atlanta’s Northern expansion, which included the annexation of Blandtown into city limits. From 1952 to 1954 new maps were published of Atlanta showing the black residential area. Even though Blandtown is noted as a resident occupied area on these maps, zoning decisions in 1954 reveal the city’s plan to rezone the area to

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144 “Map of Atlanta; Negro Residential Areas.”
industrial, making it apart of the Northwest Industrial Corridor. In 1956, zoning was switched from Small Single Family Residential (R-4) to Heavy Industrial (I-2). The main streets going through Blandtown were classified as truck routes by the Georgia Department of Transportation. The industrial zoning stipulated that residents could not repair their homes if the damage to them was above 50 percent of the property value. In addition, any new residential construction was prohibited. According to Keating, from 1960 to 1990, the community population dropped from 84 to 44 households and the population declined by 71.9 percent. Houses were demolished or left vacant.

Issues between residents that stayed and businesses persisted. As of 1989 there was an estimated 65 companies identified as having hazardous chemicals in Blandtown’s zip code area, 30318. Outspoken neighborhood president, Azalee Wharton invited officials to hear about the toxic chemical issues occurring in her town. As warehouses, chemical companies, and salvage yards took over the area, residents complained about the smell. A resident was hospitalized for three days after being exposed to chemicals from a Nottingham Chemical Company spill in the area.

The residents fought to get the zoning changed back to residential, but the voice of industry overpowered the citizens. Despite several reported issues between business practices and resident needs, the businesses argued that the law was in their favor. Speaking on behalf of the businesses that operated in and around Blandtown, Dan Little of Nottingham Chemical


146 Keating, Atlanta: Race, Class and Urban Expansion.

Company and Allan Venzer, who owned a warehouse, argued that the area was never zoned residential. In addition, they didn’t honor a tentative agreement made in 1991 that they would settle for I-1 (light industrial) zoning, which would shift business from being material-oriented to business and end-user oriented and help with some of the chemical pollution. City councilwoman Clair Mueller was able to get Blandtown coded as low-density residential in the 1991 Comprehensive Development Plan (CDP), but the Zoning Review Board, listening to the attorneys for Nottingham Chemical Company, did not approve the rezoning. Thus, while a map in the 1991 CDP designated the area as low-density residential, the change was never executed.

Much of this occurred because business needs were placed before the people. Nottingham Chemical Company formed their own neighborhood association and represented itself to the city as “the neighborhood.” Larry Keating recounts of the Nottingham Chemical Company:

They tried, sometimes successfully, to intimidate the residents by telling them that their property would decline in value if residential zoning were obtained. They hired lawyers and planning consultants to attack and try to discredit the residents’ positions. And finally, in their most cynical move, they created a nonfunctioning charitable foundation, supposedly designed to aid residents in need. This foundation existed only on paper and never dispensed any money to anyone.

By 1993, the new community development plan designated Blandtown as industrial again. The city council voted to maintain the plan in 1994, citing that the houses were too dilapidated to remain residential. According to the Atlanta Voice, only one council member voted against it.

148 Coleman, “Residents of Industrial Area Waging Quixotic Zoning Fight.”
149 Keating, “Race, Class, and the Atlanta Housing Market.”
150 Keating, “Race, Class, and the Atlanta Housing Market.” 47
Even though the neighborhood has been completely gentrified, conflicts between residents and industry persist today. A proposal was made by Smyrna Ready Mix concrete-mixing facility at the end of 2018 to bring the concrete plant to Blandtown. The part of Blandtown that the property would sit on is zoned as heavy industrial but is also less than a mile from the future BeltLine Northwest trail and newly developed residences. Along with the environmental consequences of sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxide, and carbon monoxide emissions, the plant would hinder the already traffic constrained roads in the area, with approximately 60 truck trips per-day through their major streets.152 Outcries from residents lead the City of Atlanta Zoning Review Board to deny Smyrna Ready Mix’s land use permit in March 2019, but the residents aren’t out of the woods yet as it could go to court.153

What continued conflicts between resident and industry reveal is that the neoliberalization of space not only affects low-income communities, but newly gentrified ones. Though it is also important to recognize, if not to at least question, that for black low-income residents’ attempts by businesses to maintain control of the space were unjustly accepted, while those same attempts to majority white and economically stronger residents have been more effectively quelled. Such considerations amplify the claim that neoliberalism more readily persists as a form of systemic racism, instigating the impoverishment of African Americans for the profit of the dominant white hegemony. The persistent connection of these problems in Blandtown’s history makes it ever more important that the spatial narrative is not romanticized.


By witnessing the dialectical tensions that define Blandtown’s past and present, there is hope that in the future the traumatic past won’t repeat itself.

2.4 Pedagogical Space: Narrating “West Midtown”

Now that we understand the two tensions making up Blandtown’s performative past, we turn to the pedagogical narrative that is circulated by the name “West Midtown” and “Westside” the unofficial colloquial term used to describe the area along Howell Mill Road, Marietta St. and Huff Road. Another name association is “Westtown,” which is one of the major subdivision developments. Based on interviewer data, the colloquial use of the term “West” in official popular neighborhood name roughly began in the 1990s. It was also referenced along with neighboring areas as the “industrial corridor” or “industrial enclaves.” Distinguishing the area with the term “Midtown” separates it rhetorically from the non-white majority downtown and southwest Atlanta. It also segments the area from the affluent and older-wealthy areas of North Atlanta, or Buckhead, thusly positioning “West Midtown” for a certain kind of gentrifier with economic growth potential, such as working professionals, and young, college-educated families.

In this section, I will first illustrate, using contemporary narrations of the area, the narrative associated with “West Midtown”. Then, using interviewer responses, I reflect on the rhetorical meaning the name has for residents and visitors.

By the early 2000s newspaper articles start being published about the changes to Blandtown in the wake of developer outlooks and gentrification. These articles, along with public articulations of the area from the Atlanta Convention & Visitors Bureau and the Atlanta BeltLine, provide the spatial narrative that is being popularized under the name “West Midtown.” Using this data along with the following texts depicts the spatial narration of past, present, and future Blandtown as “West Midtown.” The narratives associated with “West
Midtown” romanticize Blandtown rhetorically by 1) erasing the racial trauma, 2) personifying industries and buildings, and 3) starting the past at year 2000, when developers and BeltLine ideators took notice.

2.4.1 Past – Erasing Racial Trauma and Personifying industries and buildings

Romanticizing the narration of this space begins by erasing the people of the past, particularly the African Americans and the racial tensions that formed the neighborhood. Some writers used inaccurate historical information that furthered the erasure of racial trauma all the way back to slavery. Using a false narrative of Blandtown’s history the dialogical tensions are presented as resolved.

The inaccurate narrative about Blandtown has been circulated through newspapers and scholarship. As journalists caught on to the rush of developers coming to the westside of Midtown at the turn of the century, the fictional story was brought to broader public circulation. In one version of the history, David Pendered writes,

Winter’s site is at the western tip of a historic black community called Blandtown. Bequeathed to a former slave who quickly lost it for not paying taxes, Blandtown grew after the Civil War as a housing development for blacks working in the freight yards and related industries.154

In another, journalist Diane Glassi reminisces on the industrial enclaves’ past “country feel” in a neighborhood originally formed for mill and railroad workers. She begins the spatial history before the Civil War marking the location as originally home to Cherokee and Creek Indians, which is a part of the larger Atlanta history. Then she continues noting the specific history of Blandtown:

Around 1890, the Seaboard railway supported a small community of homeowners in the area now known as Blandtown. Author Sarah Huff credits its name to an African-

American named Felix Bland, who took his surname from the white family who supported his education and deeded him land.155

This is the story that has been circulated about Blandtown by many journalists and academics. The narrative articulates Viney Bland inaccurately as a white slave owner who bequeathed her land to her slave Felix Bland, who then lost the land because of unpaid taxes. This fictionalized narrative works to romanticize the history and assuage racial tensions by presenting a white family as a savior to a Black man. Further, by claiming that Felix lost the land due to unpaid taxes the systemic racism enforced by the industrial takeover of the residential neighborhood is overshadowed. Such false stories of white benevolence to former slaves erase the history and doubles down on the act of forgetting, rather than witnessing the racism that brought Blandtown into being.

In addition, some twenty-first century journalists removed original black residents and the antagonistic business owners from the story by personifying the industries and buildings as the agent actors. This action reflects a neoliberal framing in narration that gives businesses the power to act and prioritizes the business voice at the expense of silencing human actors or placing responsibility on inanimate objects, rather than holding the responsible accountable.

At the turn of the century, the Atlanta Constitution dedicated at least two articles to changes occurring on the “northwest side of Atlanta.” Positioning the focus on the new housing market in zip code 30318, journalist John McCosh briefly writes about the area’s past:

The northwest side of Atlanta is home to the R.M. Clayton sewage treatment plant, an aging, smelly behemoth known for its spills into the Chattahoochee River. For decades the industrial area at the northern end of ZIP code 30318 was infamous for its drug-plagued apartments and public housing. But now a caravan of people buying in to the first new neighborhoods built there since World War II are bringing rapid change.156


Using the terms “drug-plagued apartments” and “public housing” the author erases the human element, deciding instead to articulate the buildings as the actors and the problem. In fact, in this article people do not enter the spatial narrative until the “caravan” of new (presumably white) people got there. The writing gives a negative connotation to the sewage treatment plant and other industries but makes references to the businesses and not the people that operate them. This negative perception spreads to the apartments and public housing, using buildings where the poor live as representations of human life. By doing so, McCosh translates that prior to the new arrivals, not only was the neighborhood undesirable, but the people were too.

Personifying buildings and industries is a practice that takes place in other public narrations of the space. For instance, the Atlanta Convention & Visitors Bureau makes no mention of Blandtown, instead articulating the neighborhood name colloquially as “West Midtown” and discussing the space as just a change in building use, rather than a change of people. Inviting visitors to the area, the text reads:

Atlanta’s West Midtown is reinventing itself. Once largely industrial, this area of town is now home to a likely selection of urban lofts, art galleries, live music venues, retail shops, restaurants and modern office space. Spanning from the southern tip of Howell Mill Road to 17th Street – and located minutes from downtown, Buckhead and all of Atlanta’s major highways and interstates – much of West Midtown retains its loft-style industrial identity as most of the new developments in the area have restored the once-neglected factories and warehouses that date back to the 1880s.157

In this articulation, human actors are completely removed, and the place holds all the agency. The “new developments” take on the animate action of “restoring” the “neglected factories and warehouses.” Giving the building the agency reflects a neoliberal framing that thinks and speaks in terms of economic factors. The writer does take note that the factories and

warehouses were “once-neglected” and draws the neglect back to the 1880s, implying that prior to the present moment, the space was uncared for and erasing the perception that it was ever home to anyone else.

### 2.4.2 Present and Future – Starting the story in year 2000

Other descriptions of the space erase Blandtown’s past by starting the past at the turn of the century, absenting everything that came before. This strategy was particularly used in the BeltLine Master Plan for the area, which articulates the planned build-out of trails, parks, and public transportation. Pronouncing the future of this area under the BeltLine development plan, Atlanta BeltLine Inc writes,

> The character of the Huff Road area has dramatically changed in the past ten years. What was historically a small railroad community (Blandtown) surrounded by rail lines and industrial development, is now a growing mixed-use neighborhood.\(^{158}\)

In this short description of the area, which is supposed to be used as the anchoring point for future design ideas, the plan writers focus only on the “past ten years,” as though history starts there. In fact, ten years prior to the writing of the 2007 plan, much of the indigenous black residents had already been displaced, leaving behind vacant and dilapidated homes surrounded by heavy industry. The “small railroad community” is not described here and the key elements of Blandtown’s historic past as one of the first black neighborhoods in the city is lost. This inhibits planners and readers from connecting the future BeltLine trail to Blandtown’s past.

### 2.4.3 The Problem of Narrative Coherence in “West Midtown”

The historical narrative associated with “West Midtown” most largely reflects the story of the industries with little to no mention of the residents that were displaced by these businesses.

\(^{158}\) “Atlanta BeltLine Master Plan: Subarea 8 Upper Westside-Northside Plan Recommendations” (Atlanta BeltLine, Inc, March 19, 2012), 6
Thus, the power to narrate the space is given to businesses and the story disregards the dialectical tensions between resident and business, creating seemingly linear progression from industrial land use to contemporary urban renewal. The inaccurate history circulated by the name that promotes white benevolences forgets the racial trauma of reality. Names hold meaning and interviewees responses provide additional support for how the name “West Midtown” addresses visitors and residents rhetorically. Each interviewee was asked “what does the name ‘West Midtown’ mean to you?” Separating the responses of current residents from original black residents, a discursive analysis reveals two associations with the name – 1) Whitewash and 2) Desecration of Memory.

The current resident interviewees use semblances of the metaphor “whitewash” to describe the meaning attached to “West Midtown.” To whitewash something is to cover it up and in the case of Blandtown, the metaphor specifically references the cultural whitening of the neighborhood by changing the name. One current resident expressed angst over some businesses seeking to rebrand all of the area as “West Midtown or “West Buckhead” and hanging up signs with those names. The interviewee said about “West Midtown,” “I think it has to do with them wanting to erase the history of the name and create the new whiter version of the neighborhood.” He continued, “West Midtown is a way of further erasing the history.”

Another current resident attests that reclaiming the history is a way to keep from “whitewashing it.” When asked about the name “Westtown” that the largest developer in the area used for his residential subdivision she states, “Honestly, it pisses me off every single time.” She continues:

Westtown seemed so contrived. And so unnatural and so clearly a marketing device that had no connection to the community at all. I mean they didn’t call it... I don’t know... they could have called it something. Huffroad corridor or Huff town. Or Mariettaville. Something that reflected the community around it. Westtown is just way too contrived a
name. So, I have no affinity for it. It actually has a very negative connotation to me because it just seems so forced.

The name new developers and business owners seek to use are considered a form of “branding” or “marketing” these residents conclude. Reflecting on the naming device in this way raises a key point about place-naming as strategic and “whitewashing” as a rhetorical device for claiming the space for the dominant culture.

Former residents have a slightly different take on the name “West Midtown” reflecting their concern for the loss of memory and history. One displaced resident who was born and raised in Blandtown from the mid-twentieth century responded at length about how the new name affected him, saying, in part:

So now people want to do away with that whole existence of what was and replace it with what is now and that’s what you call renovation. And you know sometimes, you just can’t renovate things. Sometimes you can only desecrate and so that’s what Blandtown is to me now. It’s a desecration of memories that in my mind were so important to my life until the only way that I can go out there now and be comfortable is to start in my mind flicking pictures. Snap shots. I got my camera on automatic and I’m not taking pictures, I’m putting pictures in place of what’s there now.

After his family moved from Blandtown in the ‘70s and he came home from the Vietnam War, he longed to go back to the place he remembered as “home.” He visits the neighborhood now and sees what city planners and developers call “renovation.” But to “renovate” is to repair, restore, or refurbish. The term “renovate” is most accurately used when we fix or clean up things that have been damaged by age. But he describes a key struggle with the use of “renovation” in the case of Blandtown and other areas experiencing what the city deems “urban renewal.” He argues this is not “renovation” but “desecration” because after they are done, no elements of the past remain. The name “West Midtown” is a reflection of this “desecration” because it is the removal of the last relic of Blandtown’s past, its name.
Take for another example displaced resident who, when asked what “West Midtown” means, stated matter-of-factly, “It means that they left something out.” Expressing the importance of connecting to history he said,

Whoever Felix Bland was or whatever, people ask questions. Somebody oughta be able to tell them. You know it’s like when we dealt with schools. First lesson you’re gonna have regardless of subject is who your school is named after and why was it important. Why was he important enough for them to build a school in his memory, honor, or whatever you want to call it. So, when you say, “I’m a proud graduate of Booker T. Washington, Henry MacNeil Turner, David T. Howard” who is this man? “George Washington Carver.” But see the average black kid didn’t know anything about black leaders but Booker T. Washington and George Washington Carver. So, after those two they say, “who is David T. Howard?” over there on the Eastside in 4th Ward. I say, “you don’t know?” Well that way when you speak up you can look ‘em in the eye and tell ‘em who David T. Howard was, the impact he had on Atlanta. Just like you talk about Martin Luther King. You can say it with pride and conviction. That made you feel good and it makes you feel more confident when you know why you’re doing what you’re doing.

Using key examples of how names are used on school buildings, he gives the impression that by leaving out the name, people who visit it miss out on the pride and confidence that comes with being connected to history. He also distinguishes how names function rhetorically to commemorate the past by providing the impetus for passersby to ask questions. In this way, the name metaphorically “speaks” and continues to “live.” But “West Midtown” erases all of that.

2.5 Sublime Coherence: Narrating “Blandtown”

The challenge of “West Midtown” is that it erases and forgets the past to the detriment of the collective identity of former residents and the ties current residents have to that. Using false narrative construction to create narrative coherence forms a counterfeit, rather than sincere unity, which is detrimental to actual unified, yet ethnically diverse performances in space. Currently, “West Midtown” is a public counterfeit construction of Blandtown’s identity.

While “West Midtown” signs dominate the space, at the time of this writing, two “Blandtown” markers disrupt the fraudulent identity. The first sign is Turk’s billboard marking
the “Heart of Blandtown” on English St. The second sign is the “Blandtown” marker at the intersection of Elsworth Industrial Blvd and Chattahoochee Ave, which was erected in July 2019 after a 5-year struggle by the neighborhood association to get city grant funding and fundraiser support to purchase it. “Blandtown” serves as a commemorative name because the original black residents are no longer there. When all markers of the past have disappeared, died, or been displaced, the name is sometimes all that is left. Likening the disappearance or displacement of people to “death,” Alexis, Barnett, and Leake argue that, the name acts as an epitaph, addressing that which is absent as if it were there, and calling out or addressing a passing person. In this way, the name functions to re-animate the dead, act as a witness to the past, and remind passersby of what was undone or lost. Even more, as the epitaph addresses passersby it becomes the voice of the deceased, warning the living of their mortality. In the same way, the place-name that remains after the people and culture of the past have disappeared, warns of the mortality of our collective existence, urging, from the grave, that there was “something-undone.” As the authors state, the name brings the desire to the passerby to “make something meaningful of them in the present.”

Thus, the final question that we retain for this chapter is whether reclaiming the name “Blandtown” serves the witnessing function that I propose and how rhetorically is witnessing made possible? I began, arguing that witnessing in the case of place-name as spatial narration can occur when the story is dialogically coherent, mediating the interplay of the dialectical tensions, in this case black/white and resident/industry relationships. To get to this point of mediation the narration would have to reach the “Sublime,” a discourse of oneness, not 

separation.\textsuperscript{160} In addition, a genuine dialogically coherent spatial narrative associated with
“Blandtown” must be produced by the vernacular voices of current and past residents and
rectified with primary data that situates accurate history into public memory. I utilize interview
responses from current and displaced residents, reflecting on what the name “Blandtown” means
to them and their own personal life stories that they attribute to the space. A critical assessment
of these metanarrative responses reveals the interviewees’ recognition of conflict and coherence
in their own ties to the space. Their stories of “Blandtown” mediate the dialectical pairs by
bringing forward their relationship with the place, rather than their separation from the people.

\textbf{2.5.1 Community formed by shared place}

Firstly, the “Blandtown” epitaph speaks that a community must be nurtured and
cultivated to sustain. What Blandtown residents of the early 1940s and 1950s recognized was
that separation didn’t have to result in isolation. Collectivity could be reinforced by sharing
space. When original black residents were asked what Blandtown means to them, both responded
“community.” “You knew everybody,” one responded.

You grew up friends. You all went to the same school and after school you play. You
grew up friends. You all went to the same churches. The main churches that came out of there was St. Peters
Baptist… and Greater Bethel… But you knew everybody. And consequently, you were a
resource to each other for that reason.

Even when his parents divorced, the fact that they lived in the same neighborhood meant
that he “got a chance to enjoy both sides.” Connections to neighbors and family were sustained
because of their common relationship to the place and the resources cultivated there.

\textsuperscript{160} Savoy, Lauret. Trace: Memory, History, Race, and the American Landscape. Berkeley: Counterpoint,
2015.
Though recognizing the promise of communal connection, the stories also identify that in a close-knit environment separation and contention can still occur. One interviewee recalls the death of a brother by the hand of his twin for flirting with a girl he liked. It was one of his most horrible memories. The respondent recollected what he saw when he was just 12: “I remember that guy laying there with his stomach blewed out.” He also remembered a family moving there from Alabama and each member dying off in violent ways. To reconcile these tensions between the thought of community and the public display of violence against family, the interviewee says about the family, “it wasn’t properly weeded out. It wasn’t properly watered.” Here the speaker forms a rationale for why violence, death, and trauma occurred to some and not others. He considers that some came to the land, but their roots weren’t nurtured by the soil. Instead of separation or hatred of each other as the problem, it is the relationship that these people have with the place itself that determines their future. He acknowledged that to mediate these conflicts the families and their children can’t just be placed into the harsh realities of Blandtown’s environment, but they must also be nurtured by it.

Blandtown was home to working class Black people and for it to be sustained there was a necessity for individuals to be developed by the community. For these families that development occurred in the homes, the school, and the churches. An original resident recalls that even though his teachers didn’t live in Blandtown they went to church there on Sundays.

They’d come to church and you knew you were gonna be good then cause your teachers sitting out there and [when] you go back to school, they’re gonna get you about talking and not paying attention.

This was the type of nurture that separated those that “made it” and those that “didn’t.” Insightfully though the speaker connects that the teachers’ location in Blandtown was key to
them having a connection that lead to a nurturing, communal development. Assumedly, if the teachers were only seen on school days, the strength of those bonds would have been weakened.

### 2.5.2 Resident and Business unite in mutual space

Second, a through point connecting “Blandtown’s” history is the ideological battle between resident and business that is central to the stories of both old and new residents. “Blandtown” witnesses the conflicts of spatial power and voice, while also recognizing the necessity for a delicate balance between both. Blandtown grew from both industry and black residents’ acknowledgement of a mutual need. The companies needed labor and newly freed African Americans needed jobs. Their relationship to the land is what anchored them. An original resident explains:

Originally a lot of people who were early residents out there migrated from South Carolina because they were following the railroad as laborers. The railroad and the steel mill, Atlantic Steel where Atlantic Station is now, they offer good salaries to blacks with little or no education because the work you did was manual. They worked and they made good salaries. And that’s why they were located where they did because it was close to the site of the place that they worked for. And if you’ve been out there you know where Nottingham Chemical is. And behind Nottingham was what we call the Seaboard Shop. That’s where they service the trains cause it was a junction and they service trains there…. They had their coal and wood and then they had the big water tower because they were steam engines and you needed water to run them and replace the bearings. [And] the guys laid tracks.

It is important to recognize that the resident’s story starts with the people not the industries, while “West Midtown” stories begin with the railroads and businesses. From there the link of the businesses and the land is what inevitably draws many to the area. The speaker focuses strongly on the relationship to place, with terms like “migrated” and “located” to note the key actions taken by the workers and “site” or “junction” to reference the positioning of the businesses. The residents maintain their agency as actors, but the setting is foregrounded, uniting the two conflicting groups.
The delicate balance between business and resident power was never available for the poor black community. In the end, it was not unpaid taxes that lost Blandtown, but “the businesses. The business wanted it. The people didn’t have no money so the people with the money bought the property. That’s it.” Acknowledging the former residents’ known understanding that if Atlanta wanted to expand downtown they would probably come in their direction, this respondent accepts that with money and government at play, they knew they wouldn’t be able to keep Blandtown to themselves for long. The respondent again doesn’t sacrifice the residents’ agency for the business but acknowledges the power the money holders had. The point of separation between business and resident occurs when the association that residents have with the land is weakened by the affiliation the businesses have with it. The focus of the speaker’s story is not contention with the business owners themselves, but conflict with the business’s dominant relationship to the shared space.

The flip of Blandtown’s balance over to the industry side was realigned when upper-middle class residents moved to the area in the early 2000s and forged seeming partnerships where the businesses and residents could possibly support each other’s interests. One current resident who moved in the area in 2010 states,

I understand that in order for certain infrastructure projects to be done I need those businesses here to help with that because there’s only so much taxes they can collect from me as an individual homeowner. They can get far more taxes from the businesses. So, you actually want to encourage business here. So, our relationship was very very cordial, and I mean they were my biggest supporters. … They are the ones that have the money to make the changes that the neighborhood was wanting.

The neighborhood was able to get changes, like widening streets in the traffic-congested area, completed by negotiating with businesses and developers. In this way businesses that needed resident support for zoning and ordinance changes were more likely to get it if they also
fulfilled resident needs. The respondent articulates his support of the businesses based on their shared and negotiable link to place.

But in a space that is consistently tugged by the intertwining of these two conflicting groups there are still losses for community members. The same respondent acknowledges,

As much as I was one that was very aggressive at pushing development, I have to say be careful what you wish for because it’s gone from this little, quiet, sleepy neighborhood to this bustling, busy 24-7 neighborhood now. It has its positive points and then it has some of the negative points.

One of the biggest negatives for residents is the gridlocked traffic on the major streets into the neighborhood as thru-traffic traverses to the restaurants and entertainment businesses, and trucks commute to-and-from the industries. The speaker doesn’t lose confidence in his support of business until the residents’ relation to the land is diminished because of a more dominating association the businesses have to it.

In attempts to retain a sense of equitable balance between industry and residents, the neighborhood association invites business owners to their meetings as a part of the community, rather than separate from it. But even with homeowners having more economic power, they have experienced “deceitfulness and bullying” from businesses “trying to impose their will on the neighborhood.” But in many respects, this is the identity of the neighborhood.

In another example, a respondent answered,

You have to have the right mindset to live here because it is industrial. It is not a quiet cul-de-sac. It is not going to be...It’s not gonna ever turn into another neighborhood of Buckhead. It’s always going to be this industrial mix. It’s always gonna have the railroad as a major presence and a major part of its history. The railroad isn’t going away. The trucks are not going away. The people need to understand that they are living in that sort of environment and be ok with that.

The narrations of Blandtown from the voices of residents helps extend the historical trajectory of the past by sincerely approaching the pros and cons of the differing ideologies in a
shared residential and industrial space. Rather than romanticizing the environment as harmonious, the former and present residents connect their identity to that of the businesses that share Blandtown with them.

2.5.3 Past, Present and Future tied by place

Lastly, those that identify “Blandtown” as home also consider the connection of past and present to be a necessity for unifying the displaced and the gentrified in the spatial narration of Blandtown. The dialectical tension of the present is between the displaced and the current dwellers. To mediate the separation imposed between these two groups, both parties require that the future of Blandtown be anchored to its past. In this way, separation is reconciled by the sharing of space across and beyond time.

For original black residents, the loss of Blandtown cannot be rectified, but the memory can be brought to life. Stability for this group is defined as remembering that they existed. The oldest known living former resident responded, “History is just like water. It’s not the same as it flows. And for you to pass off the scene and look like you never have been there….“ His sentence drifts there, as incomplete as the history. In his metaphor of history to water, the respondent accepts change as easily as the passing of time, but that’s where his metaphor draws to an ending point. His words consider that while change is inevitable, there is some loss in the feeling that a scene can alter so much that it looks like you never existed.

Noting the necessity for both transformation and heritage, this resident doesn’t share hostility toward the new developments in his old neighborhood. He says, “I think it’s a good move.” Singing the lyrics of Lou Rawls song Tobacco Road, he says “tear it down and start all over again.” Then he expounds pointedly,

The only thing that I do have some issue with … I would hope that the new ownership, which he doesn’t show interest, [would show interest] in maintaining any remnants of
Blandtown. I would hope that with the history that there would be something that they could hold on to. Gregor got his sign out there and that means a lot.

This respondent, who owns property outside of Blandtown, spoke positively of change with the aspiration for one of the new developers, Brock Built, to connect to the past through place-name. The name is an enduring confirmation that both old and new Blandtown live.

Another displaced resident emphasizes this necessity for “existence” through memory continuously in his interview. He states about Blandtown, “it was just a little place all by itself that existed.” Yet, he mourns the loss of the vestiges of the past.

I went out and I came back. And then one time I went back and there was nothing to come back to. That’s a sad scenario that I’m left with. Even if I went and built a house in Blandtown, a nice house, it wouldn’t be the same. It would be a house that’s built on a portion of land that was there in Blandtown, but everything that made Blandtown is not there.

These words of loss bring to our purview that a place without its people or any recognizable signs of the past, is an erasure, forgetting of identity to the point of rupture of trajectory. This is the trauma of displacing people and culture without anchoring to a past.

However, the displaced residents are not alone in their acknowledgement that the past needs to be brought forth amid change. A current resident explains the dichotomy of past and present that was available when he first moved in:

The only thing we had to go to at the time it was called the Corner Tavern and we kind of stayed over there all the time because it was right across the street. There wasn’t half of the development that you see now. This, what they’re building right here on Manlow that used to be Inland Seafoods, so it stunk all the time and then the old Georgia Steel Mill was up the street where you see the new Westside Heights luxury apartments by Worthing. That was an old crumbling steel mill. And where Brock is building now on Fairmont you had a few older houses that were there, but it was basically abandoned warehouses and fields. The new homes that are on Fairmont that was all just wetlands, grass.
In just the last decade, so much has changed that even 2010 Blandtown is barely recognizable. He recalls businesses coming into the neighborhood wanted to get rid of the name “Blandtown” even asking why the name should be kept. He would tell them that it is necessary to understand the history of the name before it gets wiped away. All the historical homes had been demolished, and this resident wanted to retain the last relic of the past. He stated

We wanted to cement that this is Blandtown and it has historical significance to me, especially as a Black male so I wanted to at least save that part of the legacy of the neighborhood even though all the homes are gone.

This respondent seems to understand the serious connection of the neighborhood to his own collective identity as an African American. Many black people connect to places of meaningful black history to center their own personal legacies and affiliations to the spaces they live in. And Blandtown for other current residents will always have to rectify its future iterations with artifacts of the past. The name is one of the leftovers of this forgotten past and as old and new residents consider that they sharply recognize the identity of “Blandtown” as being more than just a space of constant alteration, but one that new visitors and residents can come to and also see the stable roots of the past.

The oral narrations of Blandtown as described by displaced and current residents disrupt the pedagogically coherent narrative circulated by institutions. These narrations use dialogical coherence, reflecting the multi-voiced and layered aspects of Blandtown’s spatial performance. Without sacrificing the truth of the dialectical tensions that abounded in the neighborhood, the oral narratives form mediation of those tensions by foregrounding the relationship with space, instead of the separations amongst people. Further, these stories consider the significance of “Blandtown” in commemoration to what was and what could be. They use an interplay of two or more conflicting elements to represent the meaning of “Blandtown.” The dialectical space
incorporates the different voices, supporting both separation and coherence within one spatial story by anchoring to place.

2.6 Conclusion

The historical forgetting and erasure of Blandtown’s history because of displacement warns us of the detrimental effects of cultural gentrification on collective history. A critical analysis of “Blandtown” as a neighborhood name being used for narrative commemoration requires a recognition of the importance of dialogical coherence in spatial narration and “naming” as a rhetorical device influencing and influenced by identity. While names like “West Midtown” can be used to whitewash the dialectical tensions that are prominent in the performative history of a place, commemorative names like “Blandtown” that are narrated by the historical trajectory of those that share its identity can mediate the tensions by focusing on the shared relationship to the land. What I have attempted to explain here is that for “Blandtown” and neighborhoods like it, witnessing can occur when we truthfully consider the trauma and tensions that make up space. Coincidentally, witnessing the trauma can also be used to bring forth unification. Uncoincidentally, it is the people who experienced the tensions and yet still forged tight bonds to the space that are most helpful in forming the sublimely coherent narration of the neighborhood.

What I am suggesting is that in an act of witnessing through commemorative naming, a place-name can embody the dialogically cohesive story of the past within the present, making it sublime through anchorage of conflicting ideologies with the place. And as passersby are addressed by the circulation and distribution of that name, they can be moved toward the desire of making something meaningful of the past in the present. The name affects lived actions,
allowing the historical trajectory to continue. Thus, sublime coherence is one way to rhetorically construct a spatial narrative to enable belonging.

But, a sublimely coherent story is not the only requirement for witnessing and prompting a “something-to-be done” in witnesses. The reconstruction period that granted the formation of southern black enclaves like Blandtown was short-lived, and a new form of oppression through Jim Crow Laws spurred a generation of activists to strive beyond release from slavery to equality of life, liberty, and property for all citizens of the United States. While knowledge of the shared trauma of the past united African Americans as an ethnicity, it would be the goals of the civil rights movement that determined how they would address their future survival. In the next chapter, we will transition to the collective memory of the civil rights movement in Atlanta and the significance of the lessons learned from the past to inciting witnesses to move toward a moral reckoning that positions the culture for survival and progression toward a destination in line with those of the national American dream.
3 "IMAGES OF AMERICA" PUBLIC HISTORY: EXHIBIT RESCUING WHITES IN HISTORICAL NARRATION V. MORAL RECKONING IN A HISTORY EXHIBITION

Piedmont Park, one of the most visited public spaces in Atlanta, marks the northern end of the Atlanta BeltLine’s Eastside trail. The park was first used for the “Cotton States International Exposition of 1895,” where young white men, post-Civil War, worked to reconstruct the South’s economy after the slaves’ emancipation by inviting Northern capitalists and railroad interests to a trade fair. Booker T. Washington was invited to make an address at the fair and convince Northern capitalists that race relations were good in the South.161 Known as the 1895 Atlanta Compromise speech, Washington adviser both white Atlanta and Black Atlanta. Beginning with black people, Washington urged against protest and radicalism, instead telling them to labor with their hands in agriculture and mechanics. He emphasized that in the South “the Negro is given a man’s chance in the commercial world.”162 Here, he connected the social progress of African Americans to modern capitalist interest. Then, he turned to white audience members, telling them to cast down their bucket to the “eight millions of Negroes whose habits you know,” and promising them that they “will be surrounded by the most patient, faithful, law-abiding, and unresentful people that the world has seen.”163 He also asserted that the races can remain socially separate, yet one, if they mutually progress in the same direction. He


163 Washington, Booker T, “Atlanta Compromise Speech.”
romantically believed that the Exposition would bring good sentiments between black and white progress in the South.

Eight years later, on the Westside of Atlanta, W.E.B. Du Bois wrote and published “The Souls of Black Folk” while he was teaching at Atlanta University. In it, Du Bois published the essay “Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others,” rejecting Washington’s compromise of political and civil rights for economic gain. He argued that oppressed groups throughout history have been influenced by three attitudes, “a feeling of revolt and revenge; an attempt to adjust all thought and action to the will of the greater groups; or finally, a determined effort at self-realization and self-development despite environing opinion.”

Du Bois had the attitude of the third, arguing that the nation must provide “the right to vote,” “civic equality,” and “the education of youth according to ability.” While honoring Washington as a leader, Du Bois opposed submission and respectability, instead urging African Americans to insist on their rights. In his writing, Du Bois brought forward the ills of the South that continued to the generation after slavery, putting Black people “in danger of being reduced to semi-slavery.” He espoused the importance of bringing witness to the truth of why African Americans were in their destitute position saying,

first, slavery and race-prejudice are potent if not sufficient causes of the Negro’s position; second, industrial and common-school training were necessarily slow in planting because they had to await the black teachers trained by higher institutions...; and third, while it is a great truth to say that the Negro must strive and strive mightily to help himself, it is equally true that unless his striving be not simply seconded, but rather aroused and encouraged, by the initiative of the richer and wiser environing group, he cannot hope for great success.


In these written words, Du Bois places responsibility on the nation for the moral disorder, shifting the burden of racial reconciliation from Blacks alone, to all Americans. In many respects, the essence of Du Bois’ message became the guiding principle of the civil rights movement and arguably the beginning of the movement’s historical trajectory.

I start this next chapter here: At a contemporary public museum exhibition situated on the BeltLine route connecting Piedmont Park, where Washington gave his address in east Atlanta, the Atlanta University Center, where Du Bois wrote The Souls of Black Folk, and all the places in between where civil rights movement activists declared the need for a moral reckoning in the United States.

* * *

Seemingly acknowledging Du Bois’ presence in a movement that started nearly 4 decades after this writing, a portrait of Du Bois was placed at one of the marked entrances to Art on the Atlanta BeltLine’s “Images of America: Atlanta and the Civil Rights Movement 1944-1968” exhibit, a 4 mile-long walking history museum, positioned on the completed Eastside and Westside trails of the BeltLine from July 7, 2018 – June 2019. Located at the southern entrance on the Westside of the BeltLine, Du Bois’s image reflects a message of witnessing. However, a narrative approach to criticism and deep mapping of the temporary exhibition of civil rights photography, reveals that the “Images of America: Atlanta and the Civil Rights Movement” display uses romanticizing to close the movements trajectory and rescue whites by presenting the spatial narrative through the white racial frame.

The “Images of America” exhibit is sourced from Sims-Alvarado’s 2017 published book by the same name. The goal of this dissertation chapter is to critically assess the exhibit against
multiple contexts, including comparing it to the historical trajectory presented by the book and the socioeconomic context of the Atlanta BeltLine as place. I suggest that the book presents the civil rights movement’s goal of forming a “perfect Union” by moving African Americans from a trajectory of continued political and economic impoverishment, on to the same politically and economically autonomous trajectory of white America. Restated in the language guiding this dissertation, the goal of the movement, presented by the book, is to place Black people on The Move with the rest of the Union. The book amplifies this message by interrogating white private citizens, businesses, and government resistance to social change. On the other hand, the exhibit presents a different narrative, one that closes the historical trajectory and rescues whites from the moral obligations that the movement instituted. A deep mapping of the exhibit against its location along the Atlanta BeltLine, reveals stark segregation and economic disinvestment in Black Atlanta, reflecting that African Americans are still in The Move and being left behind from Atlanta’s next destination.

Current rhetorical scholarship on walking history museums in urban renewal areas is limited but has been done before. Kwame Holmes examined the “City within a City, Greater U Street Heritage Trail,” developed through a gentrifying Washington DC neighborhood in 2001. Holmes’s research revealed the use of the trail for respectability politics, re-narrating the history of Black opposition to align it with the political values of gentrifiers and bring in investors.\textsuperscript{167} This study extends his research to the Atlanta BeltLine and particularly reveals the historical narrativizing measures that inhibit people from confronting the traumatic past. Furthermore, this study uses a method of deep mapping to engage the memories in space and time, forming and

investigating the multiple and complex spatial narratives within the past, present, and future dynamics of the space. Focusing on the goals of ghost maps, defined by Bodenhamer et al. as a map that “keeps the past visible in the present,”\(^{168}\) the results of this chapter suggest that practices of rescuing whites romanticize, rather than make visible, the past.

Theorized by sociologist Glenn Bracey, rescuing whites is a discursive technique to talk about race and oppression in a way that makes it palatable and comfortable for whites. Techniques of absenting whites, personification, and narrative bracketing, “buttress white supremacy by reinforcing the frames that undergird colorblind racism.”\(^ {169}\) While Bracey focuses on the use of this technique in race critical scholarship, my research turns to public history exhibitions, like “Images of America,” to reflect on the larger implications of rescuing whites to the rhetoricity of place and the dominant group’s actions in place. I argue that the application of these civil rights movement images to space re-narrates place meaning, rescues whites, and establishes white dominant power structures by 1) presenting the goals of the movement as achieved, discounting continuing systemic problems; 2) containing contested ideas and feelings to show white patriarchal and government cooperation; and 3) placing agency for continued issues onto the victims, thereby portraying any continued issues as the current failings of the marginalized to “help themselves.”

To present this argument, I will begin by exploring the role that historical narration plays in constructing morality. Second, furthering communication’s spatial turn, I will explain the methods of narrative criticism and deep mapping used to evaluate the text. I will complete a


narrative criticism of the book “Images of America” to reveal how the use of amplification as a rhetorical tool invites witnessing and demanding a “something-to-be-done.” Next, I will complete a narrative criticism of a deep map of the “Images of Atlanta” exhibit, assessing the message of the exhibit within its spatial construction in Atlanta’s current demographics and economy. I will end by explicating the rhetorical implications of this exhibit on Atlanta as the metaphorical “Black Mecca.”

3.1 Narratives and Moral Visioning of History

Art on the Atlanta BeltLine (AoAB) is Atlanta BeltLine, Inc.’s (ABI) public art program established in 2010. It was developed to get more people to explore the BeltLine throughout its development process and has experienced continued growth with new art projects appearing seasonally. Along with the expectation of driving tourism along the BeltLine, the ABI’s 2018 released policy notes a particular cultural interest in maintaining the unique character of the 45 neighborhoods on its path.\(^\text{170}\) Correctly highlighting the effects of displacement and gentrification on neighborhood culture, the policy writers ask the question, “What makes a place a home?”\(^\text{171}\) While they do not answer the question directly, they do pose a strategy focused on equitably distributing funding and space utilization to allow local institutions the resources they need to provide “place-based public art and culture”\(^\text{172}\) as a means of maintaining neighborhood character in the wake of displacement.

The research of this dissertation invites us to go back to their unanswered question, “What makes a place a home?” and reflect on AoAB’s decision to use public space to display a


\(^{171}\) Atlanta Beltline Inc., “Art on the Atlanta BeltLine,” 21

\(^{172}\) Atlanta Beltline Inc., “Art on the Atlanta BeltLine,” 21
civil rights movement exhibit. As discussed in the introductory chapter “metaphorical spaces” like the Black Mecca are maintained as home through the continuation of historical trajectories based in spatial narratives. Within spaces divided on racial lines, like Atlanta, the continued maintenance of Black Life -Worlds is done through the practice of making moral disorder visible for the purpose of calling people to participate in a moral reordering. The civil rights movement lead by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, used a strategy of peaceful protest to highlight the moral illegitimacy of segregation, voter suppression, and poverty. Reflecting the necessity of moralizing for maintaining home, the goal of this chapter is to reveal how historical narratives represented in space can either call people to participate in moral reordering or leave an audience as inactive viewers. The implications of this understanding include a shift in AoAB policy toward a particular strategy that does not just add black people to public art, but seeks to redefine public art for the sake of summoning people “to participation in a moral universe.”

As Karen Cross and Julia Peck attest, photography and its association to mass culture, have the power to devastate memory and work as “repressive state apparatus” to disengage the audience from issues of capitalism. But on the other hand, photographs also have the power to “stand as a witness to the devastation of culture.” The goal of historical witnessing is to ignite and activate the moral good in its audience. Making moral disorder visible is an integral part of this goal. Theories of witnessing proclaim that the witness moves those who’ve experienced


176 Cross and Peck, “Editorial: Special Issue on Photography and Memory,” 127
trauma from a state of repression to a state of “something-to-be-done.” By having to witness the ghosts of the trauma we are also moved “towards eliminating the conditions that produced the haunting in the first place.” According to Avery F. Gordon’s work on haunting, witnessing would allow us to perceive of other alternatives and possibilities than the one that produced the trauma and naturally seek to restore balance. Making the immoral visible is a form of witnessing that would bring audiences to interrogate past injustices with a motivation to redeem.

The narrative construction of history has one of the most fundamental roles in society as it provides the rationale for morality. As Hayden White argues, history is not a list of things that occurred, but a story of events that provides a moral evaluation. Assuming that the characters in the story are the same, historical narratives of events and people are differentiated by the warrant, or moral rationale, determined by the historian’s framing of events. The moral rationale is comprehended by assessing the values of the agents, the acting characters in the story, as framed by the historian. The value assessment forms the lesson to be learned from history or the moral order that gives history its significance to the present and the future. In other words, the historian’s construction of the past frames a moral reckoning, affecting our understanding of the victim and the victor, and values of good and evil, right and wrong. In order to draw witness to African American history and collective memory, history must be told in such a way that brings a moral reckoning to the oppressive traumas of the past.

Movement toward narrative closure is vital for sustaining collective identity because, as cited by Stephanie Smallwood, traumatic events disrupt narrative continuity, forcing an abrupt

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end that interrupts the attachments of an individual and their community.\textsuperscript{179} The assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr was a traumatic event in the legacy of the civil rights movement and the community that joined the path of the movement’s progress. It can be defined as a trauma because the loss of a charismatic leader has the power to bring the movement to an abrupt stop\textsuperscript{180} and deteriorate the community that formed. To maintain collective identity in the wake of such a trauma the history has to be reconstructed, re-narrated to “transform the traumatic memory” to be integrated into the lives of the surviving community.\textsuperscript{181} Those remaining continue the linear progression of the movement until a complete moral reckoning, social change, is achieved. However, historical re-narration also has the power to prematurely institute narrative closure, diminishing active participation in the goals of the movement and stopping the movement’s historical trajectory in reality. For the purpose of witnessing, the historical re-narration must reveal that there is still something to be resolved and more to be done here.

What I am suggesting is that there are different ways to end the public story of a historical trajectory and the decision to use one or another in a historical narrative will affect the audience’s rationale for decision and action, as well as the collective identity of the community. The three types of endings I reflect on are 1) narrative closure, 2) abruption, and 3) open with linear progress. First, narrative closure of a historical narrative is moving from one moral order to another, the moral reckoning. This is the moralizing ending that finalizes the lesson learned of


Smallwood, Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora, 206.
history and claims that the moral change has been achieved.\textsuperscript{182} For the civil rights movement, narrative closure would be the fulfillment of integration, economic autonomy, and realized voter and citizenship rights for African Americans. Because these goals have not been achieved in full, the trajectory of the movement, in reality, does not have closure. However, the historian has the rhetorical power of re-narration, which can be used to prematurely constitute narrative closure and inhibit the historical trajectory.

Second, an abruption or abrupt end ""pulls the audience forward through time’ only to leave it in midstream."\textsuperscript{183} It is a sudden breakaway from the progression of the narrative. An abruption can occur at any point in the narration, but one distinctive breakaway is at the instant of traumatic climax. For the civil rights movement, one abruption in re-narration occurs at the point Dr. King, Jr was assassinated. Historical narratives that conclude the movement with King’s death without integrating the trauma into the life stories of the surviving community, repress the trauma and inhibit moral reckoning.\textsuperscript{184} The third type of conclusion is open with linear progress toward closure. This occurs with many narrative histories as events in the story are still in process as they’re being narrated.\textsuperscript{185} Such an ending leaves behind the presumption that a moral shift could occur in the future as the historical trajectory is still in motion. For the civil rights movement, an open ending with linear movement extends the plot to show activists’ continued work toward social changes that support the movement’s progress.


\textsuperscript{183} Smallwood, Stephanie. \textit{Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora} (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2007), 204.

\textsuperscript{184} Smallwood, Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora.

Historical narratives can create and reproduce meaning in space. In addition, space can influence the meaning of spatial narratives. Thus, curators of place-based art must take into account the moral vision produced by the spatial narrative established. This brings us back to the AoAB writer’s key question, “What makes a place a home?” Revitalization efforts seeking to make Atlanta home to diverse groups must provide moral conscience in historical narration of the city. In this chapter, we review the “Images of America” exhibit narrative as it is presented in space and compare it to the historical narrative produced by the book. The purpose of this comparison is to reveal how a change in medium and rhetorical strategy in historical narration can affect the moral vision of the trajectory, troubling the meaning of the decisions already made and the future actions performed by the audience in the space. In addition, this comparison will reveal the effects of space on the narrative ending, affecting the metaphorical meaning of collective identity associated with the Black Mecca.

3.2 Narrative Criticism and Deep Mapping

The goal of this chapter is to reflect on spatial narratives in public-art, specifically the photography of a walking history museum. Spatial narratives are formed by lived practices within space as well as the use of space for storytelling. When AoAB engaged the BeltLine trail for displaying the story of the civil rights movement, the actions created a spatial narrative that could uphold the lived practices of activists in Atlanta or modify the story. The reason for analyzing this pictorial display is, as Cross and Peck explain in regards to archives, “to provide the grounds for a reconfiguration of knowledge, its ownership and modes of production.”186 Through methods of narrative criticism and deep mapping, I will interpret the story of the civil

rights movement as told by the “Images of Atlanta” exhibit. The historical trajectory presented by the book of the same name, which was used as the source for the exhibit’s images, will be the baseline for evaluating whether the exhibit witnesses or romanticizes the civil rights movement’s narrative.

The book and exhibit provide a legible text for analysis, as photographs are not simply displays of objects in the past, but act as containers of memory. As Marita Sturken argues, photographs are “synonymous with memory.” Despite the fact that the memory the photo presents is actually constructed and produced by the photographer, generally, the camera image is considered to by the eye witness to the event and therefore carrier of its memory. Thus, the images used in the “Images of America” exhibit and book “offer a means to retrieve an experience of the past,” from the perspective of the person who captured it. By assessing the story presented by the original image and the curator of the book and exhibit, we can better understand the capacity of camera images to both create and erase memory.

In following with Walter Fisher’s theories of the narrative paradigm, I use the narrative approach to criticize the pictorial, textual, and spatial text of the book and the exhibit. A narrative approach is particularly apt for the research in this chapter as it is affective in reading discourse in all mediums and forms of expression. Fisher argues that “all forms of human communication can be seen fundamentally as stories, as interpretations of aspects of the world occurring in time and shaped by history, culture, and character.” The approach has been used

187 Sturken, Marita. “Camera Images and National Meanings.” In Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the Aids Epidemic, And the Politics of Remembering, 19–43. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 19

188 Sturken, “Camera Images and National Meanings,” 19

in public address studies, media studies, rhetorical history, and political communication.

Furthering the use of this approach, I will use it to study spatial narratives contained in images, applying the narrative approach in communication to the spatial turn.

I utilize the narrative approach as a perspective for looking at the text, rather than a systematic rhetorical analysis. The text is assessed as a story, composed of events and symbolic actions. In addition, the text is interpreted within its context, this includes the medium, the time period, the audience, and the location. Using the story and the context, the critic’s focus is on the message of the text, the theme, or the lesson learned. The values instituted by the text are the basis of the message. For the purposes of this study, there is a particular focus on how the story concludes, reflecting on the methods of ending that could disrupt the civil rights movement’s historical trajectory in Atlanta.

In this study, I complete a narrative criticism of the book “Images of Atlanta” and compare the message of that discourse to the message of the exhibit. The 2017 published book is a pictorial history of Atlanta and the civil rights movement, with an introduction and captions for each image written by author Sims-Alvarado. The story is evaluated as it progresses in chapter order, including Sims-Alvarado’s introduction. The book is assessed within its context, as a contemporary work of historical narration published for a particular audience of historians and people interested in Atlanta or African American history. The 2018-2019 AoAB exhibit of the same name is a pictorial history of Atlanta and the civil rights movement, with an exhibit opening marker and captions. The exhibit’s story is evaluated as it progresses along the Eastside and Westside BeltLine trail, taking into account that multiple start and endpoints on the trail can

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shift the order of the narrative for onlookers. The exhibit is also assessed within its critical spatial context, specifically citing the stark economic and demographic difference between the residential areas along the Eastside BeltLine trail, with a median household income of $68,082 and a 72% white population (2010 data), and those along the Westside BeltLine trail, which have a median household income of $26,035 and a 90% black population (2010 data).\textsuperscript{191} It is also evaluated within its rhetorical purpose for tourism, historical preservation, and public display. In contrast to the book, the exhibit is subject to a universal audience of many particular audiences because of its medium as an open exhibition.

The moral rationale of each text is determined by the story’s message within its context. That message is discovered by interrogating the characters or agents of the text, their value positions, and how the protagonist and antagonist are identified by the historian. In the case of Atlanta and the civil rights movement, two key agent groups are identified by the text, the activists on one side and white resistance on the other. The theme is determined by the value messages of these agents as they are presented in the text and within their respective contexts.

Finally, the ending of the text must be evaluated as narrative closure, abruption, or open linear progression. For the book, the ending is determined by the ordering of chapters. However, the exhibit presents a unique case in which the ending must be evaluated within its space and shape. Thus, to formulate such a unique grasp of this text within space, deep mapping methods are used for critical evaluation.

Deep mapping is a particularly useful method for reflecting on the interrelation of events and actors in time and space. The narrative approach, as it stands, gives a perspective for

\textsuperscript{191} “Atlanta BeltLine Westside Impact Neighborhood Analysis: Demographic, Health and Community Asset Report.” Mosaic Group, August 2015.
evaluating the events in time, but not the critical detail of space, which, for humanism, is a necessary dimension for understanding the influence events and actors have on society. Space, in this conception, includes both the abstract concept and place, specific locations fixed in time. In addition, space and place exist, in memory, and in experience. Deep mapping accounts for the multiple dimensions of a narrative in space, time, and place. A deep map goes beyond topography, streets, buildings, and signs, to provide a visual for the spatial narrative, metaphorical space, and conceptual space (i.e. racialized space, gendered space, etc.). An assessment of a deep map can reveal the discursive and ideological dimensions of the location and reflect how actors frame their identities and memory within the space. Particularly important for this research is to understand that deep maps can function as ghost maps, making the past visible in the present. Using deep mapping as a method for this study will allow a critical evaluation of how the past is presented in the present through the “Images of Atlanta” exhibit.

While there are multiple forms of deep mapping, for this research, I create and evaluate a deep map of the exhibit using the conception of narrative space identified by David Bodenhamer. Narrative space is the setting that a story is held. The setting constitutes the spatial movement of the narrative through time. There are 4 aspects to narrative space – the spatial frame (each individual setting of the story), the story space (all the settings put together across the time of the narrative), the story world (the world of reality as perceived by the audience), and the narrative universe (the universe as described by the narrative). Bodenhamer explains that critics can investigate the rhetorical effects of the setting on the narrative by completing a narrative mapping of the text. A narrative mapping of history starts with a map of the real space (the

192 Bodenhamer, Corrigan, and Harris, “Introduction: Deep Maps and Spatial Narratives.”
story world). The critic then places the events of the historical narration in the location on the map where they occurred. Rather than positioning story events temporally, I position them spatially, as spatial frames. Then, I investigate the narrative universe created by compiling the spatial frames, forming the story world. This method makes spatial patterns in text visible in order to provide new perspectives and illuminate spatial meanings of the text.

More specifically, the “Images of Atlanta” exhibit can be presented on a map to make the narrative space visible. The story world for the exhibit is determined by the location of each exhibit sign as they are in place on the BeltLine’s Eastside and Westside Trail. Mapping each of the 46 exhibit signs in their location allows the researcher to see the images, events, and actors as they appear to the audience in the present BeltLine space. Viewed in their entirety, the images form the story world on the BeltLine as perceived by the audience. Reflecting on this story world provides the unique perspective for assessing the narrative’s plot and ending as formed by the walking exhibit.

Together, the images and accompanying captions curated by Sims-Alvarado provide a legible script for excavating memory of the civil rights movement in Atlanta. The narrative approach to rhetorical criticism and deep mapping provide the basis for evaluating how the past is presented in the present in the AoAB exhibit. This allows us to understand how we are telling spatial stories. Our personal and collective identities are bound to the places that we identify as “home.”

3.3 Moral Vision and Open Endings: Amplifying the Memory of Activism and White Adversaries

Through images collected from the Associated Press and various library, university, and museum archives, Sims-Alvarado presents Atlanta as the epicenter of the civil rights movement
in her 2017 published text. The history of the movement from 1944 to 1968 is witnessed in pictures and captions over ten chapters organized thematically and chronologically. The author’s selection of images and accompanying text are a visual and written landscape for rhetorical criticism. In its entirety, the pictorial narrative is specifically successful at witnessing the scale of activism in Atlanta and scope of white resistance to social change because of the rhetorical style of amplification. Using repetition, enumeration, and magnification, Sims-Alvarado brings forward the uncomfortable and unresolved moral disorder of the past and narrates a historical trajectory of the civil rights movement with an open linear progression toward closure.

In this moral visioning of events, Sims-Alvarado historically narrates the meaning of the civil rights movement for the city of Atlanta. In the introductory chapter of “Images of America,” she identifies the agents in the movement and their disparate goals. The agents can be placed into two groups: the black activists and their white antagonists. The black activists establish the goal of the movement to place black citizens on the same course as the rest of the nation by providing a “pathway” to “personal, political, and economic autonomy.” A measurable promise of this trajectory included integration, voting rights, and economic development. In this historical narrative, black activists are the deliverers of the good. They are helping the United States “move closer toward becoming a more perfect union,” Sims-Alvarado writes. The statement “more perfect Union,” reproduces the goals the United States constitution writers first initiated. While the Constitutional phrasing echoes the divisions of disparate states becoming one, the civil rights movement, specifically reflects the deep division in the Union caused by slavery and racism. The movement activists take on the heart and goals

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194 Sims-Alvarado, Images of America: Atlanta and the Civil Rights Movements 1944-1968, 7
195 Sims-Alvarado, Images of America: Atlanta and the Civil Rights Movements 1944-1968, 7
of the Constitution and institutes them for their generation in order to continue the “becoming” of a nation and to place black citizens onto the trajectory of “becoming” more just, more tranquil, more safe, more secure, and more free within the nation. However, as Sims-Alvarado’s book presents, the barriers keeping the nation from becoming the more perfect union are the “white opposition and hate groups” that challenged social change when they “recognized the political strength of black Atlantans.”¹⁹⁶ White opposition is presented as an issue for more than just Black people, but the entire nation. The book is particularly successful in achieving narrative fullness for Atlanta and the civil rights movement by using amplification as a rhetorical device for inciting moral outrage at the white antagonists’ violation of Constitutional values.

Amplification, according to Burke, is the “most thoroughgoing”¹⁹⁷ rhetorical style, as it is fully persuasive by intensifying or extending the message.¹⁹⁸ Sims-Alvarado’s text doesn’t simply use amplification for style, but to strengthen the importance of the movement’s trajectory to the country by presenting the width of the racial divide in the union. In demonstrating the heightened level of contest between blacks and whites in Atlanta, the text draws witness to the seemingly insurmountable gap in economic, political, and social autonomy that civil rights activists sought to close. Using repetition and enumeration, Sims-Alvarado reinforces the necessity of the trajectory and emphasizes the point that it did not end with Dr. Martin Luther King’s assassination.

First, Sims-Alvarado’s use of repetition emphasizes the level of white resistance that black citizens incurred in retaliation to increased voting rights and active participation. The book

¹⁹⁶ Sims-Alvarado, Images of America: Atlanta and the Civil Rights Movements 1944-1968, 7
¹⁹⁸ Burke, Kenneth. A Rhetoric of Motives.
begins the story of Atlanta in the movement with the US Supreme Court decisions in *Smith v. Allwright* (1944) and *King v Chapman* (1946), which opened white primaries to African American voters. Sims-Alvarado enumerates the expansion of the black electorate from 7,000 to 21,000 in the 1946 Georgia Democratic white primary. She then follows this chapter with a section dedicated to images of white violence and fear tactics against African Americans, allowing readers to infer that the Black vote had large political implications for white power in the city. The increase in Black voting power is established as the rhetorical situation intensifying white angst and violence against Black people in Georgia. Through repetition, Sims-Alvarado incites readers’ moral outrage against a terrible injustice to innocent victims.

Repetition amplifies the image of white injustice against black people, inciting readers’ sentiments. According to Perelman, “only by dwelling upon a subject does one create the desired emotions.”¹⁹⁹ The chapter *And None Shall Make them Afraid* prolongs the attention given to the Ku Klux Klan, Columbians group, and other white supremacist groups, forcing readers to confront a dark past that may bring about varying emotions. The first three images in the chapter depict hooded Ku Klux Klan members, including children, assembling at Stone Mountain and the Inman Yards Baptist Church in the late 1940s.²⁰⁰ With crossed arms and fully covered heads and faces, all that can be seen under the KKK’s traditional white garb are their eyes. They present themselves as an ominous presence at Stone Mountain, a symbol of the city of Atlanta, state of Georgia, and the Confederate states. Their presence is meant to incite fear in any who test their supreme power over the land and the use of children in the images garners an understanding that white supremacy is intended to proceed forever. Though audience sentiments


²⁰⁰ Sims-Alvarado, Images of America: Atlanta and the Civil Rights Movements 1944-1968, 19-21
may differ, bringing limits to the repetition, the prolonged attention forces the audience to consciously take note of the dark elements of the past and resolve them mentally or physically. The efficiency of the repetition device to form the expected emotions depends on the particular audience. Considering the particular audience of the text as historians and African Americans, the moral misconduct of the white opposition could implicitly invite readers to feelings of indignation and outrage.

As the images of injustice are repeated, the ordering of the images indicates the antagonists’ actions deathly effects on black people, inviting readers to view blacks as innocent victims. After these first three images of the KKK, there are four pictures dedicated to a funeral where African Americans mourned the mass lynching deaths of black people 45 miles outside of Atlanta. Moral force is instituted when the victims are identified and defined as innocent, furthering the claim that this is a terrible injustice. The images reinforce innocence by juxtaposing the KKK’s stance of superiority to the black mourners. After an image of hooded KKK members, standing tall and upright as they line up to enter the Inman Yards Baptist Church, there is an image of black people inside a presumed church, lined up to see the body of a lynching victim in his casket. The mourners’ heads are down in this sensitive framing. Placed together, the images imply that the vice of KKK harmed the innocent and mild. The next few images depict Columbians Inc., an anti-black and anti-Jewish group that was exposed by white

201 Perelman, The Realm of Rhetoric, 141
202 Sims-Alvarado, Images of America: Atlanta and the Civil Rights Movements 1944-1968, 22-23
police officers and had some of its leaders convicted in the late 1940s.\textsuperscript{205} Despite these convictions, African Americans were still subjected to white retaliation, as displayed in an image from 1956 depicting the bombing of a black couple’s home when they moved into a white neighborhood, furthering the outrage for innocent victims.

Repetition is used to reinforce the premise that the nation is divided along racial and moral lines, equating black with innocent, and white with victim. After chapter two, stories of white violence, resistance, and intimidation continue throughout the text, repeating the juxtaposition of innocence versus guilt, which, as a narrative strategy, incites “indignation [as] the only proper response.”\textsuperscript{206} In a chapter dedicated to desegregating schools, Sims-Alvarado uses an image citing more than 125 white men and women rallying against desegregation in front of the Atlanta governor’s mansion in 1959.\textsuperscript{207} Reinforcing violence against student sit-ins, the text provides an image of restaurant owner Harold Sprayberry, shooting insect repellent into the air as black students protest eating at his restaurant. The image makes Sprayberry the focal point, depicting the expected power of fear, yet in the background you can see protestors clapping, displaying laughter instead of the likely fear.\textsuperscript{208} Images of white violence, intimidation, and resistance continue, bringing rhetorical power to witnessing. Repetition of white resistance strengthens the “reasonableness” of the activists’ claims that the Union’s greatest divide was by skin color, and government employees were immoral too.

\textsuperscript{205} Sims-Alvarado, Images of America: Atlanta and the Civil Rights Movements 1944-1968, 24-25


\textsuperscript{207} Sims-Alvarado, Images of America: Atlanta and the Civil Rights Movements 1944-1968, 37.

\textsuperscript{208} Sims-Alvarado, Images of America: Atlanta and the Civil Rights Movements 1944-1968, 48.
In addition, the captions of the images enumerate the number of protestors involved, number of arrests, and length of days in protest, amplifying the scope of resistance to social unrest and the scale of social activism in Atlanta. The scope of resistance is pronounced through representing the number of people. Within the framing of images, you can see large numbers of the KKK standing before Stone Mountain, and that visual framing is defended by the text, which states, “here, a cross burns as 700 members are initiated into the KKK at Stone Mountain on July 23, 1948.”209 The images are also magnified, taking up two full-pages in a solo spread. The numbers and size of the images make it difficult to diminish the scale of the KKK’s presence in this time period. Enumeration of lesser numbers can also be effective, especially when presented in imagery that amplifies white male force over a woman. Sims-Alvarado does this in one magnified image where an African American woman protestors is seen on the ground with two white police officers holding her wrists. The emotions elicited by the image are reinforced by the caption, which reads, “Here, white officers drag a young African American woman across the cement as they attempt to place her into a paddy wagon with 24 other persons who refused arrest on January 19, 1964.”210 The numbering of the quantity of people in the police vehicle extends the story, which displays the use of amplification to provide fullness of demonstrative proof.

Enumeration is also used to display the scale of activism that was present in Atlanta. Though many civil rights leaders including Dr. King, Coretta Scott King, Ella Baker, John Lewis, and John Wesley Dobbs are internationally known for their activism in and outside of the state, “Images of America” does the work of extending the scale of participatory action by enumerating other black citizen involvement. Sims-Alvarado starts this in the introduction when

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209 Sims-Alvarado, Images of America: Atlanta and the Civil Rights Movements 1944-1968, 20
210 Sims-Alvarado, Images of America: Atlanta and the Civil Rights Movements 1944-1968, 69
she notes, “more than 5,000 black Atlantans arrived at the Fulton County Courthouse”\(^{211}\) to register to participate in the primary elections of 1944. Providing these numbers within a context of a 1940s Atlanta where the white population outnumbered the black population 65.4\% to 34.5\%,\(^{212}\) reflects the heightened level of political motivation that Black people had during this time. In the midst of retaliation after increased political activity, Black students participated in a demonstration, marching from Atlanta University Center to the Georgia State Capital to commemorate the 6\(^{th}\) anniversary of *Brown v Board of Education*,\(^{213}\) further noting the amplitude of the student-led protests in Atlanta. In the caption under the Sprayberry restaurant 3-hour student sit-in, the author notes that approximately 100 students participated, illuminating the level of student awareness and participation in the movement.\(^{214}\) The book ends with the city’s honoring of Dr. King after his assassination. Reinforcing the scale of influence that King had on the movement, the author notes that 300 people met Dr. King’s casket at the Hartsfield Airport when it was flown in from Memphis. Buttressing his impact and the number of people following and joining the trajectory formed by Dr. King and the civil rights movement in Atlanta, Sims-Alvarado uses a magnified image on a two-page spread and caption to depict the thousands of people who attended Dr. King’s funeral, the procession, and even a second public funeral at Morehouse College.\(^{215}\)

\(^{211}\) Sims-Alvarado, Images of America: Atlanta and the Civil Rights Movements 1944-1968, 7
\(^{213}\) Sims-Alvarado, Images of America: Atlanta and the Civil Rights Movements 1944-1968, 49
\(^{214}\) Sims-Alvarado, Images of America: Atlanta and the Civil Rights Movements 1944-1968, 48
\(^{215}\) Sims-Alvarado, Images of America: Atlanta and the Civil Rights Movements 1944-1968, 118-119
Sims-Alvarado doesn’t end there. She uses countable phrases to amplify the continuation of the movement in King’s absence. Transitioning the leading figure from Dr. King to his wife Coretta Scott King, the text’s final images note the immediate response of Mrs. King to continuing the work of her husband and the people that followed her. In an image of Mrs. King at an event where she is inaugurating the Poor People’s Campaign (Dr. King’s next goal) just “three weeks”\(^\text{216}\) after her husband’s death, Mrs. King is “surrounded by an entourage of security, aids, and supporters,”\(^\text{217}\) demonstrating that the movement had not been disbanded. In the following page, the writer includes an image of an uncountable number of “supporters”\(^\text{218}\) marching down today’s Martin Luther King Jr. Drive in Atlanta to support the Poor People’s Campaign. In addition, “demonstrators from across the United States”\(^\text{219}\) rallied in Washington DC in June 1968 for the campaign. The second to final image of the text is of Mrs. King speaking to “thousands of protesters”\(^\text{220}\) at the Lincoln Memorial. These images bring the book to a close but leave the movement open with linear progression toward closure, presuming that continued work needs to occur and will occur.

This narrative criticism of the “Images of America” book reveals the use of amplification in historical narration to provide the full measure of moral consciousness expected for representations of reality in the stories of history.\(^\text{221}\) The historian Sims-Alvarado produces the

\(^{216}\) Sims-Alvarado, Images of America: Atlanta and the Civil Rights Movements 1944-1968, 123

\(^{217}\) Sims-Alvarado, Images of America: Atlanta and the Civil Rights Movements 1944-1968, 123

\(^{218}\) Sims-Alvarado, Images of America: Atlanta and the Civil Rights Movements 1944-1968, 124

\(^{219}\) Sims-Alvarado, Images of America: Atlanta and the Civil Rights Movements 1944-1968, 125

\(^{220}\) Sims-Alvarado, Images of America: Atlanta and the Civil Rights Movements 1944-1968, 126

meaning of the civil rights movement for Atlanta. The message of the images and captions is that Atlanta’s black activists fought, as should others, for the values of the United States Constitution and the white adversaries did not. Thus, the audience should choose to follow the black activists’ trajectory and value that which is more just, more tranquil, more safe, more secure, and more free for all.

The book is a rhetorical text that provides a comparative framework for understanding the “Images of America” exhibit with AoAB. The book is established for a more particular audience with interest in Atlanta and the civil rights movement, and because of its medium, the choice to be a part of that audience is voluntary. The particularity of the audience and the private media distribution of a novel, gives the author an unrestricted space for epideictic practice that draws witness to the moral disorder and racial conflict in the United States that induced the civil rights movement’s trajectory, while leaving the trajectory open for future generations to “do-something.” In the next section I turn to the “Images of America” exhibit, discussing how space as a medium can shift the rhetorical style and message of the historical narrative.

3.4 Romantic Visions and Traumatic Repetition: Rescuing Whites for a Universal Audience

At the time of this writing the Atlanta BeltLine is incomplete, marking its finished delineations on 3-miles of Westside Atlanta (a largely poor-to-lower class black population) and 3 miles on the Eastside of Atlanta (a largely middle-to-upper class white population). Residents and visitors use their imaginations to conceive of the completed North and South trails connecting neighborhoods around the city (Error! Reference source not found.). The “Images of Atlanta” exhibit can be found on the two completed walking trails of the partially constructed Atlanta BeltLine. Including the 4 entrance and exit signs, there are 32 exhibit signs on the
Westside of the trail and 18 on the Eastside (represented as blue nodes on the Eastside and Westside trail in Error! Reference source not found.). The images and captions on some signposts reference specific locations where events associated. The association of a signpost to locations within the city of Atlanta is represented as a black line connected to blue nodes within the city in Figure 3.2. As a whole picture, the civil rights movement images’ form a spatial narrative along the BeltLine, forging a past that’s at the epicenter of Atlanta’s metaphorical stance as the “Black Mecca” and quite accurately reflecting the continued segregation in Atlanta that divides the city. Seen within the context of this space, the open exhibit romanticizes the movement amongst its particular audiences, omitting images that reflect the intensity of white backlash on the Westside and reordering the topical and chronological construction found in the book in such a way that artificially highlights government support of the movement on the Eastside. The narrative analysis of the exhibit’s deep map reveals how the rhetorical practice of rescuing whites leads to narrative repetition of social injustices and disrupts African American historical trajectories.

222 Note: There are exhibit signpost references to locations outside of Atlanta that are not pictured in the map displayed for visual purposes. The locations outside of Atlanta that are referenced on the signpost include Montgomery, AL (protest demonstration location), Selma, AL (protest demonstration location), Memphis, TN (site of MLK Jr’s murder), Reidsville, GA (location of Georgia State Prison), Athens, GA (location of University of Georgia), and Manhattan, NY (location of the South African Consulate).
Figure 3.2 Deep Map – “Images of America: Atlanta and the Civil Rights Movement, 1944-1968.” Pink lines represent the finished Eastside and Westside Trail. Blue nodes on the Eastside Trail and Westside Trail representing exhibit signposts connected by black lines to actual event locations within Atlanta. Street map from Google Maps (2020).

To appropriately assess the rhetoricity of the deep map the contextual constraints and spatial scene must be considered. As a medium, public-art has differing restraints than a novel. First there is the public, nearly universal audience of the open exhibit. While the novel is printed
for mass communication, its audience is limited by distribution, marketing, and public interest. Based on its categorization on Amazon, the text is marketed as African American history, American literature anthology, and a civil rights and liberties. Thus, it has a particular audience of people interested in history and politics and subject to the constraints Amazon imposes when it markets it through these categories. Though available to a mass audience, the novel is privately consumed. While it is circulated in print media, it is restricted to those who can pay for it, known more readily to a particular group, and is of special or personal interest. On the other hand, the exhibit is public-art, which is best understood as being open to everyone, accessible for free in the public sector, available for common use, popularly known, and in the physical view of its audience.\textsuperscript{223} The public audience for the Atlanta BeltLine includes a diverse group of races, genders, ages, and values, making up a universal audience of multiple particular audiences that the rhetor seeks to persuade. This leads to the second constraint, the multiple persuasive purposes of the rhetor. The exhibit is sponsored by AoAB, which highlights its purpose to provide equity, access, inclusion, interconnection, and growth and leadership in celebrating the diverse history and culture of Atlanta’s communities. But the acts of AoAB are also subject to the goals of Atlanta BeltLine, Inc, which has the responsibility to raise public and private funding toward completing the BeltLine. With the consideration of capital necessity, the AoAB public-art also reflects the neoliberal trajectory of the city, promoting monetary incentive and bringing in affluent interests. To bring in the affluent, previous research shows, heritage projects must align with the political values and sentiments of the gentrifiers.\textsuperscript{224}


Finally, the exhibit must meet the constraints of space itself. While a book presumably can expand to include an innumerable quantity of images and text to provide rhetorical success to the message, the design, arrangement, and space of the BeltLine regulates the number of images that can successfully be included in a way that is both informative, clear, and aesthetically pleasing. The exhibit includes a total of 50 signposts. And the rhetorical criticism that proceeds reveals what images were omitted as compared to the book, providing key insight into how this deep map romanticizes the civil rights movement.

The deep map is particularly different from a simple textual analysis because of the story world, the world of reality as perceived by the audience. The story world for the exhibit is the scene of the Eastside and Westside trail. Beginning with the Eastside trail, I will distinguish some of the race rhetoric that guided the establishment of the space in modern history and the demographics representing the area as we know it today. Such information brings to the fore the significance of the exhibit within the space.

The completed Eastside trail runs between Piedmont Park at its northern end and Reynoldstown at its southern end. The actual exhibit starts/ends at Ponce City Market before it reaches Piedmont Park. As discussed in the opening to this chapter, Piedmont Park’s storied racial history includes Washington’s Atlanta Compromise speech, where he advocated respectability politics and conceded that, “in all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress.” However, as evident by the exigence for the civil rights movement, Washington’s optimism about separation of the races had not been fruitful in bringing about mutual progress for both blacks and whites.

225 Washington, Booker T, “Atlanta Compromise Speech.”
The effects of separate and unequal are evident in the history of Reynoldstown, at the Eastside trails southernmost tip. Former slaves moved to Reynoldstown after the Civil War, making it one of the first developed African American neighborhoods. Named after a successful black landowner, Madison Reynolds, the neighborhood saw demographic changes as the results of industrialization and capitalism brought the trolley system to the neighborhood and along with it, white middle-class families. The railroad closed in 1950 and Reynoldstown went on a decline until gentrification started in the 1990s.

Today, the area between Piedmont Park and Reynoldstown is economically prosperous and reflects the racial demographic changes to Reynoldstown as African Americans were displaced. Based on 2010 census data, the neighborhoods along the Eastside trail have a median household income of $77,350, which is approximately 65% higher than Atlanta’s Median Household Income (AMI). The percentage of poverty in the Eastside Trail Neighborhoods is 12% in comparison to the city of Atlanta’s 25% poverty. From a perspective of racial distribution, the Eastside Trail neighborhoods are 72% white, 18% black, 5% Hispanic, and 3% Latino, or Asian? Such data reflects disparate impact in race and economic prosperity along this corridor of the BeltLine. Connecting Washington’s rhetoric of 1895 to historic Reynoldstown, the civil rights movement, and current day demographics provides a rhetorical and historical context for assessing the “Images of America” exhibit along this side of the trail.

We now turn to the scene of the Westside trail, which runs between Washington Park at its Northern point and Adair Park at its Southern point. The exhibit stops short of Adair Park,

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ending at a Kroger grocery store in the Westend neighborhood. The historic Washington Park neighborhood is also reflective of the history of segregation in Atlanta as the first planned black Atlanta suburb. Developed for blacks between 1919 and 1924, the neighborhood was home to many influential black families in the city and neighbors the Atlanta University Center, where Du Bois wrote *The Souls of Black Folk* and opposed the submissive stance of Washington. Washington Park was considered the black side of town as instituted by a “color line” and white developers left the area.

West End, on the other hand, developed a bit differently. It maintained its white population into the 1950s. It wasn’t until after the civil rights movement that “white flight” ramped as black people moved into the area and started desegregating the whites-only schools. By the 1980s West End was predominately Black and middle class, as many black professionals, students, and faculty from the Atlanta University Center began purchasing homes there.227 Today, the area between Washington Park and West End is seeing the reversing shift with a new influx of white residents in the wake of the Atlanta BeltLine and other developments.

Segregation laws, redlining, and white flight were large factors in the demography of today’s Westside Trail. As of 2010 census data, the Westside Trail neighborhood’s racial distribution is 90% black, 5% white, 2% Hispanic, and 1% Asian. This distribution is largely consistent across all the neighborhoods along this corridor. In comparison, Atlanta overall has a Black population of about 54%. Furthering the disparities between the Eastside and Westside Trail is the income distribution in the Westside Trail neighborhoods. Here the median household income is $26,035, which is 44% below the city’s AMI and 66% below the median household income of the Eastside Trail neighborhoods. 37% of the population is in poverty, more than

doubling the state’s poverty average. And though this side of the BeltLine is home to the Atlanta University Center, it is approximated that only 20% of residents have a college degree, which is 27% less than the city average. The differences are also represented in housing conditions as 39% of homes along the Westside Trail are considered in fair or poor condition, in comparison to just 18% of the Eastside Trail homes considered in fair or poor condition.228 Viewing the history of segregation, redlining, the civil rights movement, white flight, and current demographics along the Westside Trail provides a historical and spatial context for understanding the “Images of America” exhibit.

The exhibit connects the history of these spaces by spatially narrating Atlanta and the civil rights movement. Connecting the historical trajectory to the space through public-art has the power to draw witness to the trauma of segregation and the current encroachment on black space, gentrification. In order to do so, the spatial narrative would need to call forth the past moral disordering into the present, reinstating the need for a moral reordering by constituting the movement’s narrative as open for active participation in its continued linear progression. But what this study reveals is that the placement of the sourced images in space revised the narrative agents through personification and caused disparate narrative endings on the Eastside and Westside Trails, leading to opposing messages to the differing audiences and instigating continued racial separation.

In this exhibit’s spatial narration, the moral visioning is re-casted, de-emphasizing the white antagonist and personifying the tools of change and tools of the status quo as the acting

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characters, rather than the white and black humans. This message is initiated at the four-exhibit entrance and exit signs, located at the north and south ends of each of the trails. While the entrance and exit signs salute African Americans as protagonists in social protest, rather than setting up an antagonist opposing them, the text rescues whites through personification, placing responsibility on objects and ideas instead of white actors.\textsuperscript{229} The exhibition sign reads, “During the first half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, a progressive group of black business, civic and religious leaders from Atlanta, Georgia, challenged the status quo by employing a method of incremental gradualism to improve the social and political conditions existent within the city.” The non-human antagonist is the “status quo.” Noting the younger generations shift in social change methods to direct-action, the text then reads,

A culmination of the death of Emmitt Till and the Brown decision fostered this paradigm shift by bringing attention to the safety and education concerns specific to African American youth. Deploying direct-action tactics and invoking the language of civil and human rights, the energy and the zest of this generation of activists pushed the modern civil rights movement into a new chapter where young men and women became the voice of social unrest.

Here an antagonist is not identified for the younger generation. Instead, the focus shifts to the tool of change, direct-action tactics. The phrasing specifically removes the actions of the white antagonist. For instance, using the terms “culmination of the death of Emmitt Till” is a passive construction that eliminates the white agents of Till’s murder, never discussing “how” he was murdered. Phrasing the events of Till’s fatality as a “death,” rather than a “murder” constrains the audience from incentive for justice or reparations for the act. The message of the exhibit entrance and exit signs are constructed to focus on the agency and methods of change,

\textsuperscript{229} Bracey, “Rescuing Whites: White Privileging Discourse in Race Critical Scholarship.”
rather than the actors. The agency is positioned against the “status quo,” which is personified as the antagonist to civil and human rights.

Beyond the entrance and exit signs, viewing the exhibit in its entirety within the BeltLine space reveals that the message construction on the Eastside Trail is different than that on the Westside Trail. In addition, the narrative endings presented on the separate trails are also distinct. On the Eastside Trail the narration visions the success of direct-action tactics in establishing social change and, thus, ends in narrative closure of the civil rights movement trajectory. On the Westside Trail the narration visions the tragic ending of direct-action with the death of Dr. King and the continuation of his legacy with Coretta Scott King, providing narrative linear progress for the trajectory’s Westside audience. In the following, assessment reveals how the spatial narrative is framed to rescue whites.

Rescuing whites is a framing device, first proposed by sociologist Glenn Bracey, that saves white people “from direct criticism for racism.”

Bracey specifically targeted scholars that use absenting whites, personification, and narrative bracketing to “temper” their language and “make it palatable to whites.” Because such acts remove white people as agents of racism and white supremacy, they romanticize the events that occur. Rescuing whites goes beyond traditional scholarship. As I present here, the rhetorical framing is also used in public-art as the focus of public memory is shifted to emphasize white people who supported racial progress and deemphasize white supremacist retaliation against racial progress. The “Images of America” exhibit performatively rescues whites because of the order of the chapters, omission of white agency, and institutionalization of segregation within the space.

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230 Bracey, “Rescuing Whites: White Privileging Discourse in Race Critical Scholarship,” 1
231 Bracey, “Rescuing Whites: White Privileging Discourse in Race Critical Scholarship,” 2
The images on the BeltLine are primarily ordered based off the book chapters, but there are distinct and troubling differences in the chapter order that perpetuates the rescuing of whites, particularly on the Eastside trail. The Eastside Trail, beginning at Ponce City Market and ending at Reynoldstown, starts at chapter 1 of the book and ends at chapter 6. However, chapter 5 is omitted from this consecutive ordering of the chapters. The Westside Trail, beginning at the West End Kroger and ending at Washington Park, starts with chapter 4 and ends at chapter 10. Here, chapter 6 is omitted and moved to the Eastside, shifting the consecutive order. Chapter 7 is omitted from the exhibit entirely (Table 3-1). If the chapters had been perfectly aligned, it would be constructed with chapters 1-4 on the Eastside and chapters 4-10 on the Westside. Chapter 4 is overlapped on both sides of the trail in the current curation. However, the misplacement of chapter 6 and the omission of chapter 7 completely, reconstruct the story the book provides and perpetuates rescuing whites, particularly on the Eastside.

Table 3-1 Exhibit Layout by Book Chapter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eastside</th>
<th>Westside</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: Atlanta's Black Voting Power</td>
<td>Chapter 4: Atlanta's Student Movement and SNCC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: And None Shall MakeThem Afraid</td>
<td>Chapter 5: Direct Action Tactics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: Destroying Jim Crow and Enforcing the Brown Decision</td>
<td>Chapter 8: SNCC, SCLC, and Selma</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chapter 4: Atlanta's Student Movement and SNCC</td>
<td>Chapter 9: Poor People's Campaign and Opposing the Vietnam War</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chapter 6: The National Campaign for Civil and Human Rights</td>
<td>Chapter 10: Honoring a King and his Legacy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Omitted - Chapter 7: Atlanta’s Response to the Civil Rights Act</td>
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Chapter 6, the misplaced chapter, is titled *The National Campaign for Civil and Human Rights*. The chapter reflects national support for the movement. Along the Eastside trail, three images from this chapter are used, 1) a 1963 image of Dr. King giving his “I Have a Dream Speech,” 2) Dr. King and Mrs. King arriving in Oslo to receive the Nobel Peace Prize, and 3) Dr. King receiving an award from the city of Atlanta as a ‘Citizen of Atlanta, with Respect and Admiration’ in 1963. The third image is particularly interesting because it directly connects to Atlanta and local government support for the movement King was leading. In the image, Rabbi Jacob Rothschild of The Temple is handing Dr. King a large crystal Steuben bowl award.
According to the caption, the reception occurred after Dr. King received the Nobel Peace Prize. It was arranged by Mayor Ivan Allen and former and current Coca-Cola CEOs Robert Woodruff and J. Paul Austin. The event reflects a unification of support from government and business toward racial progress and social change. Together, all three images portray Dr. King as loved and supported by the nation and local business and political leaders. These moments of seeming unification did occur. But their designated location on the Eastside of the BeltLine troubles the narrative presented by the book.

This chapter was misplaced from its consecutive ordering that would put it on the Westside trail (primarily Black and lower class). Instead, the images are on the Eastside Trail, with a larger white and middle- to upper-class visiting population. Positioning the images on the Eastside Trail reframes the narrative for this particular audience by focusing on white support for the movement. The audience receives a message that the movement was successful, and government and capitalist entities were a part of that. However, the misplacement of this one chapter is not enough to rescue whites. Other image omissions provide support for this narrative message.

As explained in the rhetorical criticism of the book, chapter 2, *And None Shall Make Them Afraid*, is the most holistically explicit chapter in reflecting white retaliation to black direct-action. This chapter is included on the Eastside trail, following the expected consecutive ordering of chapters. However, images of white retaliation against black people, including the prominent Ku Klux Klan images in the book, are excluded from the exhibit. The three images from this chapter that are included rescue whites by presenting white racial innocence. The three images used are, 1) The Columbians, an anti-black and anti-Semitic hate group, entering the Fulton County Jail, 2) a group of white activists in Atlanta that worked to dissolve the
Columbians group, and 3) Mayor Hartsfield and Rabbi Jacob Rothchild kneeling in front of The Temple after it had been bombed by white supremacists. Together, the images focus attention to the real traumatic crimes against Jewish supporters of civil rights and the government’s conviction of the white supremacist group, the Columbians. While the events are real and the stories need to be told, the issue is the inclusion of these images and the exclusion of all the images that focus on retaliation to black bodies. The images that created moral indignation for black people in this chapter of the book, are excluded from the exhibit, diverting attention from the systemic complicity in violence against black activists.

Thus, on the Eastside of the BeltLine trail, where the incentive for BeltLine investments is the strongest, the civil rights movement is romanticized through omission of images that would draw witness to moral disorder against African Americans. Furthermore, the Eastside trail positions a narrative closure for the civil rights movement, providing the message that direct-action tactics were successful and a moral reckoning has occurred in Atlanta because hate groups were convicted and Dr. King was given his rightful award from local business and government. The evidence of this narrative closure becomes clearer through the criticism of the Westside trail in comparison.

As noted previously, the consecutive ordering of the chapter’s places chapter 4-10 on the Westside Trail. However, Chapter 7 Atlanta’s Response to the Civil Rights Act, a chapter that emphasizes white retaliation to civil rights, is omitted from the exhibit. Images from this chapter in the book start at President Lyndon B Johnson’s signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and ends with an image showing young white men, self-identified as the “Rebels,” marching in downtown Atlanta to welcome Governor George Wallace of Alabama, a leading proponent of segregation and white supremacy. While the chapter identifies Mayor Ivan Allen and Georgia
Governor Carl Sanders as supporters of the Act, other images show white protestors against the progressive policy marching in the streets of Atlanta. One image shows Ku Klux Kan members protesting businesses that were integrating, carrying signs that read, “DON’T TRADE HERE! Owners of this business surrendered to the RACE MIXERS.” The chapter also magnifies businesses that refused to integrate, showing Pickrick Restaurant owner, Lester Maddox closing his restaurant after being fined for refusing to integrate. A following image shows Maddox leading protestors through the city arguing for private rights. But all these images are omitted from the exhibit, reducing the focus on white anti-Black racism.

Instead, the Westside trail images focus on the memory of agency in the youth, and their methods of direct-action, and deemphasizes the antagonists’ actions. Rescuing whites occurs here, like the Eastside trail, through omission of images that lead to direct criticism of whites. For example, exhibit sign 17 on the Eastside Trail shows John Lewis, who was leading 200 activists in a demonstration in Selma on February 23, 1965, being warned by a police officer in Selma that white opposition was high and dangerous. This image is seemingly peaceful between the white officer, the demonstrators, and the press taking pictures. What is omitted is the successive, magnified image from the book that depicts demonstrators in Selma led by Lewis and Hosea Williams on March 7, 1965 being hit with billy clubs and tear gassed by law enforcement. While the book magnifies the traumatic violence at the hands of the police, the exhibit excludes these images, omitting key elements of violence against young activists and particular story lines within the larger context of the movement. Another example of such omission is with exhibit sign 20 on the Eastside. Exhibit sign 20 begins the story line of Julian Bond’s ban from the Georgia House of Representatives “because of his support of SNCC’s anti-war stance on Vietnam.” The exhibit includes 2 images reflecting on this 1966 moment for a
black politician. The second image, exhibit sign 21, shows Dr. King and Bond casting ballots to get Bond his congressional seat back in the Georgia House. These two images do not provide due justice for the traumatic events revolving around the decision to ban Bond from his political seat. An image in the book that is omitted from the exhibit shows white protestors preventing “African American demonstrators from entering the Georgia State Capitol in support of reseating Julian Bond to the Georgia House of Congress.”

The exhibit also excludes the images of marchers through Atlanta, rallying support for reseating Bond. The exclusion of these images from Bond’s story inhibits the audience’s awareness of the scope and scale of retaliation to Black political power and the extent to which Black protestors had to come together to support him. This minimalizes the extent of moral disorder and romanticizes the changes that these activists were able to make in the contentious environment.

More disconcerting is some omissions made in captioning and paired image choices for events that reframe the narrative to rescue whites. One such image is exhibit sign 16, which is a picture of King’s family, friends, and supporters welcoming him home from an 80-day prison stay in Reidsville State Penitentiary in Georgia. The first line of the caption under the image reads, “Dr. King was sentenced to four months of hard labor at Reidsville State Penitentiary for violating his probation of an earlier traffic offense.” This statement concedes that Dr. King was in prison because of traffic offenses and omits any connection to civil rights’ protests. On the other hand, the corresponding event images and captions are different in the book, providing a framing that reflects integration protests as the true exigence of Dr. King’s arrest and his traffic offenses as a smokescreen. In the book the story of the arrest begins with an image of Dr. King protesting to integrate Rich’s department store in Atlanta on October 19, 1960. The next image

232 Sims-Alvarado, Images of America: Atlanta and the Civil Rights Movements 1944-1968, 98
shows Dr. King in the back of a police car. The first line of the caption says, “Dr. Martin Luther King Jr was arrested along with 52 students on October 19, 1960, for violating Georgia’s segregation laws.” The next image shows Dr. King walking with police officers on what is assumed to be the day of his release from prison. The first line of the caption reads, “As a result of the arrest at Rich’s, Dr. King was sentenced to four months of hard labor at Reidsville State Penitentiary for violating probation for an earlier traffic offense.” The fourth image shows Dr. King being welcomed home by family and friends. The storyline in the book has 4 images that provide a complete exigence for King’s arrest and its association with his protests. In comparison, the exhibit displaces the exigence and deemphasizes opposition to Black protests.

While there are images on this path that name whites as perpetuators of injustice, the lack of amplification decreases the narrative fullness of the moral disorder of the past and the present and magnitude of opposition to moral ordering. What I hope to have revealed here is that the omission of white antagonistic actions rescues whites from direct responsibility. It furthers a romantic vision of the civil rights movement for people on the Eastside and Westside of the BeltLine. On the Westside of the BeltLine a primarily black audience sees the addition of their history to the urban renewal project. However, they are not witnessing the scope and scale of the moral disorder. In addition, within the setting of the Westside BeltLine a different ending is portrayed. The civil rights movement narrative begins to conclude as visitors reach Washington Park. The storyline transitions to Chapter 10 Honoring a King and His Legacy. This final chapter reviews King’s assassination in Memphis, the outpouring of honor for him at his funeral in Atlanta, and the continuation of the movement with Mrs. King. It ends, as the book does, with

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233 Sims-Alvarado, Images of America: Atlanta and the Civil Rights Movements 1944-1968, 53
234 Sims-Alvarado, Images of America: Atlanta and the Civil Rights Movements 1944-1968, 53
the movement’s continuation and linear progression toward moral reckoning. On the Westside BeltLine a largely Black audience sees the tragedy but is left with the hope of an open story.

Now, we must view these two different types of endings and the rhetorical messages they give to the segregated audiences. On the Eastside BeltLine a largely white and affluent audience is provided narrative closure. There is nothing left to be done here or a “postracial” ending that subject’s audiences to the belief that racism no longer exists. On the Westside BeltLine a younger, black audience is left with an open story that reflects a hopeful desire for continued change. Together, the two narrative story lines romanticize the future for these particular audiences and deemphasize the glaring obviousness of what is actually occurring. While Dr. King and civil rights activists fought for integration, Eastside and Westside Atlanta’s present reflect that Atlanta is segregated on racial lines. However, a romanticizing of the narrative hinders audiences on the Eastside from gathering full acknowledgment of the moral disorder that continues, while it sends a message to the Westside that through their own continued actions change can still come.

3.5 Conclusion

I began this chapter suggesting that the historical trajectory of the civil rights movement in Atlanta began with the message from Du Bois written in 1903, in a space close to Black Atlanta’s collective identity. His message stated that “the burden belongs to the nation, and the hands of none of us are clean if we bend not our energies to righting these great wrongs.” While one of the exhibit entrances on the Westside begins with a portrait of Du Bois, the full scope of the historical walk institutionalizes the conceptual burden of moral reordering on black Atlanta. It more aligns with the rhetoric of Washington, who Du Bois criticized for “his doctrine has
tended to make the whites, North and South, shift the burden of the Negro problem to the Negro’s shoulders and stand aside as critical and rather pessimistic spectators.”

I have strongly reiterated that rhetorical witnessing of history is a necessity to bringing about a “something-to-be-done.” Witnessing influences action. In my rhetorical criticism of the exhibit I have revealed that narrative closure on the Eastside BeltLine inhibits the call to action and the open ending on the Westside BeltLine places the burden of social change on the primarily black and poor – to – low class population. Performatively, the exhibit places black Atlanta and white Atlanta at odds. It repeats segregation and disrupts the historical trajectory of the civil rights movement, which has not had a moral reckoning in the real space.

I have also extensively assessed the book “Images of America” to reveal that the witnessing message of a book can be re-narrated as romanticizing rhetoric in space when rescuing whites and neoliberal goals are applied. Thus, when answering the question of this dissertation, “how can African American historical trajectories be lost or maintained when the neoliberal dominant hegemony homogenizes a metaphorical origin?,” this case study reveals that a historical trajectory can be disrupted by historical spatial narration that rescues whites. Such forms of historical narration use false narrative closure to present the goals of the moralizing trajectory as complete, which discounts the issues that are still occurring within the place. In addition, public-art that rescues of whites remove responsibility from the dominant group for moral reordering by framing them as racially innocent. By placing all agency onto the victimized group, rescuing whites in historical spatial narration, in turn places the responsibility of failure onto the victim alone.

Excavating these spatial narratives is a necessity because the rhetorical work to romanticize space is invisible to the untrained eye, yet still covertly powerful in affecting the
way we act toward each other in the world. Over the past two chapters we have learned that to sustain African American collective identity and encourage the formation of spaces that are respectful to diverse historical trajectories and belonging, we have to present sublimely coherent stories that are true to the lived event of the past and encourage viewers to continue to proceed in the direction of moral reckoning. In the final case study, I will grapple with the ways in which spatial narratives that effectively provide witness can still be rendered ineffective within the built environment and reconstructed to make them invisible and exclude groups of people from cultural belonging. In the end, it will be our renewed energy to assess these changes in cultural environment as strategic efforts to supplant marginalized groups that will move us toward reimagining our cityscapes as places where everyone can live.
FROM BLACK MECCA TO BEER TOWN: THE INVISIBILITY OF BLACK SITES OF MEMORY VS TRANSCENDING MNEMONIC NARRATIVES

“Is this for white people or black people?” one child asked Angel Poventud, an activist volunteer along the Atlanta BeltLine. His question is not out of the ordinary when you consider the changes occurring in the city.

Residents across south and southwest Atlanta are asking the same question as they brace themselves for the BeltLine trail construction at different rates across these historically black neighborhoods. They have already seen the major changes in the first large portion of the BeltLine trail opened in 2012 on Atlanta’s eastside. Before it officially opened, speculation on the BeltLine promises was one of the major drivers that shifted the demographics of the Old Fourth Ward neighborhood where Martin Luther King, Jr. grew up. In the first decade of the 21st century, the percentage of white residents increased from 16% to 34% and after the 2008 recession, average home sales increased from $126,000 to $290,000 over the first 18 years of the century. The fast changes were accompanied by visible transformations in the built environment. An old Ford Factory was converted into loft apartments and the Sears-Roebucks warehouse became Ponce City Market, a 2.1 million-square-foot mixed-use space of boutiques,

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gourmet eateries, offices, and apartments.\textsuperscript{237} Then, in 2018, New Realm Brewing, the first brewery on the Eastside trail, was opened in an old warehouse space.\textsuperscript{238}

There are a few sure signs that your neighborhood is already gentrifying. It’s that new craft brewery, the yoga studio, hipster café, health-food store, and boutique shops that ring the alarms for those who may not have already been leery of the reduction in government housing, opening of a charter school, and faster home sales that happened before those businesses came in. People of color in gentrifying neighborhoods are often aware of the signs but find little power in staving off the influx of new wealthy investors eyeing their community. By the time residents ring the alarm to government officials that speculation is inciting displacement, the kings and queens of capital have already staked their claim, giving long-term residents the sense that their need to get back \textit{in} The Move could be delayed, but it is surely inevitable.

As of 2018, “an outlay of $500 million of mostly public BeltLine money has generated $4 billion in private investment, with a further $4 billion planned or proposed.”\textsuperscript{239} The weight of the capital being placed into the project has enhanced scrutiny of the city of Atlanta as a model for urban renewal plans in cities across the nation. As Atlanta becomes more visible, so does its built environment and the chance to construct Atlanta as a city, not just for black people or for white people, but for all people to thrive.

\textsuperscript{237} Mead, “A City Cursed by Sprawl: Can the BeltLine Save Atlanta? | Cities | The Guardian.”


\textsuperscript{239} Mead, “A City Cursed by Sprawl: Can the BeltLine Save Atlanta? | Cities | The Guardian.”
In this chapter, I turn to the private investments that have spurred the iconic symbols of gentrification at the Westside location where that young black boy seemingly asked Poventud – Is this for me?

* * *

“Malt Disney.” That’s the nickname that has been dubbed for the Westside of the BeltLine trail, home to the Lee + White Development. Cutting through historic West End Atlanta, a majority residential area, the Westside trail opened to the public in September 2017 and has had considerably less foot-traffic than its finished counterpart, the Eastside trail. But despite the low traffic to start, commercial developments have continued, especially those catering to the craft brewing subculture. Lee + White, a collection of 14 consecutive warehouses dating back to the 1950s, covers 23 acres of land along White Street with a prime location down a ½ mile of the Westside trail. Once known as “Warehouse Row,” it started to transform in 2017 as more breweries found their home in the space. As of this writing, the repurposed warehouses are home to 7 drink-focused locations dedicated to the art of fermentation.

Craft brewing, a historically white male industry and social space, has now made its imprint on the West End, which has been a majority black low-income neighborhood in southwest Atlanta since white flight in the 1960s and 70s. It is coined by some of its residents as a “Black Mecca” in and of itself. A spatial mapping of the beer-focused locations, and the places in the built environment that are designated sites of history and memory for black residents, uncovers that the beer locations have prime visibility on the Westside trial, while black sites of memory hold positions of invisibility, outside of the direct walking path. Thus, while the Atlanta BeltLine is touted for connecting multiple diverse neighborhoods across the trail, such spatial
mapping exposes the ways in which urban renewal is used to render black culture invisible and alienated from Atlanta’s future. Drawing from Craig E. Barton’s work on sites of memory, in this chapter, I argue that the built environment, formed by shifts in landscape and large capital investment connected to the BeltLine construction, effectively romanticizes the African American spatial narrative by separating black and white culture and forming a hierarchy of space that subordinates Black memorial narratives under an exclusive, white, idyllic sense-of-place.

Sites of memory are studied throughout the field of rhetoric and communication. Scholarship regarding individual national memorials,240 including civil rights commemorations241 dominate the study of memory, place, and rhetoric. Though Gregory Clark uses Kenneth Burke’s theory of identification to address how tourism of popular sites in the United States’ landscape lead us to identify collectively as a nation,242 few studies by rhetorical scholars have addressed the racialized cultural landscape and its effects on belonging to a neighborhood, city, or nation. It’s curious that more work by rhetoricians hasn’t been done in this area as they are apt at critiquing domination and the discursive power in communicative symbols.243 Thus far, the study of the racialized cultural landscape and built environment has been dominated by other areas of the humanities and social sciences, including geography and


urbanist studies. For instance, Delores Hayden, acknowledging that landscapes hold the power to create a sense of cultural citizenship— that is, a logos of cultural belonging and membership in American society— goes on to excavate the historical meaning in the urban landscape of Los Angeles to make visible the history of people of color and women in the city. In keeping with Hayden’s work, architecturist, Craig E. Barton explores racialization of space in the built environment and sites of memory in his edited anthology, “Sites of Memory: Perspectives on Architecture and Race.” These works help us recognize the importance of looking at the development of our cities as a spatial and social process and cultivate productive methods for designing cities that allow multiple historical trajectories to coexist.

Their work suggests that the dominant hegemony uses power over space to constrain, isolate, and make invisible certain marginalized groups and this becomes more evident as we excavate the spatial narratives memorialized by the landscape. In extension, this chapter seeks to capitalize on cultural landscape studies to understand how urban neighborhood design affects the visibility and invisibility of African American narratives inscribed in sites of memory as representations of Americanness. A rhetorical focus on sites of memory is critical to understanding how collective identities can endure despite the threat of gentrification-instigated displacement.

In its simplest form, to witness is to see. Whether the story has sublime coherence or brings a moral reckoning, as we’ve discussed in previous chapters, doesn’t matter if the story is not seen or heard. Not seeing yourself reflected back in the place you are expected to call home

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crushes your sense of belonging to that place and you feel invisible. African American sites of memory do not have a front facing location on the Westside trail, leaving the metaphorical narratives associated with the Black Mecca, covered by the futurist metaphorical narrative of “Malt Disney.” To reflect on how history can be romanticized by the design of the built environment, I spatially and chronologically narrativize the sites of memory articulated in vernacular histories of the West End against the proleptic and retrospective reality determined by the narrative of alcoholic beverages and the craft brewing industry. Critical assessment of this narrative reveals that the built environment of the Westside trail in the West End uses a strategy of colorblind racism to render black culture invisible by repatterning the movement of more affluent people into the neighborhood, separating the black cultural spaces from the Westside trail, and neoliberalizing the narrative of the space with a privileged and historically exclusionary subculture. Because of the rhetorical power of the built environment, this invisibility of their mnemonic narratives could ultimately alienate African Americans from belonging, leaving them unable to identify a positive sense of self that fits into the “new collectivity assembled there.”

This is not to suggest that breweries should not be opened in revitalizing black neighborhoods, but to understand the ramifications of using landscape in a diverse environment for an exclusive subcultural group.

In this chapter, we turn to the built environment and a critical examination of the stories attached to sites of memory where neighbors, strangers, and coworkers build community. First, I will discuss sites of memory and spaces of appearance to identify the elements of West End’s geography that are pertinent to this study and the significance of invisibility and cultural

247 Clark, Rhetorical Landscapes in America: Variations on a Theme from Kenneth Burke, 15
belonging to witnessing. Then, I will review the deep mapping and spatial storytelling method I use to approach the overarching question of this chapter. Next, I discuss the history of the West End, focusing on the connection of beer and alcohol to the production of the segregated city. Then, I introduce the reader to sites of memory that have cultivated the black sense of collective identity tied to the place. Reflecting on the West End as a Black Mecca, I end by assessing its transformation to beer town, spurred by the Lee + White development on the Westside trail. It is a strategic shift in the gateway to the neighborhood that will lead to the invisibility of black sites of memory in the West End. A chronological retelling of West End’s story with primary attention to movement and identity construction in the built environment reveals how cultural gentrification is dependent upon distinguishing itself from the overt racism of the past through a strategy of a colorblind neoliberal racism that preserves racialization of space in the 21st century.

4.1 Sites of Memory and Spaces of Appearance

We seek to understand how the changing built environment on the Westside trail could affectively romanticize black historical trajectories. Because historical trajectories are made real by memory, to answer this question, we must study the locations where collective memory is most vibrantly embodied in the built environment. Thus far, I have studied a place-name and public art. Now, I turn to the built environment to interrogate the “sites of memory” and “spaces of appearance” within the changing West End landscape.

In 1989, Pierre Nora argued that there were no longer “real environments of memory” in modern day France. Instead, memory had been crystallized into “sites of memory,” museums, archives, and festivals that embody a memory that is no longer performed because the culture that staged the performance has disappeared. He argued that media was now the vestibule of memory as modern society made people forgetful of the past. Nora’s issue with history, was that
it destroyed and reconstructed memory, while memory itself was lived and sacred.\textsuperscript{248}

Contrastingly, as Nora disparaged “sites of memory,” Barton interrogated the public and civic places where people act out memory and referred to them as “spaces of appearance.” Drawing from Hannah Arendt’s original theory, Barton argued that spaces of appearance are the sites of memory of the white public realm.\textsuperscript{249} With access, power, and voice, the culture of the white dominant hegemony had not disappeared, therefore, their memory was performed and visible. As we seek here to understand how the changing built environment on the Westside trail could affectively romanticize black historical trajectories, viewing the cultural landscape from the structure of sites of memory and spaces of appearance is helpful, but, at the outset, they must be pinpointed.

Let’s start with the sites of memory. The threat of disappearing culture leads to the necessity for historicizing lived memory in a material, functional, and symbolic way. Residents of West End have already begun the process. From June 28 to December 20, 2019 the Hammonds House Museum in West End Atlanta was host to a temporary art installation by Shanequa Gay. The exhibition, titled “Lit Without Sherman: A Love Letter to the West End” was a collaborative showcase, weaving wall murals and toile figures with recorded interviews from residents of West End. Leatrice Elizy, the executive director of Hammonds House, noted that the exhibit interviews were particularly important to historizing a place that could drastically change after gentrification and urban renewal take their tolls.\textsuperscript{250} The oral interviews presented


\textsuperscript{249} Barton, “The Mnemonic City: Duality, Invisibility and Memory in American Urbanism.”

with the exhibition are of particular interest to this research. As black residents discussed what
the West End meant to them, they recollected on key locations of personal and collective
memory. The locations mentioned, including Hammonds House Museum, the Shrine of the
Black Madonna, the Wrens Nest, and Soul Vegetarian, are sites of memory. They present a
collective memory, or mnemonic narrative of the neighborhood and can be analyzed and
interpreted against changing spaces of appearance in the built environment.

Sites of memory are vital because in order to maintain collective identity, the Black
Mecca’s historical trajectories must continue into the future, settling themselves within places of
memory and influencing actions of future generations. Historically, the values, ideologies, and
practices of a culture are transferred to coming generations through memory bound in people and
acted out in their rituals, gestures, and traditions. However, according to Nora, when a people’s
ability to act out and transfer their memory themselves is threatened, they become ever more
concerned with creating sites of memory, archived history embodied in material form. Sites of
memory are a type of cultural preservation. The “Lit without Sherman” exhibit and discussions
around it exemplify this contemporary reaction to safeguarding living memory against cultural
gentrification. The threat of displacement and change makes the sites of memory significant for
the future endurance of the Black Mecca in the West End. As Nora states, memory dictates and
history writes. The recorded interviewees intend to remember these locations and the sites are
kept as a repository for the future to not forget the past.

As texts to be read, the material form of these sites gives them legibility, offering them as
symbols of communication for narrative analysis. As Barton argues, sites of memory act as

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251 Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire.”
252 Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire.”
“mnemonic narratives,” designed to help us to remember. Barton also leads us to recognize that sites of memory offer a means for scholars, activists, and cultural workers to ensure the production and survival of a culture that is lost or, in the case of the West End, could be lost. To do so, Barton gives us the “responsibility to augment the narratives of dominant history through the “excavation and construction of those objects and devices capable of evoking memory.” The narrative memory imposed in the site can be used to critically assess the neighborhood and reveal those things that have been made invisible. In the end, such excavation of mnemonic narratives provides the opportunity to think of new possibilities in the structural design of our landscapes.

But to fully grasp Barton’s suggestion that we excavate architectures of memory, we must also consider spaces of appearance, where an individual can gain political and civic visibility in a public space. A space of appearance, according to Hannah Arendt, is any space, outside of work, where individuals come together to speak and act. It is potentially “wherever people come together” during leisure time, but it is only actualized through power. Barton takes Arendt’s definition further, noting that in the United States, spaces of appearance are specific to the white dominant hegemony as they have the power to reinforce the existence of the space. For present day West End, a majority black neighborhood, one location is identifiable as a white space of appearance, Lee + White. New craft breweries opening along the BeltLine trail are sites where individuals entering the neighborhood can collect and socialize with neighbors, strangers, and colleagues.


The association of spaces of appearance to power is significant to justifying why Lee + White is a space of appearance. Power is defined by Arendt as “potential of action” or potential of being and acting together. Power is not determined by numbers or strength, but by the possibility of a group of people living and acting together. This potential can be increased by money as long as togetherness is still occurring. The appearance of Lee + White has transpired in conjunction with investment of money into the possibility that the Atlanta BeltLine will bring young, white, professionals into the West End. Combining capital and social interaction, Lee + White is a public space of power for the white dominant hegemony.

Sites of memory and spaces of appearance have multiple functions in the West End. The sites of memory preserve the traditions, values, and ideologies that have made West End “home” to African American historical trajectories for the past 60 years. The spaces of appearance serve as places to practice the rituals of tradition. Together, these places make up the urban cultural landscape of the West End, serving as symbolic representations of culture, citizenship, and identity. The form and flow of the built environment affects how these locations are witnessed by visitors and residents. As the flow of movement in the West End changes due to the creation of the Westside trail, the ability to witness these sites of memory changes with it, affecting what is visible and what is invisible in the geographic space.

4.2 The Problem of Invisibility for the Mnemonic Narrative

Hayden urged that in the planning of urban cities, we take heed to the significance of the built environment in building “cultural citizenship” and belonging for diverse ethnic and gender groups. She stated that restoring shared meaning and belonging in cityscapes would require us to first deem ethnic and women’s histories as important to American history and second, forge

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255 Arendt, “Action.”
ways to include places of ethnic and women’s memories in the flow of city life.\textsuperscript{256} Therefore, as African Americans take the lead on historicizing memory into sites and developers shift the urban landscape with new spaces of appearances, we must also be vigilant in confronting the ways in which changes to the landscape affect the social and political meanings that we make from the space. If these meanings are housed within the mnemonic narratives of sites of memory and spaces of appearance, we must also confront how these spatial narratives determine cultural citizenship in shared spaces.

Mnemonic narratives are synonymous to memories translated as stories of events past. Imposed in sites of memory and spaces of appearance that allow us to engage the past with a diverse public, mnemonic narratives have the rhetorical power to determine what and who is American. Often taken for granted, places and more specifically, the built environment, prompts individuals to “adopt for themselves the elements of an identity that will make them at home in the American nation.”\textsuperscript{257} This is because people develop their shared national identity in those places away from home where they have to engage and interact with others.\textsuperscript{258} Clark argues that in places of transaction and interaction, people get the chance to “revise their separate senses of self” in order to “fit into the new collective”\textsuperscript{259} and forge a sense of belonging with a larger community. According to Clark’s theory, in order to cultivate that belonging, the individual must revise their perception of self. Disengaging from those things that keep them separate for the sake of becoming a part of a larger community. National identity is nurtured in locations where

\textsuperscript{256} Hayden, The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History.
\textsuperscript{257} Clark, Rhetorical Landscapes in America: Variations on a Theme from Kenneth Burke, 15
\textsuperscript{258} Clark, Rhetorical Landscapes in America: Variations on a Theme from Kenneth Burke.
\textsuperscript{259} Clark, Rhetorical Landscapes in America: Variations on a Theme from Kenneth Burke, 15
people share a common experience, like New York City, especially after the September 11th terrorist attacks. The shared trauma of 9/11 impacts feelings of cultural belonging, as despite the race, gender, and class-based struggles that may separate us, all Americans experienced a sense of loss due to the events. A pilgrimage to Manhattan can enhance national belonging because of that shared loss. Visitors congregate around a common experience of freedom, pride, and aspiration that transcends personal identity and culture. This is the perspective of New York City as a “representative place” where Americans come to identify themselves with shared history, trauma, and community, turning them into public citizens. In this representative place, the mnemonic narrative of 9/11 is engaged, and visitors can transcend their differences, identifying themselves as together, at least for a period. While Clark’s research suggest this to be a norm, an assessment of sites of memory and spaces of appearance from America’s racial context would reveal that the rhetorical landscape can also create out-groups based on intersectional identifications of race, gender, class, sexuality, etc., hindering transcendence. In this case, we focus particularly on race, and class as a consequential intersection, that causes racialized others to desperately resist oppressive narratives.

Landscapes cultivate memory, memory is tied to identity, and identity established by cultural belonging is required for diverse people groups across the United States to have cultural citizenship. However, the US’s unique historical context, which positions the nation’s economic and political ideology within a racialized structure, racialization of space and anti-black racism in the landscape impedes transcendence. Clark, using Kenneth Burke’s rhetorical theory, articulates “transcendence” as a transformation where an opposing group adopts the point of view of the opposition. The opposing groups motives adjust to be compatible with the motives

of the others. But, if taking Burke’s theory of “identification” in full context as Clark suggests we should, but does not do himself, when a differing other has an intense resistance to the opposing anti-black viewpoint in the mnemonic narrative, they are far less likely to transcend differences and become a part of the dominant body. For those that are othered based on race, adopting the point of view of the dominant hegemony could reinforce negative perceptions of self, breaking apart their individual identities and suffering the dissolution of their cultural identities. To be specific, African Americans who face a “double consciousness,” which causes them to “disavow the humanity of their African identity,” can lose sense-of-self when rhetorically prompted to adopt the view of an anti-black opponent. This is of further detriment to the collective identity of African Americans as a group, threatening the Black Mecca.

In this way, mnemonic narratives can work in opposition to cultural citizenship when differing others engage with a memory that counters the dominant hegemony’s romantic ideal of the past, one that recollects historical exclusion and trauma proliferated by racism, sexism, or genderism, rather than the Western idyllic sense-of-place. My research takes up this issue in

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261 Clark, Rhetorical Landscapes in America: Variations on a Theme from Kenneth Burke, 89

262 In describing how identification with the language, attitudes, and values of the audience persuades a listener to yield, Burke says about the audience, “the more violent your original resistance to the proposition, the weaker will be your degree of “surrender” by “collaborating” with the form.” See Burke, Kenneth. A Rhetoric of Motives. (University of California Press, 1969), 58.

263 DuBois writes “It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.” See DuBois, W. E. B. The Souls of Black Folk. A.C. McClurg & Co., 1903.

observation of the Atlanta BeltLine as a place outside of home and work where people engage and interact with differing others. If we were to think of the BeltLine trails as a “representative place”\textsuperscript{265} for the city of Atlanta, we can consider how it marks individual and collective identity for residents and visitors through sites of memory and spaces of appearance. As the built environment of Atlanta shifts with new capital investment in luxury housing, gourmet restaurants, yoga studios, and hipster cafés and bars, it is imperative that we review the historical narratives associated with these places to understand how their inclusion could solidify the exclusion of African Americans from the cultural belonging. The mnemonic narratives established by these locations can engage memories of an American past that could be archetypal for the dominant group, while they are wounding for the historically marginalized. As the research of this chapter suggests, the alcohol and beer industry in Atlanta, Georgia and the nation has a history of stigmatizing African Americans and empowers white Americans toward violent exclusion of black bodies from space.

It is also important to recognize that sites of memory have been used by black people to combat the historic exclusion from United States’ touted landscape. Clark, referencing Kenneth Burke, stated that places function as images and public symbols. Cultures that can publicize their respective symbols in the place are also provided with an invitation to make themselves over in that public image. The “aesthetic image can merge the individuals who identify with them….into collectivities.”\textsuperscript{266} Plainly, when a culture sees a substance of themselves in the public place, they are more likely to identify with it, transcending any other differences between themselves and differing others, and becoming a part of the public. In this way, identification with place occurs

\textsuperscript{265} Clark, Rhetorical Landscapes in America: Variations on a Theme from Kenneth Burke.

\textsuperscript{266} Clark, Rhetorical Landscapes in America: Variations on a Theme from Kenneth Burke, 55
when the sites yield to the language of the people, featuring their attitudes and values. The invitation to be a part of the collective does not come unless you are capable of creating and publicizing your own cultural symbols of representation in that place. The threat of the dominant hegemony entering an identified metaphorical black space is that the people will lose the power of production and distribution of their own culture in the space, leading to their “invisibility” and exclusion from cultural belonging.

Thus, to confront the ways in which African American historical trajectories can be romanticized in revitalizing neighborhoods, it is necessary to consider “invisibility.” In the field of critical rhetoric, invisibility has been defined as the transparent, unseen power and position of whiteness because it is the normative on which everything else is compared and defined. This dissertation takes a turn from the whiteness centered view of “invisibility” as power, to a black centered view of “invisibility” as to not exist. The social construction of race in America has rendered black bodies invisible. This goes beyond the notion of being “unseen.” Invisibility can be far more complex if we look at the definition from Ralph Ellison, who eloquently articulated the issue of the invisible black body in *The Invisible Man*. Ellison writes:

> I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination – indeed, everything and anything except me.

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267 Burke, Kenneth. *A Rhetoric of Motives*.


As Ellison describes, the invisibility of black people is not simply because they are absent from view. In fact, he writes that even when this black man is available to be seen, he goes unnoticed. Ellison continues,

That invisibility to which I refer occurs because of a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom I come in contact. A matter of the construction of their inner eyes, those eyes which they look their physical eye upon reality.270

He affirms that invisibility is due to the way others look or in this case don’t look at him. In such a sense, invisibility is a function of the eyes that behold the subject, and not a function of the subject itself. If this is the case, invisibility must be defined from the perspective of the onlooker. Thus, to pinpoint invisibility in the geography we can define it as Barton has as “consciously removing from the public gaze that which is neither intended nor desired to be seen.”271 Rhetoricians are particularly empowered to tackle the issue of invisibility in the urban landscape, because they are trained to excavate the mnemonic narratives and deconstruct the organization of the narrative within the scene that it is written. As we deconstruct the evolving organization of sites of memory and spaces of appearance in the West End, we seek to recognize how the public gaze on the mnemonic narratives has shifted in that neighborhood from its impetus to the present.

While Atlanta BeltLine, Inc does share in acknowledging the importance of preserving the cultural landscape as a part of its history, this research reveals that it falls short in making those sites of memory a part of the flow of travel for people in the neighborhood, giving visibility to a mnemonic narratives that have a disruptive meaning for black American identities.


In the next section, I review the methodology used to give this researcher the means to observe the positioning of sites of memory and spaces of appearance and establish how changes in the built environment affect movement in and out of the neighborhood, leading to the invisibility of the urban cultural landscape they claim to want to preserve.

### 4.3 Methodology: Deep Mapping Spatial Storytelling

The built environment, including transportation routes, is significant to the cultural landscape of any city and throughout this dissertation I have recognized these routes in the shaping of terminus and one of its historic districts, the West End. The West End was designated a historic district in 1991 because of its links to the origins of the city. Though it wasn’t annexed into Atlanta until 1894, the neighborhood started developing as a frontier outpost in the 1830s as a crossing point for people traveling South to Newnan and West to Decatur and Sandtown (a Native American town). The small settlement grew along Gordon Street (now Ralph David Abernathy Blvd), which was originally a trail used by Cherokee Indians. As white men began using it for trade, and an inn and tavern (named Whitehall Tavern) was built for travelers’ lodging, the location just 2 miles from the terminus point of the Western and Atlantic Railroad continued to grow. Along with it, the cultural landscape was formed. Though the West End had been racially diverse, post-Civil War plans for a “New South” homogenized West End to be an upper-class white neighborhood. Then, by the 1960s and 1970s, white flight shifted the neighborhood to a majority working class black population. African American professionals making residence in the space close to the Atlanta University Center, began referencing the area as a Mecca of black art, thought, and religion. According to local historian, Robert Thompson, in the early 2000s another wave of young, black professionals and single-black mothers moved in.
The racial complexion of West End started shifting again in 2012-2014 when small groups of young millennial whites moved in, in conjunction with the Atlanta BeltLine construction.

The formation of the West End has been both a spatial and social process. Its connections to the city origins, the Civil War, civil rights, and urban renewal, make this location significant to the research study. It’s demographic turns from white space, to black space, to today’s reversed white in-migration, are storied in the many historical narratives of the district and representative of the changes occurring in gentrifying urban centers across the United States. When we tie the built environment history to the cultural memory, we can productively anticipate how urban renewal could change its social environment in the future. My research suggests that a rhetorical perspective of history, race, and space in the West End provides a new way to story the neighborhood and identify how demographic changes intertwined with past actions of white supremacy, coincide with the romanticizing of history and memory and the exclusion of marginalized groups from the cultural landscape. To answer the question, “Does the Atlanta BeltLine romanticize or draw witness to African American historical narratives?” I create a deep map of the mnemonic narratives attached to sites of memory and spaces of appearance in the West End. Then, I critically assess the spatial story for visibility and invisibility of African American memory and the symbolic representation of American identity in sites along the Westside trail.

The first step in linking the cultural to the spatial is determining what aspect of the “cultural” would be the most apt for researching memory and history in the space. As discussed in the previous section, sites of memory and spaces of appearance were chosen for this task because they embody historical and lived memory in mnemonic narratives that are legible for rhetorical analysis. The sites of memory chosen here are selected from the “Lit without
Sherman” Art Exhibition as resident identified spots of collective identity and community. Artist Shanequa Gay interviewed black residents about what West End means to them. The audio recordings were presented within the exhibit. The West End locations that the residents specified as key to their memory of the space as community include three museums and education centers (the Hammonds House Museum, Wren’s Nest House Museum, Uncle Remus Branch Library, two retail spaces (Mall West End and former Sears-Roebuck location and the Goodwill), two entertainment locations (Gordon Street Theater and Club 559), one religious space (Shrine of the Black Madonna), two restaurants (Soul Vegetarian and Taste of Tropical) and transportation (West End MARTA Station). Of the 12 sites of memory the following locations are publicized on the Atlanta BeltLine website: Hammonds House Museum and the Wren’s Nest. Because of the additional attention from the BeltLine, you will see that my research pays particular attention to these locations in conjunction with the evolving spatial narrative of the West End.

As you can recall from the previous section, using Barton’s definition, spaces of appearance are locations where the white dominant population performs memory in everyday life. Since white flight, West End has had a black majority. While there have always been white business owners and homeowners in the area, this study cannot encompass an entire mapping of white spaces of appearance. All the spots mapped here connect to the narrative of the BeltLine. In 2017, in connection with the opening of the Westside BeltLine trail, white spaces of appearance began opening in the area. The locations in West End include Lean Draft House, the first location to open on the Westside trail, and the businesses housed inside of the Lee + White development. Lee + White, as of this writing is home to 15 businesses including seven beer or art of fermentation-focused companies (Monday Night Brewing Garage, American Spirit Works Distillery, Hop City Beer & Wine West End, Wild Heaven Beer, Cultured South Fermentation
Co., Golda Kambucha and Best End Brewing Company), two sports related businesses (Resurgence and Falcons), three eateries (Honeysuckle Gelato, Doux South Pickles, and Boxcar), one tech company (MacStadium), one gym (The Overlook Boulder+Fitness), and the United Way. Of the 16 new locations, eight of them are beer or fermentation related businesses. Lee + White is also advertised on the BeltLine websites as a place to visit, thus, it is a major focus of this research.

To link the cultural to the spatial, I use a method of deep mapping, which spotlights select locations in order to gain new knowledge about the place and movement between places within it. A regular map of the exhaustive locations within a space does not make it possible for you to know how it may be experienced. The goal of the deep mapping process is to better understand how the West End may be encountered in 2020 and beyond if the progression of the BeltLine and businesses on its path continue in the same pattern. Therefore, my deep map locates the West End across time and place. Utilizing the Neatline for Omeka GIS mapping tool, I connect West End’s origins at Whitehall Tavern in the 1830s to the present, using the spaces of appearance and sites of memory as the connecting points. The map is available in a tangible and reproducible form.

The next step in the deep mapping process is to weave spatial stories into the locations on the map. This allows me to track and organize experiences and movement through the neighborhood. The biggest challenge to deep mapping is the seeming inability to chart multiple realities, and the conflation of oral history, archives, newspapers, memoirs, etc. There are so many different things to say about a place. As Trevor Harris notes, a deep map in many ways is

an attempt to “map the unmappable,” but I move forward through this challenge as such creative means seem to be the best way to understand the interconnections of landscape and culture. In order to understand the mnemonic narrative associated with these sites of memory and spaces of appearance, I utilize primary data from the Atlanta History Center, including Atlanta Journal, Atlanta Constitution, Atlanta Voice newspaper articles and associated documents. For institutions that are currently open, the history publicized on their websites is also used as a data source. A primary source of data on the future built environment of the West End is the Atlanta BeltLine master plan for the Westside trail. In this selective, not exhaustive, look at some culturally significant locations in the West End, I seek to identify parts of the narrative that affect how different people groups come to be identified with the site. As such, stories of exclusivity, homogeneity, and individualism, are considered to hinder the progressive histories and belonging of African American collective identity, centered in kinship, communalism, and closeness.

The final product of this deep mapping process is a historical and spatial narrative of memory of the West End. Through this complex flow of events and places you can discover how the built environment interacts with and affects the collective identity of the space. In contrast to previous chapters, where a comparison of narratives was done, this study is an analysis of one spatial story, characterizing the past, present, and future landscape of the West End to reveal how current cultural gentrification efforts are intertwined with and dependent on past racist actions that excluded African Americans from the space Utilizing Neatline as a multimedia, geovisual tool, I am able to connect the mnemonic narratives of the locations and the primary documents to their respective locations in West End. The completed deep map can then be criticized for the elements of visibility and invisibility, as well as belonging and exclusion. Reading the full spatial

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273 Harris, “Deep Geography - Deep Mapping: Spatial Storytelling and a Sense of Place,” 34
narrative from beginning to ending is the best way to view the changing cultural landscape and give glimpses to how cultural gentrification, if left unresolved, could shut out black American identity from the revitalized space and erase the African American “Black Mecca.”

4.4 Storying the West End in Space and Memory

The deep map that conveys the spatial narrative of sites of appearance and spaces of appearance in West End is shown in Error! Reference source not found.. Today, West End’s official boundaries lie roughly between Langhorn Street and Cascade Ave SW (on the east), W Whitehall Street (on the west), Interstate-20 and Westview Drive SW (to the north) and Beecher Street and Donnelly Ave SW (to the south). The Westside Trail runs along White St SW. Together, these boundaries form the geographic framework that the narrative is woven into. To represent space and time statically, the “green” icons represent locations serving the area from the 19th century (former spaces of appearance). Icons in “blue” represent locations in the 20th century (African American designated sites of memory). And icons in “pink” represent locations that opened in 2017 (new spaces of appearance), the year that the Westside trail opened to the public. Immediately presented by the deep map is a narrative that suggests that the spatial distribution of 20th century sites of memory are separated from 21st century spaces of appearance. But the complete story reveals, that the spatial narrative of West End exposes that neoliberalism and the dominant hegemony reproduces itself in black space by repatterning the dominant movement and rhythm of the neighborhood. I turn now to that story, beginning in 1830 at Gordon St (today’s Ralph David Abernathy Blvd).
4.4.1 West End’s Start (1830-1910) – Mnemonic Narrative of the tavern, the brewery, a riot, and prohibition

The initial spaces of appearance for West End Atlanta are just as important to this story as the current ones, especially because of the significance of beer and other alcoholic beverages to the neighborhood’s growth and values. As I’ve suggested, America’s racialized past presents a unique experience that requires an articulate understanding of how our local communities were formed and racially identified. The formation of the West End from germination to growth is a representative anecdote of anti-black racism promulgated in space. From a tavern, to the first brewery in the city, beer would become a staple to the new settlement and just as easily become
a force for opposition between the secular and the sacred, and black and white, defining movement through the social environment.

In 1830, Atlanta, known as Terminus at the time, was mostly a forest area, best described as a frontier with trails and dirt roads traveled by Native Americans, early settlers, and traders. In 1836, the state’s general assembly voted to expand the Western Atlantic Railroad to link between the Port of Savannah and Tennessee. But even before the passage of the act, white settlers moved into the area. As traders used local dirt roads to move between settlements, there came a need for a hotel. Charner Humphries (1795-1855), who had migrated from South Carolina and had a plantation of 25 to 30 slaves south of the area, ended up opening the community’s first tavern274 and a race track north of the area (in today’s location of Spelman college).275 He painted it white. Being the first painted house in the county, the 2-story tavern was named “Whitehall” or “White Hall.” According to Atlanta beer historians Ron Smith and Mary O. Boyle, Whitehall Tavern was known to be the only hotel for travelers from South Georgia all the way to Tennessee.277

4.4.1.1 Gateway to Whitehall – Spatial Movement

The location of the tavern, on Gordon Street and Lee Street, reflected the dominant movement of people into and out of the budding neighborhood. The trails were originally routed by Native Americans, and after the land was taken from them in 1821, white settlers used the


routes as they were the paths of least resistance in the heavy forested area.\textsuperscript{278} A former resident described Gordon Street as “being an old Indian trail; where the Cherokees used to travel, where the intrepid white man pushed his trade; and the hardy back woodsmen were accustomed to take lodging at night.”\textsuperscript{279} White settlers used Gordon Street as a main road to go West to Decatur, Ga. The crossroad, Lee Street was the main road to go south to Newnan. A north-south highway developed in 1848, west of Lee Street, became the main highway under the name Whitehall Street.\textsuperscript{280} Because of its location, the tavern was also the place to deliver and pick up mail that came in from Lawrenceville or Newnan. Soon the neighborhood also had a name: Whitehall, drawn from the inn that functioned as its central point of social interaction and movement.

### 4.4.1.2 White Cultural Citizenship – The Early Social Environment

The tavern’s social features and location made it fundamental to formation of the neighborhood’s culture in its early years and made it an identifiable representative place, where people separate from home and work to interact with others. The tavern functioned rhetorically as a zone of contact where settlers, militiamen, and travelers could go to and experience “public symbols of the ideals and aspirations --- and thus the identity --- to be shared by every citizen”\textsuperscript{281} and member of the fledgling community.

According to the 1931 unpublished manuscript of Wilbur G. Kurtz, which chronicles the interview he had with Humphries’ son-in-law, the tavern was an important social space. His recollections give a glimpse of the ways the tavern cultivated collective responsibility and

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\bibitem{281} Clark, Rhetorical Landscapes in America: Variations on a Theme from Kenneth Burke, 73
\end{thebibliography}
entertainment for the area. It had 8 rooms, generous hall space, a porch, a dining room, two fire places, and a kitchen where cooks “prepared wonderful concoctions before a fire-place, with a battery of ‘spiders,’ pots, pans, and portable ovens.” West of the house was a horse stable and across from it was Charner’s store, where he sold rum, which was the “merchandise in demand in a frontier community.” The tavern was the place to go for the county’s Muster Day, the annual militia enrollment day. During the event, able bodied men would take part in drills of marksmanship. The winner would get the yearling cow, which was eaten with a potent form of brown October ale, a type of beer made using top-fermenting yeast. A whiskey barrel was also common. And Humphries kept drinks on tap and cash customers could drink on the house, while visitors were expected to pay a nickel or dime. In this way, a fresh, local whiskey or ale was the staple of the Whitehall neighborhood. Whitehall Tavern stopped operating after the Civil War. Some say it was taken down and the timbers were used to build a house. Other accounts are that it was burned during the war. Regardless, its memory persists because it provided a place where new settlers could encounter each other and come to comprehend what it meant to be a southern American.

Beer was significant to the social functioning of Atlanta and Whitehall, particularly in the 1850s. Indeed, it is hard to conceive of this past, considering the conservative manner in which

283 Kurtz, “Wilbur G. Kurtz, Sr. Papers: Whitehall Tavern,” 4
285 Smith and Boyle, Atlanta Beer: A Heady History of Brewing in the Hub of the South.
the South contemplates beer and alcohol policy today, but taking the past into account provides a
at least one view of the idealized sense-of-place the white dominant hegemony yearns for today.
The proclaimed godfather of Atlanta brewing, Edgidius “Edgion” Fetcher got his start in
Whitehall. Brewing came to the United States and Atlanta with an increase in German
immigrants in the mid to late 1800s. They brought a brewing technology that allowed the
production of lager beer and fueled local beer production in Atlanta. Fetcher and his brother
migrated from Germany to Atlanta and opened the first brewery near Howell Park, which is
located on today’s White St and Westside trail. Though the name and exact location have been
lost to history, it is known that Fetcher’s brewery stopped operating after the Civil War.288

After the war, the city put a license tax on bars. Being outside of the city limits, Whitehall
didn’t need to heed to the tax, increasing the number of bars opened in the area. According to
historian Cornelia Cooper, at one time there were at least 7 bars and 2 breweries in Whitehall.
One brewery was located on today’s Lawton St (cross street unknown) and the other was across
from in the Candler Warehouse, at one point the largest cotton warehouse in the city, located
near today’s West End MARTA Station. Pre-Civil War Whitehall’s breweries and bars lead to
the production and distribution of alcoholic beverages in the area. It may have become the “Malt
Disney” of the era, until post-Civil War Confederate angst lead supporters to seek the
construction of a New South for white America. The strategy of exclusion and regulation of
black people and the federal troops eventually lead to cauterizing the beer and liquor industry in
Whitehall and then to the rest of Atlanta.

288 Smith and Boyle, Atlanta Beer: A Heady History of Brewing in the Hub of the South.
4.4.1.3 Black Cultural Exclusion – Forming an “Exclusive” White Space

By 1870 the Whitehall neighborhood was home to 300 black people, which was almost 50% of the population. The influx of freed slaves in the area occurred because of the presence of federal troops at the McPherson Barracks, previous location of Humphries’s racetrack, which would become the site of Spelman College after troops left in December 1881. The Barracks became a refuge for freedman and spurred early diversity in the neighborhood. But such integration of freedmen and women into white space was short lived as Confederate sympathizers strategized to make Whitehall more exclusive.

The post-war environment inspired Confederate supporters to take control of the future of the neighborhood and its culture. West End’s history after the Civil War reflects the designation of the space as a white middle- to upper-class hotbed. George Washington Adair (1823-1899), first a slave trader and then a real estate broker after the war, sought to sell land he purchased in Whitehall and attract white middle- to upper-class residents. As Timothy J. Crimmins chronicles in his 1982 history of West End’s emergence as an Atlanta suburb, Adair’s plan included a process of exclusion that started with renaming the neighborhood, designating its boundaries, and naming its streets in commemoration of the Confederacy. First, the McPherson Barracks, where freedmen were taking refuge, were excluded from official neighborhood limits, leading to the separation of the future Atlanta University Center in its official boundaries as well. Second, the name “West End” was chosen by Adair based off the name of West End in London, a fashionable commercial and entertainment center. The name symbolized what Adair hoped Whitehall would become for the city of Atlanta. Third, Adair and early property owners created social distance by having the names of the streets in the new town changed to commemorate Confederate forces, including Stephen Lee (commander-in-chief of the United Confederate
Veterans), General John B. Gordon (confederate general), Brigadier General Turner Ashby (confederate general), and General Alexander R. Lawton (Quartermaster General of the Confederacy). With the exception of Gordon Street, these street names are still present within the neighborhood limits today and reflect the dominant hegemony’s consideration of symbols in the built environment as an association for identification with the place. West End, from the start, was to be recognized by the culture and value of the Confederacy, thus excluding African Americans in the representations of place.

The next step to social distance included finding a way to not only isolate the federal government but regulate federal soldiers who frequented saloons in West End. This led residents to seek state incorporation, which would allow them to tax liquor dealers and manufacturers. Licensing would help save the town from getting a bad name because of “unruly behavior” from alcohol consumption. The neighborhood that was all “wet” quickly dried up. The legislature applied for state incorporation in 1868 and was granted the charter and able to tax liquor dealers and manufacturers. In 1878 the neighborhood secured a charter to forbid the sale of intoxicating beverages. In 1893, its need for a fire department and other protections lead to West End’s annexation by the city of Atlanta. The city pledged to continue West End’s prohibition.

Seeking to attract new white residents, Adair and other property owners sold land for less than their worth, supported the Atlanta Street Railway, and promoted the neighborhood as a great place for businessmen who worked in the city. In particular, patterning the movement of people into the neighborhood was essential to neighborhood growth, according to Crimmins. The

Atlanta Street Railway, a trolley line, was formed, running west to Lee Street and south to Gordon Road (Error! Reference source not found.).

Adair invested in the railway company, building capital and power for the development of the new town. Crimmins describes that the location of the railway on the original main arteries made the Gordon / Lee intersection a commercial sector where men working in the city could take a trolley home. Victorian homes were built along the streetcar route. In addition, the lower cost of property made for a great investment, increasing the wealth of early financiers. What this information reveals, is that strategic plans regarding movement of people in the neighborhood, affected its growth and determined the types of people, mostly businessmen, that would enter
West End, making it an upper to middle-class white male dominant space. The neighborhood was described by former Atlanta mayor Evan P. Howell in 1890:

"West End is emphatically a residence community. There are no manufactories with soot and dust, no paupers, but a thrifty, well-to-do class of people, who generally own their homes, who have their garden, their flower yards, their horse and cow and fowls, and, who, away from the noise and dust and strife of the great city, live in quiet and comfort."

This description reflects the initial culture and purpose of West End, as a space outside of a working-class city and set apart for middle- and upper middle-class white life. West End had formed its own social distance from African Americans, the federal government, and lower-class whites. By 1890 the population had risen to 1000, with very little growth in black bodies as the black population went from 50% of the neighborhood in 1870 to 33% of the neighborhood twenty years later. By 1930 only 15% of the population was black and their homes were closer to Spelman at the northern portion of the town. Promoted to West End as a good means to keep black students and faculty at the historically black colleges north of the neighborhood out, Interstate-20, an expressway running east to west, was designed in the late 1950s and constructed in the ‘60s. West End was an identifiable white space in a diversifying city.

4.4.1.4 Prohibition and the Atlanta Race Riots

Before we talk about the increased proliferation of breweries in Atlanta in 2020, the history of Atlanta becoming a dry town in the early 1900s is important for contextualizing the present and future racialization of space in the city. While West End promoted the temperance

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movement within its neighborhood, the city was having a temperance movement of its own. In the early days after the Civil War and into Reconstruction, alcoholic beverages were a key factor in separating people, the rural from the urban, the sacred from the secular, the confederacy from the federal government, and white and black. With the clear intention of identifying post-Civil War West End with a southern confederate identity, the early developers sought to use its stance on alcohol as an identification of its old southern values. But more broadly, the war over beer and alcohol in the city and Fulton county of which it resides brings to attention the widening racism against African Americans, Jews and German immigrants there. As Smith and Boyle state, “Prohibition had become a battle over not only alcohol but also more generally about who was a ‘real American.’”  

The temperance movement in Atlanta started before the war and was reignited after the war as alcohol consumption increased. The movement across the United States was spurred by the argument that consuming alcohol lead to domestic violence and economic ruin. Prior to West End’s incorporation, from 1885-1887, Fulton County (where Atlanta is located) was voted “dry.” Under the local option law, whiskey and spirits were banned, while local wines could be sold. Breweries could continue to brew beer, but it was illegal to sell it within the county. The “dry” law was short lived. By 1887, another vote brought the county back to “wet” status. But as stated before, as a part of their annexation, West End was able to maintain prohibition. The rest of the city would follow suit in 1907, after the 1906 Atlanta Race Riot, a white mob attack on black people, was used to promote the urgency of Prohibition across the city and the state.  

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295 Smith, Ron, and Mary O. Boyle. “Prohibition Comes to Atlanta.” In Atlanta Beer: A Heady History of Brewing in the Hub of the South. (Charleston, South Carolina: American Palate, 2013), 38

296 Smith and Boyle, “Prohibition Comes to Atlanta.”
Alcohol, particularly African American and Jewish immigrants drinking and selling alcohol, became the scapegoat for white violence against black bodies.

The first generation of African Americans not born to slavery in Atlanta sought a model of Atlanta that was based in racial cooperation. But Atlanta’s elite developers perceived this as a threat to the New South that would rise out of the Civil War. “Blacks were transformed, as whites perceived their collective future, from permanent productive members of the New South into destructive obstacles to the realization of a revitalized white South,” writes Gregory Lamont Mixon in his 1989 dissertation on the Atlanta Race Riot. As such, violence against black bodies was a tactic by Atlanta elites for maintaining white supremacy. Anti-black fervor increased in 1904 as many white people feared “racial equality” and expressed anxiety about the ability of the legal system and white paternalism to regulate black bodies in the industrializing and urbanizing South. By the summer of 1906 the angst had grown to a boil, leading white people to seek violence and scapegoating as a means for restoring racial order for their state of “white crisis.”

Two white-fear inducing story types proliferated in the Atlanta Constitution and Atlanta Journal newspapers in September 1906 and encouraged immediate vitriol against black Atlanta: 1) accusations of black sexual assaults against white women, and 2) allegations that black drinking establishments were the cause of the alleged attacks on white women. The particular events that lead to the violent attacks of September 22, 1906, were inspired by fear by fear of black men. Papers published on the Friday and Saturday before the attack claimed that the “City


License Inspector Ewing found pictures of nude white women openly exhibited in Black clubs on Decatur Street.

In the 19th century Decatur Street, east of West End toward the center city, was a white prostitution district. However, by the 1900s, black prostitution entered the area. Black-owned “dens and dives” were available for cheap lodging and drinks. In addition, Jewish businessmen and women served alcohol in integrated saloons. The street included “Colored Saloons” as well as Chinese, Greek, Italian, and Syrian businesses.

Segregation forced black people to be served in the back. An Atlanta Journal article described it as the “street of shame” where drunken people joined with criminal whites, smelling like old beer, assorted drinks, and grease used for frying food. With the newspaper’s increased focus on the vice of Decatur Street as a threat to the sexual safety of white women, on September 21st, the day before the riot, the operating license of twenty-two black restaurants was terminated.

Then, on Saturday, September 22, 1906 a new headline reached the newsstands, asserting that four white women were assaulted with at least one “black brute” suspected, one black man arrested, and another unidentified person on the run. Mixon writes:

The papers claimed that white women were prisoners in their own homes because the streets were flooded with ‘black beasts.’ The slightest touch or even movement in the shadows prompted many of Atlanta’s white female population to scream first and assume they were assaulted by the infamous black brute.

The alleged assaults provided the justification for white revolt against black bodies from September 22-24, 1906 which officially left 10 black people killed. The vigilante mob started

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299 Mixon, “Riot: ‘If You Are White It’s All Right,’” 524
300 Mixon, “Riot: ‘If You Are White It’s All Right.’”
301 Smith and Boyle, Atlanta Beer: A Heady History of Brewing in the Hub of the South, 38
302 Mixon, “Riot: ‘If You Are White It’s All Right.’”
303 Mixon, “Riot: ‘If You Are White It’s All Right,’” 531
their attack of black people on Decatur and Marietta Street, even though the alleged sexual
assaults occurred in a mixed residential area of Atlanta and Dekalb County. The mob, armed
with “clubs, iron pipes, and brick bats,” continued to areas where blacks were isolated and
could be outnumbered. Some police attempted to protect black people against the rioters when it
was easy, but generally they stood and watched. Some joined the rioters. The mob attacked street
cars as black men and women were riding trolleys downtown. Black people were prohibited
from buying arms, but a newspaper article attested that black women fought back with umbrellas
and hair pins, while in more densely populated black neighborhoods black people retaliated
against white streetcar riders. Rain caused rioters to clear the streets around midnight, while
Atlanta’s National Guardsmen started coming out to quell the rampage early Sunday morning.
They took control of the streets from Sunday to Tuesday, “not to suppress the riot but to prevent
black retaliation.” Black people found retaliating were rounded up by the Georgia militia. In
the end, the riots were utilized to reinstate white control over black bodies, inevitably worked to
reinforce white supremacy in Atlanta.

Rather than black people being victims of white hate, black people with beer and alcohol
were sanctioned as threats, establishing the drinks as symbols of separation for blacks and whites
and regulation of alcohol as a means of controlling black bodies. The Atlanta News articles
argued that Blacks needed to be subdued for white safety. The implied causation between
black drinking and rape provided support for closing black dens and dives and reinforcing the
need for prohibition across the state. Newspaper articles throughout the South used the race riots

304 Mixon, “Riot: ‘If You Are White It’s All Right,’” 539
305 Mixon, “Riot: ‘If You Are White It’s All Right,’” 567
in Atlanta to encourage the closing of black establishments. The editor of the Atlanta Journal encouraged prevention of licenses being given to any man, white or black, who would sell alcohol to black people.\textsuperscript{307}

Black people drinking was considered to be the cause of Atlanta’s national humiliation and preserving Atlanta’s reputation was of critical importance.\textsuperscript{308} Over 200 black and white elites came together in a combined meeting in the city council on the Tuesday after the riots died down. In the meeting, the cause of the riot was determined to be the “low dives” which included saloons, dens, and clubs. Because these businesses were declared the scapegoat, carrying the sins of the attackers, they had to be removed from the city. The group declared that they must be closed. The dens on Decatur and Peters street were targeted. In addition, by the end of the month a Grand Jury condemned the Atlanta News for inciting the riot. From October 1906 to January 1907, white Atlanta defined “Law and Order” and reestablished conservative rule to solve the race issue.\textsuperscript{309}

The vision of a drunken black man was enough to spur people to agree to prohibition, regardless of their own pleasure from the drink.\textsuperscript{310} All of the fervor against black alcohol establishments provided fuel for temperance and lawmakers wrote new legislation for Georgia wide prohibition. In 1908, the Hardman-Covington-Neel Bill made statewide prohibition mandatory.\textsuperscript{311} This racial history reflects the intense passion that Southern white people had for

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{307} Mixon, “Riot: ‘If You Are White It’s All Right.’”
\textsuperscript{308} Mixon, “Riot: ‘If You Are White It’s All Right.’”
\textsuperscript{311} Smith and Boyle, Atlanta Beer: A Heady History of Brewing in the Hub of the South.
\end{footnotes}
policing black bodies and returning to a white-dominated region. It is a part of the historical narrative imbedded in the space and made memorable by sites in the built environment. While white Americans may have an idyllic perception of the freedom from alcohol regulation in the pre-temperance movement era, African American collective memory holds on to a more traumatic conception of the past. One where alcohol was used to separate the races. These moments inevitably affected the future of African Americans in the brewing business, which we will discuss in the following sections. But first, we turn back to the West End to understand how the white exclusionary neighborhood eventually became a mecca of black culture.

4.4.2 Sites of Memory: Mnemonic Narratives of the West End’s Black Mecca

By 1930, the West End population totaled 22,882, 15% being black. The majority of the small black population lived at the northern edge of the neighborhood, closest to Spelman College, founded as a seminary for black women that moved from its location at Friendship Baptist Church to the old McPherson Barracks location in 1883. Though Adair and early West End developers had successfully made West End a “homogeneous, well-to-do white community”312 in the early 20th century, the civil rights movement, specifically the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education ruling against separate-but-equal laws, would require integration. In the 1960s, once they were able to access housing in West End, many more black people moved there, and white residents fled to areas north of the city center. By 1976, West End’s black population made up 86% of the residents. Where Whitehall tavern and the trolley system brought white businessmen to the area in its early years, it was a mall and public train system that would become the nexus of black movement in and out of West End.

312 Dugger, Cecil W. “West End Shows Signs of Rebirth.” The Atlanta Constitution, November 7, 1982: 47
4.4.2.1 The Gateway to Black Space - Spatial Movement

A look at the deep map of West End’s sites of memory for African Americans, you will see that they are all located in the northeast corner of the neighborhood (Error! Reference source not found.). This is the same area that eventually developed into a commercial center in the early 20th century around the original location of Whitehall Tavern. Although white consumers and businessmen gradually stopped frequenting these locations, in the late 20th century, a more modern transportation system cemented the Gordon/Lee intersection as the gateway for in-and-out traffic and the mall enhanced attraction.

Figure 4.3 Deep Map of West End with focus on Northeast corner and Sites of Memory developed from 1908-present. Street map from Google Maps (2020).
As white wealth left the neighborhood, the city of Atlanta and remaining white residents wanted to revitalize West End. The city of Atlanta Housing Authority invested $14 million, including federal dollars to clear out 103.1 acres of land of older homes and commercial spaces for new construction, including a new mall.\textsuperscript{313} The Mall-West End was built on 14.9 acres\textsuperscript{314} and opened in 1973. It connected with the already present Sears, Roebuck and Co. store on Gordon St (now Ralph David Abernathy Blvd). Richard A. Dent was named mall manager, becoming the first black boss of a shopping center in the South.\textsuperscript{315} Development of the mall was one of the first moves taken toward urban renewal.

Even with the mall opening, it was necessary to provide a new generation a means of getting to these businesses. Consumer traffic to the mall was encouraged by the development of the West End MARTA Station, which opened in 1982, bringing commuters to the neighborhood by both bus and train. The MARTA Station was constructed between Lee Street and Whitehall St, across from the Mall-West End. The public transportation directed traffic of students and faculty from the Atlanta University Center of historically black colleges north of the neighborhood into the West End, making it a popular area for college students and professors. This brought in new young black professional families.\textsuperscript{316}

\textbf{4.4.2.2 Cultivating Black Cultural Citizenship in a Historically White Space}

However, there is a difference between being “in” a place and being “of” a place. Though white people had migrated north, their sites of appearance were still represented in the built

\textsuperscript{313} Crimmins, “The Atlanta Historical Journal, Vol. 26, No. 2-3, Summer-Fall 1982.”

\textsuperscript{314} “The Mall-West End.” \textit{The Atlanta Voice}, February 6, 1971:3

\textsuperscript{315} “Dent to Manage West End Mall.” \textit{The Atlanta Constitution}, May 22, 1972, sec. People & Events.

\textsuperscript{316} Crimmins, “The Atlanta Historical Journal, Vol. 26, No. 2-3, Summer-Fall 1982.”
environment, leaving behind symbols of the racialized past that perpetuated anti-Black mnemonic narratives. The hostile history worked in opposition to the rhetorical purpose of shared public space, which, according to Clark, is to “present images of actions that ‘awaken a disposition’ in the individuals who compose a community to act together upon values that constitute their common identity.” Clark, Rhetorical Landscapes in America: Variations on a Theme from Kenneth Burke, 31 If the “common identity” of black Americans needed to be “awakened” for them to foster belonging, then new narratives had to be inscribed in the space. The new black residents did exactly that. The new narratives worked rhetorically to foster “identification” with a shared language, identifying the ways and culture of the space with the ways and culture of the people.

In 1991, Gordon Street, once named for a Confederate general, was renamed “Ralph David Abernathy Boulevard” (RDA) recognizing the civil rights leader and reverend who led the West Hunter Street Baptist Church on the main street. And in 2001, Ashby St was renamed Joseph E. Lowery Blvd after the civil rights movement pioneer. The name changes also reflected the changing environment of Gordon Street and Ashby Street since African Americans became the majority populous. As the deep map shows, visible along the drive down RDA between West of Whitehall St is the Mall-West End, Soul Vegetarian, the popular Goodwill Thrift Store, and the Shrine of the Black Madonna, just a few of the locations that are key to African American collective memory of the space. The sites of memory form a nucleus for the neighborhood, providing visibility to the diverse elements of African American culture that are supported by many of these locations. The sites draw witness to religious diversity, art, and social life, while

317 Clark, Rhetorical Landscapes in America: Variations on a Theme from Kenneth Burke, 31
318 Burke, Kenneth. A Rhetoric of Motives. (University of California Press, 1969), 55. Burke says “you persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his.”
revealing how a space originally planned to be a white enclave can be transformed to a metaphorical origin for African American life after the civil rights movement.

### 4.4.2.3 Counter-Histories or Restored Memories

The West End was established for white life, and parts of its history are also recognized as serving the purpose of assuaging white guilt. The storytellers of West End, prior to it becoming an African American majority, utilized the built environment to reinstate the institution of whiteness and the subordination of black bodies and voices. Many of the locations that African Americans now call sites of memory for black culture were originally places resurrected for the supremacy of whiteness. Thus, black residents had to re-story the built environment by removing some of the relics of the white supremacist past and providing counter-histories that center black people as not only human, but worthy of visibility. Beyond the renaming of Gordon Street to RDA Boulevard, the symbols centering blackness are represented materially in the built environment with the shift of Uncle Remus Library name to West End Library, subsequent counter-history of the Wren’s Nest and Uncle Remus stories, repurposing of the Gordon Theater to the Shrine of the Black Madonna, and establishing the Hammonds House Museum.

One of the most controversial issues to hit West End was when black residents pushed to remove the name “Uncle Remus” from the local library branch. The original name recognized the internationally popular 19th century American writer of the Uncle Remus stories, Joel Chandler Harris, who lived on Gordon Street. Harris fashioned the fables, which have been translated into at least 27 languages since their publishing, after stories told to him by George Terrell, a slave on a plantation when Harris apprenticed at a local newspaper printed there. The narratives, including talking characters like Br’er Rabbit and Br’er Fox, became extremely
controversial to black people, who recognized the white authors retelling of stories he heard from a slave as a white framing of black life and appropriation of black work. The library itself represented the hypocrisy of racism. Uncle Remus, the fictional black narrator of Harris’s stories, represented the space for public education and thought, but at the time of its opening at the current location in 1949 (it was first opened in 1913 at Harris’ home), black people were not allowed there. After the Brown ruling, residents throughout Atlanta fought against integrating the Atlanta Public Libraries, with the main branch not being integrated until 1959.

By the 1980s, the Uncle Remus Branch, still using the controversial name, was hosting heritage events to recognize black history. Though Harris’s book was still available it was rarely used beyond the summer when tourists would come to visit. As black residents considered the name “Uncle Remus” evermore offensive, they petitioned for the name change and in 1982 the Atlanta Public Library board voted to change the name to “West End Branch.” The decision was made with a clear majority among trustees voting 17 to 13, but there was an uproar of dissent from people outside the black community. One person argued that the stories are “a compliment to black people” because “Joel Chandler Harris loved them and appreciated them and wrote in their own dialect of the time.” Such comments actually reinforced the racial ignorance that was represented by the Uncle Remus stories. In an opinion piece, name change opponent Waights G. Henry Jr, wrote that Harris did for black people what Homer did for the Greeks by preserving their thoughts and folklore. While Henry felt that the name change buried black past, the black residents of West End, like Michael Lomax, an English teacher at Morehouse and

Spelman, considered it offensive to recognize a past reflected in a “stereotyped character [Uncle Remus] from the old plantation school of southern literature.” Henry fails to recognize that Homer had the privilege of writing and getting credit for his work, while African Americans did not. Removing “Uncle Remus” from the library name was a step toward forming a built environment that was inclusive of black thought and black people.

In addition, activists drew light to the ways Harris’s stories had been used to whitewash slavery in a revisionist history to make the past more acceptable, which lead libraries across the nation to remove Harris’ books during the civil rights era. It also forced The Joel Chandler Harris Association to rethink admission policies that excluded black people from patronizing the “Wrens Nest,” a museum opened at Harris’s home after he died in 1908. Named the “Wren’s Nest” for a wren that nested in the mailbox in the late 1800s, the National Historic Landmark housed the library before it moved to its current location in 1949 and continues to get visitors interested in the author. Funds from former US President Theodore Roosevelt and magnate Andrew Carnegie helped the Harris Association purchase the property and maintain it.

Harris himself was considered a progressive figure during his time. He regarded the Old South in high esteem and was not a proponent of integration, yet he did support black education and the right to vote. Though Harris’s stated goal was toward “the obliteration of prejudice against blacks…and the uplifting of both races so that they can look justice in the face without blushing,” the museum formed in his honor excluded black patronage until a court order in 1968


forced integration. Nonetheless, the museum’s image and Harris’ memory along with it had been tarnished and a loss of subsidies from the city kept the museum from getting necessary upgrades. In the 1980s, the association, run by 100 white women, was forced to broaden association membership to men, reframe the Uncle Remus stories in the media to restore its popularity, and fundraise for nearly $300,000 worth of necessary improvements. The association was also advised by West End Neighborhood Development, Inc. President, Cleta Winslow, that they would need to emphasize the contributions that black people made to Harris’s work if they wanted to improve its image. The 1982 elected association president, Gloria Baker, sought to “transform the decaying house into a museum that all citizens of Atlanta, black and white, can be proud of.” Furthering these efforts, in an Atlanta Constitution article, characters like Br’er Rabbit were positioned as worthy of being remembered for their African origins, rather than the invented narrator Uncle Remus who was likened to an Uncle Tom. Harris was articulated as worthy of being remembered as a folklorist who did not intend to be condescending in his use of the black Southern dialect in his writing. In addition, the Wren’s Nest stopped screening new members, opening membership to all interested parties. These actions toward inclusivity, though still in recognition of a controversial and offensive history, were spurred by black West Enders’ need to form a built environment that invited their identity and accurately documented the troubling and traumatic history that brought them there. African Americans’ public


326 Graham, “Harris’ Tales Re-Evaluated by Academia.”

327 Graham, “A New Life for the Wren’s Nest: Bad Times Befall Uncle Remus Home.”
admonishment of the work, which was national in scope, lead to the Wren’s Nest’s patronage decline and the books that used to be required school reading being removed from the Atlanta Public School curriculum. Once these issues were brought to light, the library transitioned from a site that retracted the black experience to one that invites the black experience. In addition, the black story of resistance became a part of the mnemonic narrative of the sites. They are now symbols of black resistance to a social order that attempted to romanticize and appropriate their past. The sites promote a shared initiative and strategy for dealing with the oppressive past and fostering a common future.

Such changes were also evident in the use of past buildings to reflect diversity in black religious thought and theology, which work as “constitutions,” expressing a shared reality and establishing the “expectations and conventions” of the “social order.” In the “Lit without Sherman” exhibit, art and audio recordings of residents give a glimpse of a West End full of religious diversity, from Rastafarians, Muslims, Christians, and Buddhists. However, the Shrine of the Black Madonna stands out as a key collective site of memory for West End residents, made so because of its work in the community and its prime visible location on RDA Blvd. The Shrine of the Black Madonna, a denomination of the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church, opened a location in 1975 in the original site of the Gordon Theatre, a segregated theater opened in 1940. The community film emporium seated 1300 people. During a period of racial unrest, forty members of the Shrine of the Black Madonna in Detroit transformed the facility originally


329 Clark says that religious theology works as a constitution that “establishes the common ground upon which people can interact.” Clark, Rhetorical Landscapes in America: Variations on a Theme from Kenneth Burke, 127.

330 “New West End Theater Is To Open Tonight.” The Atlanta Constitution, August 30, 1940, 21.
designated as a white space of entertainment into a center for black empowerment. The theology of the Shrine became popular in the ‘50s and ‘60s and centers black people in Christianity and Jesus as a black Jew to address the needs of a “black revolution,” according to Albert B. Cleage who started the church in Detroit.\textsuperscript{331} Christianity, a religion sometimes vilified as a “white man’s religion,” is recognized as a “black man’s religion” within the Shrine of the Black Madonna.\textsuperscript{332} In the West End, the Shrine operates a bookstore and holds programs for the community. Many of the programs are centered on restoring African American identity and black history. As such, it represents one of many segments of black theology and political thought that are produced in efforts to reinforce black identity and humanity in an anti-black world. In the West End, the Shrine of the Black Madonna buttresses a revolutionary-based theology in a space that was expected to conserve white ideology at the exclusion of others. The Shrine forges transcendence for African Americans with the West End space by 1) clearly identifying a shared substance, black trauma and oppression, 2) providing resources for understanding the shared attitudes, like black history classes and a Marcus Garvey Day celebration, and 3) establishing shared expectations for the people. In this way the theology works within the site of memory to provide a construction for the future.

4.4.2.4 Witnessing the Social Life of Black Atlanta

Along with transitioning the space from being a segregated white space, West Enders cemented black culture as an acceptable representation of Americanness. The visibility of black culture continued to be reinforced in the architecture of West End as African Americans formed

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{331} Fiske, Edward B. “Black Theology Now Evolves.” \textit{The Atlanta Constitution}. November 28, 1968.}  
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{332} Sheppard, Nat. “Drop White Concepts, Blacks Urged.” \textit{The Atlanta Constitution}, March 6, 1970.}
their own spaces for visibility. One such location was the temporary scene of the “Lit without Sherman” exhibit where the sites of memory for this research were identified and continues to enforce its mission of honoring black art and culture. This is the Hammonds House Museum, stationed in one of the three oldest houses in the historic district. Located just 4 miles west of the Mall-West End, Hammonds House is named for Dr. Otis T. Hammonds, a black doctor and retired chief of staff and anesthesiology at Southwest Community Hospital in Atlanta who owned the 19th century Victorian home. After his death in 1985, the Fulton County Board of Commissioners lead by Michal Lomax, purchased Hammonds’ home with the intent of turning it into an African American research library. When the library board declined, the building was established as an art gallery, which was fitting for Hammond who had both a distinguished medical career and avid participation in art preservation, collection, and support of black Atlanta artists. Included in the purchase of the home was Hammonds collection of 250 artworks from Haitian, African, and African American artists. Since its opening, the museum has served as a gathering place for the viewership and participation in black culture, holding temporary exhibitions, jazz brunches, Kwanzaa celebrations, an awards gala for advocates of Atlanta’s arts, and other art-inspired events.

In 2018, the museum celebrated its 30th anniversary with an educational symposium that highlighted the impact it has had on West End and metropolitan Atlanta. As a staple site of memory for black Atlanta, the Hammond’s House placement in a residence built around 1870 in the white enclave, reflects a transition of time periods and the significance of West End to black post-civil rights era history. In addition, when juxtaposed to the Wren’s Nest, the Hammond’s

House reflects what happens when black artists are credited for black art. These artists can communicate symbols that connect with other black people through common experiences. As a site holding these rhetorical symbols, Hammond’s House contributes to the conscious and unconscious connectivity people have when images “symbolize a shared way of seeing and, ultimately, being”\(^{334}\) in the world.

The West End continued to draw witness to a generation of art and style in the 1990s as it became a congregating location for black 90s youth to celebrate music, dance, and hip hop. A small club in West End was central to the Atlanta hip hop scene and the life of its artists, Club 559. It’s closed now, but for its lifetime it was considered iconic to Atlanta’s nightlife, particularly the promotion of Atlanta’s black music artists. Located on 559 Ashby St (now Joseph E. Lowery Blvd), the club was credited for turning songs into local hits. To visitors coming into the neighborhood, “559 was a club in a then-unfamiliar and seemingly dangerous part of town they typically avoided. But to locals it was a place where they could physically release all of life’s stressors through dancing,”\(^{335}\) journalist Jewel Wicker writes. Local Atlanta artists like Lil’ Jon and the Eastside Boyz, regard the West End club and its regular influx of party goers and dancers, as the place where many of their songs were inspired.\(^{336}\) Club 559 was particularly significant to the local scene, but did bring in new visitors during annual FreakNik weekend, where nearly 80,000 black youth and college students on spring break gathered for concerts, parties, and events. The Freaknik events were expansive, taking place on Memorial Drive and Grant Park (south of the city center) to Midtown (north of the city). With its close

\(^{334}\) Clark, Rhetorical Landscapes in America: Variations on a Theme from Kenneth Burke, 68


\(^{336}\) Wicker, “How Atlanta’s Clubs Fueled the City’s Budding Hip-Hop Scene in the ‘90s.”
proximity to the Atlanta University Center and black college students, the Mall-West End and Club 559 were popular sites.\textsuperscript{337}

These, among other changes that black West Enders made in the area, exemplify some of the symbolic actions African Americans take within privileged white spaces, to form community and collective identity through both function and location. Functioning to re-narrate black history and culture within an anti-black space, sites of memory draw witness to the traumatic past that brought them there and the hopefulness of a future for the African American historical trajectory. Locating the sites of memory in the area where people enter and exit the neighborhood, gives visibility to these stories so that the memories may be remembered repeatedly. As this research turns to the 21\textsuperscript{st} century, we’ll see how re-patterning of movement along with urban renewal from Atlanta BeltLine, Inc plans are poised to both shift the visibility of these sites and accentuate spaces of appearance.

4.4.3 \textit{Spaces of Appearance: Gentrifying West End's Black Mecca}

Atlanta BeltLine, Inc, began officially studying West End in January 2009 with a kickoff and community meetings to help formulate the land use and design plans for the Westside trail. For gentrification to occur, it relies on impoverishment and negative stigmatization, which forges a dystopic narrative that favors revitalization and redevelopment.\textsuperscript{338} Reporting strategies to assess impact of the Westside trail on local neighborhoods built this narrative context. The West End neighborhood they researched confirmed the lower income and poor attributes of the under-
resourced area. Metrics collected between 2008-2014, showed that the West End population was 4,341, the largest of the 12 neighborhoods impacted by the Westside trail. West End was 90% African American and 4% white, with a median household income of $21,727. These metrics reflect that 34% of people in West End were living below the poverty line, which was 9% higher than the Atlanta average at the time. The majority of homes (76%) were renter occupied.339 The dynamic youth and hip-hop culture that had once proliferated in the neighborhood also changed. After a 17-year run, the last Freaknik was held in 1999. The black college spring break that had nationwide attention was canceled as the event became more sexualized and violence and crime activity around it increased. The West End Sears-Roebuck closed in 1992, leaving Mall-West End without a major department store to carry it.340

Such changes, along with the effects of urban sprawl, attracted “urban pioneers”341 to West End before the BeltLine came to fruition. White speculation in the area began in the late 1990s, but gentrification started with adjustments to home values, rather than shifts in new businesses. The Atlanta Journal Constitution reported in 1997 that investors were buying dilapidated homes and renovating them for sale. Home sales in zip code 30310 (which includes West End, Stewart Avenue, and Sylvan Hills Neighborhoods) were the highest in the city, at upwards of 697 homes in 1996. The majority of sales were coming from house flippers who buy


341 Hightower and Fraser, “The Raced-Space of Gentrification: ‘Reverse Blockbusting,’ Home Selling, and Neighborhood Remake in North Nashville,” 17, Hightower and Fraser write, “urban pioneers – a colloquial phrase based on the problematic conception of space being uninhabited--- are defined as those who move into a newly gentrifying area surrounded by neighbors who are members of the original, lower class community (Weninger 2009).”
a house, restore it, and sell it again. Sometimes selling one home two or three times in one year. These homes were also selling for the cheapest price at an average of $38,397 per home, compared to an Atlanta wide average sales price of $158,406.\textsuperscript{342}

By 2002, the West End area was seeing the median home sales prices increase by 28\% and renovated homes selling for $150,000 to $260,000. The West End was of particular interest because it already had restaurants, grocery stores, and a shopping mall.\textsuperscript{343} In conjunction with gentrification, between 2006 to 2007, auto theft in Zone 4, which includes West End Atlanta, increased by 36\%, followed by increases in larceny, burglary, and robbery. Some argued that the increased crime was perpetuated by the hopelessness attributed to displacement, homelessness, unemployment, and drug abuse.\textsuperscript{344} The strategy of flipping the homes are a part of the stages of redevelopment, in which investors seek to “change the neighborhood’s racialized and classed stigma to attract more affluent populations.”\textsuperscript{345}

Though home sales and prices started changing right before the turn of the century, cultural gentrification in West End, coinciding with new “white-centric” business development, came along with the opening of the Westside trail and a shift in the gateway to the neighborhood. In this final section, I turn to how movement into the neighborhood is being changed and new business marketing suggest a turn back to the exclusive white past of West End.

\textsuperscript{342} Saunders, Tinah. “Home Sales in the City Last Year Rose 8 Percent.” Atlanta Journal-Constitution, August 7, 1997, sec. City Life.


\textsuperscript{345} Hightower, Cameron, and James C. Fraser. “The Raced-Space of Gentrification: ‘Reverse Blockbusting,’ Home Selling, and Neighborhood Remake in North Nashville.” City & Community, 2019: 2
4.4.3.1 The New Gateway to the West End – Repatterning Movement with the Atlanta BeltLine

In the 1800s, Adair utilized three key spatial strategies to make Whitehall an exclusive white space and increase traffic to the heart of the neighborhood at the main artery of Gordon / Lee Street. The strategy included using the Atlanta Street Railway as a source of transport to and from the forming business and retail district, changing the neighborhood name and street names to commemorate the Old South under the rule of slavery, and forming boundaries to the neighborhood that would keep black populated areas out. Comparatively, a spatial change is being made in conjunction with the Atlanta BeltLine, Inc master plan for the Westside trail. Atlanta BeltLine, Inc is repatterning movement in West End by forming a new gateway to the neighborhood, creating spatial separation between the original heart of West End from the new Westside trail area, and shifting business and restaurant development to the Westside trail area.

The Westside trail is poised to move the major entrance to the neighborhood from its heart in the northeast quadrant, to the west side of the boundary along White Street. In following with the original belt line railway, the Westside trail runs from the intersection of I-20 and Langhorn Street, across the intersection of RDA Blvd and Cascade, and along White Street to end at Lee Street (Error! Reference source not found.Error! Reference source not found.). Prior to the BeltLine plan, White Street was encompassed by residential homes on the east of the street and large warehouses to the west of the street, along with wooded areas without a clear walking path. A Kroger grocery store is located at the RDA Blvd / White Street / Cascade intersection. Primarily a residential area, this segment of the neighborhood stands apart from the major retail district where the sites of memory are located.
As a part of the greater redevelopment plan, the Atlanta BeltLine Master Plan for this segment of the larger trail, organizes into multiple land use nodes, which inevitably separate the original gateway to West End from the BeltLine. The names used to identify the nodes, also capitalize on a rhetorical strategy to differentiate the old gateway from the new gateway (Error! Reference source not found.). The old gateway is labeled “West End Node,” while the new gateway constitutes three different nodes in the plan “Kroger Area,” “Warehouse Row” and
“Lee/BeltLine.”® The node names subtly differentiate the “West End Node” known for the sites of memory connected with black collective identity from the BeltLine Westside trail.

Unlike the overt separation of boundaries that Adair used to distinguish West End from the McPherson Barracks and black refuge area to its north, the Atlanta BeltLine, Inc. plans use the subtle shift in nomenclature to distinguish the notorious black neighborhood from the area nicknamed “Malt Disney”. This change is a form of romanticization through rebranding to make the area attractive to investors and wealthier residents.

Figure 4.5 Atlanta BeltLine Master Plan, Subarea 1 planning nodes.

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The formation of the trail comes in conjunction with plans to redevelop the Kroger Area and Warehouse Row. The envisioned Kroger Citi-Center Area, Warehouse Row, and Lee/BeltLine are the major redevelopment focus specifically tied to West End as they are of “crucial importance” for making the BeltLine “an active, safe, accessible, and interesting place,” the plan reads. The existing Kroger supermarket is expected to be the center of a larger retail node with the addition of another multistory mixed-use building in Kroger’s parking lot.

The proposal envisions Warehouse Row with mixed use development and multi-family residential. Thus far the warehouses in Lee/BeltLine segment have been majorly utilized by Lee + White, bringing craft brewing industry to the frontal façade along the trail.

To bring pedestrian and vehicular traffic to the new businesses, the plan includes improvements to mobility in the surrounding area, in conjunction with movement along White Street and the Westside trial. The intersection of Cascade Avenue, RDA Boulevard, and White Street, which has historically been problematic, will undergo improvements to allow ease of automobile traffic and safety for pedestrians. In addition, to the formation of the Westside walking trail, which is already open, other streets in the proposed area are being opened up to make easy access from connector streets to the main artery of the trail. (Error! Reference source not found.)

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If Adair used the Atlanta Street Railway to bring businessmen from the city into West End in the late 19th century, the Westside trail is the 21st century gateway to the neighborhood, being used to bring young, white, millennials into the West End. Understood through deep mapping of the past, present, and future planned transportation landscape of the neighborhood, we are able to visualize how transportation can be used to instigate contemporary racialization of space in a more covert way. Racialization is not only constituted by the positioning of the new developments, but the types of developments that are making over Warehouse Row in the West End.
4.4.3.2 Malt Disney and the Re-Whitening of West End

The historical context of West End’s development and creation of the exclusive white space from 1830 to the 1950s overtly represents the narrative of racist practices in space. But the production of that racist past is also used to establish present practices by distinguishing the illicit racism of the past from the present. The association of new developments with the term “mixed use,” suggests that “all groups have similar opportunities under neoliberalism.” However, through deep mapping and critical analysis of the narrative of the past and the spatial narrative perpetuated in the future plans of the West End, we see that the present forms of development use color-blind ideology, to reinstitute an exclusive white space and make black culture invisible within the new space. These actions, along with the wounding experience African Americans had in the past regarding alcohol and beer, disrupt transcendence, leaving black people out of place in the revitalizing neighborhood.

The Westside trail governs the prime locations for spaces of appearance near the Kroger grocery story and in “Warehouse Row” and “Lee/BeltLine.” As revealed previously, Malt Disney takes up these locations with “Lean Draft House” located across from Kroger (near the intersection of RDA Boulevard and White Street) and the Lee + White development along White Street. The adaptive use project includes 4 warehouses, a sum of 433,204 sq. feet and ½ mile along the BeltLine. Partners, Ackerman & Co. and MDH Partners, purchased the properties for $40.3 million from Stream Realty Partners in 2019, which suggests the capital strength expected to come into the neighborhood. According to a press release, along with the breweries that are

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already located there, the owners have plans to add retail stores and loft offices.\textsuperscript{349} Though it’s not identified when it got its nickname, the connotation of warehouse row as “Malt Disney” and West End’s perception as “beer town” reflects a new era in the neighborhood, that shifts the collective identity of the space from how it is recognized in the sites of memory of the Black Mecca.

Let’s review. Overt racism in the past used alcoholic engagement to separate race and class. African Americans and poor whites were identified as lascivious and violent due to drinking. The West End neighborhood separated itself from the stereotype by prohibiting alcohol after the Civil War freed African Americans. The growth of the neighborhood as a well-to-do white enclave was facilitated by prohibition laws before the state or nation had made their own. Then, the city of Atlanta utilized African Americans’ enjoyment of alcoholic beverages as a grounds and scapegoat for white violence against black bodies. In these two ways, the history of beer and liquor in the United States was used to position black people as subordinate and instigate an anti-Black social order.

While Georgia state prohibition ended in 1938 and segregation was outlawed in the 50s and 60s through the civil rights movement, new tactics were instituted as a means for continuing the racial order while maintaining an integrated multi-race landscape. In order to carry on the racial structure, developers distinguish the present actions from overt racism of the past, arguing that the new bars and breweries are open for all and welcoming to everyone under the establishment of mixed-use developments. In actuality, though black people are present in these spaces, they are not wholly visible. Invisibility is not only instituted by the spatial location, but

the spatial narrative that Malt Disney brings to the West End, reidentifying the scene with white, millennial culture, power, and exclusionary traditions.

Research studies into the niche industry reveal that craft beer and craft breweries target a very specific market, fostering an exclusive sub-culture based on age, race, and gender. Craft brewing is used to describe “quality, small batch brewing techniques, a unique group of independent brewers, and the beers they produce.” In the 1950s, the larger beer industry became an oligopoly, with the top five brewing companies holding 75% of the market by 1975. But the legalization of homebrewing in Georgia in 1995, 17-years after Jimmy Carter legalized it for the rest of the nation, paved the way for the craft beer industry of today. In September 2017, Georgia’s Senate bill 85 passed making it legal for breweries and distilleries to sell directly to customers, where in the past they had to sell through wholesale distributors. This made space for a local movement that would market specifically to an expert class of brewers and beer drinkers, rather than the masses, leading to the exclusion of women, black people, and lower classes from the subculture.

The proliferation of craft brew-focused industries demonstrates a strategy to bring in young, white millennials, without overt segregation within the community. Generally, craft breweries market to young, college educated, millennials and according to a 2014 study “the typical craft beer drinker is a white male, college educated, ranging between 21 and 44 years in

350 Beckham, “The Value of a Pint.” 12
352 Smith and Boyle, Atlanta Beer: A Heady History of Brewing in the Hub of the South.
age, and earns at least $50,000 - $75,000 a year." Feeney presumes that the phenomenon attracts millennials because it fosters a feeling of “sophistication” and a “prestige factor.” Lee + White customers include those of the millennial age group as well as retirees with interest in the beer culture.

Craft breweries are positioned on the Westside trail as a cultural representation of power and authority for the white population. The brewing industry is important to the American cultural and economic landscape. In the United States, as of 2014, the brewing industry accounted for $78 billion in wages and more than $250 billion in economic output. It makes up about 1.5% of the national output. Locally, eleven breweries and pubs opened in Georgia after Senate Bill 85 was passed, joining the already $1.6 billion craft beer industry in Georgia and representing the economic power this subculture wields in the state. On an individual level, research presents that customers who drink craft beer specifically associate it with being a quality product and a form of self-expression that engenders social status.

Power is institutionalized in the industry, not only by the racist past of beer and liquor segregation and stereotypes, but also the lack of black people in the industry. There are almost no black craft brew business owners in the United States. Beyond ownership in the industry, the subculture is almost, exclusively white and male. Communications scholar, craft brew aficionado and author of the blog series *The Unbearable Whiteness of Craft Brewing*, J. Nikol Jackson-Beckham attests in her experience at the Extreme Beer Festival’s special session that she was one of five women, and the only black person at the 500 attendee session. While volunteering with “brew crew” at the festival, she recalled a disconnection from the socializing between the men “who seem… to have much more in common with each other.” Jackson-Beckham argues that beyond the festival, the craft brew subculture “presents a particular combination of openings and barriers to members of the subculture in relation to their many subject positions and contingent identities.” Thus, she describes the culture as a tight knit community that is difficult to infiltrate for outsiders based on race, gender, and age. This community social landscape goes beyond the invitation to enter a bar or brewery, but expands to include other activities of individual homebrewing, professional craft brewing, and craft brew advocacy in social media. The multiple levels of connectivity serve as manifold barriers to entry and belonging.

Malt Disney also reinforces white sense-of place and the new neolocalism, which is longing for an idyllic past, harking back to “Make America Great Again” ideology and white supremacy. According to Doreen Massey, the Western view is that there is no longer a sense of

362 Beckham, “The Value of a Pint,” 165
363 Beckham, “The Value of a Pint,” 212
364 Beckham, “The Value of a Pint,” 213
365 Beckham, “The Value of a Pint.”
their idealized local places inhabited by coherent and homogenous communities. This has led to a contemporary nostalgia for the past, driving a fervor to reestablish local appeal. Breweries are an indelible factor in this past, and particularly significant to West End, as described in the previous section.

Atlanta history, in line with the nation’s past, shows that breweries were some of the first buildings forged by the white colonists. Taverns were centers for trade, lodging, and socializing. In addition, in the early colonial years, beer with two to three percent alcohol content by volume, was American’s “drink of choice.” The saloon and tavern were not only tied to alcohol consumption, but the wealth of the families that owned them, like Whitehall’s Charner Humphries. Craft breweries target local tradition in order to gain access to customers in the larger neolocalism movement. This movement suggests that people seek local charm and a return to a local sense-of-place and a larger landscape. For example, Feeney’s research on Pennsylvania’s craft brewing industry reveals that many of the breweries are in areas with historic European influences. The West End, with its ties to the first Atlanta brewery and Whitehall Tavern, provide it a significant historical connection. Like the taverns of the past, breweries provide a sense of social belonging for their stakeholders.

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368 Beckham, “The Value of a Pint,” 45

369 Beckham, “The Value of a Pint,” 48

Another way to forge a local theme is through naming conventions. Using local names of people, events, or wildlife helps to engage these enthusiasts. Malt Disney reflects back to this idyllic sensibility of life through naming. Let’s start with “Lee+White,” which takes on the name of the cross streets it’s located on, but in doing so, also performs Confederate remembrance. You will recall from the origins of West End’s street names that Lee Street is named for Confederate Commander-and-Chief Stephen Lee. Further, the owner of American Spirit Works Exchange, a tasting room and barrel-aging facility in Lee+White was “inspired by old-time grain exchanges, where farmers would come to sell their wheat and barley.” The name was chosen to pay homage to that past. The Wild Heaven Beer company offers the “ATL Easy Ale.” Naming conventions help connect Malt Disney brewers with the new community they are forging in the West End and the past Confederate sentiments.

This propensity for the idealized sense of local place caters to an exclusive past and social framework. Contemporary cultural gentrification relies on racial segregation. The urge for local sensibilities and a sense of place is a retrospective need that takes for granted the white supremacy that made the southern homogenous past what it was. For it to progress it requires color blind ideology, forgetfulness of the trauma and structural racism occurring to people of color. While sites of memory are repositories to contain history, without visibility to a diverse

community, the sins of the past are forgotten and reestablished based on the economic and class demographics of the region, rather than the structural processes that produce them. When placed within the scene of the West End, the craft brewing industry signifies a shift of cultural representation in the area. Cultural gentrification along the Atlanta BeltLine trail is dependent upon West End’s racist past and the significance of race in the history of alcohol and beer consumption and distribution. Its position along the newest transportation route in the futurist projections of the neighborhood conditions the craft brewing to become a major part of the spatial narrative to the detriment of the memory of black collective identity in the area. When African Americans do not see themselves reflected in the built environment along the BeltLine, the substance of their identification with the place is threatened and being able transcend and form belonging would require a dissolution of black self and black collectivity.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, a deep map of West End’s sites of memory and spaces of appearance from its beginnings in 1830 to today provides a rhetorical case study for understanding how collective identity can be romanticized by space. The landscape represents a legible text formed by movement, history, ideology, and the culture of the space. With particular attention to the visible cultures in the gateways to a neighborhood, the research revealed that the Atlanta BeltLine Westside trail romanticizes the collective memory of the Black Mecca, by making them invisible in the flow of movement along the newest gateway to the community and reestablishing the space as a microcosm for white, millennial tastes. This work reveals the importance of exposing the narrative history of an industry within an urban landscape because our actions in today’s built environment can perpetuate the racialization of space and convenience the idea of a post-racial social order.
In the beginning of this chapter I quoted a young black boy looking at the changes on Westside trail and asking, “is this for white people or black people?” His question was one of belonging. The quilted nature of United States cultural community suggests that cultural belonging and investigating belonging goes beyond a person’s physical ability to enter a location within a territory and further into the symbolic markers of community determined by history, memory, and present performance in the space. For African Americans, venturing along the new trails brings about the feelings of double consciousness. If belonging to community, as Clark suggests, requires us to transcend our differences, adopting the point of view of the opposition, then, the rhetorical act of transcendence at Malt Disney, requires black people to adopt a troubling view of self, one that would consider a black man or woman drinking alcohol as violent and inhumane. And one that acknowledges a Confederate ideal where black bodies are constrained, and white space is exclusive. This reflects the rhetorical power of mnemonic devices in our built landscape to determine in-groups and out-groups.

The craft brew industry represents a white exclusive position and serves to transition West End back to a white space through colorblind ideology, which causes people to close their eyes to the realities of racism and oppressive practices under the guise that economic development is good for everyone. To be colorblind is to not see color. In a sense, the Westside trail and Malt Disney’s development provide an enclosure for gentrifiers and visitors to maintain “blindness” to black culture around them. When you see a black person in the local brewery, you can become numb to the fact that the area around them is poverty stricken. Malt Disney averts the eyes from the reality of black life that is still occurring in the space. In this way, it is an intentional means of forming invisibility, and removing from view those things you don’t wish to
see. In order to foster a sense of belonging and citizenship for African Americans in cities undergoing urban renewal, space must be used rhetorically to foster visibility for black culture.
5 CLOSING

“And if the word integration means anything, this is what it means: that we with love, shall force our brothers to see themselves as they are, to cease fleeing from reality and begin to change it. For this is your home, my friend, do not be driven from it; great men have done great things here, and will again, and we can make America what America must become.” – James Baldwin 374

At the start of this dissertation project, I recollected on my family’s experience at Stone Mountain as a meeting up of ghosts, so to speak -- the ghosts of the Confederacy with the ghosts of my slave ancestors. I acknowledged that in this meeting, at a mutual location for both a Confederate memorial and the metaphorical origins of African American collective identity, the traumatic history of the past was made visible, and that visibility produced “a something-to-be-done.” It brought to fore the reality that the problems of the past had not be reckoned with and that if they were never dealt with we would live out our lives consistently subjected to the supremacist chains those confederate generals wanted to keep us under. But if, by some means, we were to see our history for its really sad, scary, and violent beginnings, decide that racism and its oppressive results are immoral, and change every aspect of our life worlds that puts us back in those chains, we could be freed. In this way, I suggested that in order to free the slaves and free their heirs, it’s necessary to combat every element of our nation’s structure, including racist and neoliberal ideology, that keeps them tied in bondage, never connecting to an actual origin and consistently being displaced from their next destination.

That very goal is broad and deep, but made easier to grasp when we acknowledge the power of space to both constrain people and make them free, and to both persuade us to see everyone as equal or convince us that our demographic differences make some inherently better than others. For it is not just the children of the slaves that are stuck between origin and destination, but the entire nation. As James Baldwin famously wrote, “We cannot be free until they are free.”

The ultimate significance of this dissertation is that it demonstrates that when we consider that space and place act rhetorically to forge identification with or against a thing or a person, we can make use of spaces and places as a witness and story teller that mediates our differences, teaches the lesson to be learned, and provides visibility for all of our cultures and historical trajectories.

Gentrification, a social and economic process that renders change, presents an exigence where rhetoricians, developers, planners, residents, and other scholars, can begin reexamining how we design our neighborhoods and cities. Considering that gentrification particularly forces displacement of the lower class and people of color from locations they call “home,” the exigence of gentrification, also gives us a chance to examine how we redefine spaces rhetorically to forge identification of home with the people who are threatened to be displaced and the gentry entering the community. When we speak of revitalizing spaces and places that make up the American landscape, government officials, planners, and residents, might ask “What makes a

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375 Baldwin, The Fire Next Time, 21
place home?” Is it the sanctuary of grandma’s house, walkable streets, place-based public art and culture (AoAB), access to amenities and utilities, the aesthetic?” It might be reasonable to inquire about the parts of the locations that capture our attention. What name best represents this neighborhood and the people we want here? Are we adding public art, museums and commemorations of history? Are the buildings, parks, and trails assessible, safe, and pleasing? But what’s more, the question I pose here is, do the people who have lived, worked, and played in these spaces see themselves, their values, their culture, their history, in the space? In this dissertation, I take on the concern beyond the physical appearance of the environment, to understand how the way we narrate our spaces affects our connection to them and our collective witnessing of the people that traverse(d) them. I ask both “how are spaces produced by culture?” and “how is culture produced by space?”

Intentionally, my question of culture production focuses on African American identity as it is a unique identification forged not out of the sharing of known physical origins, but from the sharing of trauma that forced the production of metaphorical origins of connectivity. Noting the instability of metaphorical origins within spaces of white hegemony, I consider the fragility of space due to displacement and cultural gentrification as detrimental to African American identity.

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376 In her essay, hooks recollects on the fear of being black in a public space being mediated by her grandmother creating a sense of safety in the home. She writes, “.” Oh! That feeling of safety, of arrival, of homecoming when we finally reached the edges of her yard, when we could see the soot black face of grandfather, Daddy Gus, sitting in his chair on the porch, smell his cigar, and rest on his lap. Such a contrast, that feeling of arrival, of homecoming this sweetness and the bitterness of that journey, that constant reminder of white power and control (383).” See hooks, bell. “Homeplace (a Site of Resistance),” In Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics, 382–90. Boston, ma: South End Press, 1990.


in affinity to being both American and Black. This requires us all to consider how African American historical trajectories are denied and repressed by the neoliberal dominant hegemony.

To ponder this issue, I used the more specific case concerning Atlanta as the Black Mecca, and asked “how could African American metaphorical origins in Atlanta be disrupted or protected in the wake of the Atlanta BeltLine’s path?”

My “how” question focused solely on the process of identification by communication between physical elements of the space and the people that traverse them: the dialogic discourse between African Americans and places that harbor cultural narratives of collective identity. To present the results of this case, the dissertation was intentionally organized to provide a view of time that is both retrospective and proleptic, a view of narrative theory from three narrative techniques, and a comparative view of the usefulness of rhetoric and geography under various integrative methods. Through this analysis we learn that African American historical trajectories can be disrupted when spatial narratives are used to erase Black existence, rescue whites, and continuously reconstruct white dominant power structures. The Black Mecca can be maintained and belonging and citizenship attained, when the spatial narratives are sublimely coherent, make moral disorder observable, and make black history and memory visible in the built environment. Together, these rhetorical uses of spaces as communicators of cultural narratives lead to transcendence.

In chapter 2, an analysis of the rhetorical forgettings of Blandtown by erasing the performative historical narration associated with place-name, reveals that just as rhetoric can be used to constitute a person as a concrete, visible, subject, it can be used to reconstitute a community, erasing its existence. The research starts at Blandtown as an artifice of the original belt line railway that inspired today’s Atlanta BeltLine and an example of how, if gentrification
and urban renewal work to their expected end, can lead to erasure of the Black Mecca. We learn from displaced residents that to forget existence is to lose collective identity and belonging. To be erased is to lose “home.” However, place-names can be used to commemorate spaces when the associated public narrative brings the marginalized group within the story, in such a way that presents the conflicts and tensions that make up the narrative of the space, while also unifying these disparate tensions through their shared connection to land. In such ways a shared association of a particular locale as “home” can be used to foster collective identification and reaffirm the diverse historical trajectories that are producing the space.

Chapter 3 centers this dissertation around the moral crux of the black historical trajectory in Atlanta, the civil rights movement, and within a wholistic view of completed BeltLine trails on the eastside and westside. A narrative approach to criticism of the “Images of America” walking history museum along the Atlanta BeltLine from 2018-2019, demonstrated that actions that add historical events to public spaces can rhetorically romanticize the trauma and lessons that should be learned from the past when they rescue whites from guilt and fail to acknowledge unresolved problems. Romanticizing trauma results in the absolution of the dominant hegemony’s oppressive actions without a moral reckoning. This is a detriment to the physical spaces Black people call home as it conceals moral disorder and suppresses the actions necessary for a moral reordering, resulting in a repetition of economic and political oppression of Black lives. We learn that place-based public history can ignite the moral good in its audience when the narrative accurately represents trauma, responsible agents, and an open narrative requiring “something-to-be-done” to rectify the continuing moral disorder.

In chapter 4, a deep map of the past, present, and prospective future of the West End revealed how urban renewal projects and changes to the built environment can formally make
black memories and historical trajectories invisible, by secluding them from new flows of movement in-and-out of the neighborhood and using the space to publicize an exclusive, white, idyllic sense-of place. Using Malt Disney as a major capital development and social attraction along the Westside BeltLine promotes a sense-of place for the white dominant hegemony, while also recollecting a traumatic racist and oppressive history for African Americans. Such actions affect senses of belonging to place and transform a locality that was once “home” to something unfamiliar and foreign, a place that once identified you as “kin,” to one that identifies you as “outsider.”

In the introduction to this dissertation I noted that there are three things that make Atlanta a Black Mecca and an apt metaphorical origin for Black collective identity, that is that it 1) harbors the memories of collective trauma, 2) provides an origination story for Black homeland post-Civil War, and 3) conceptualizes a hope for a utopian future of racial peace and prosperity. Yet, the three cases I have explored throughout this text expose the ways in which urban revitalization is being used to not construct but remove the retrospective and proleptic needs for Black collective identity in the city. One of my interviewees said it best regarding Blandtown and I reiterate his articulation for all of Atlanta: Atlanta is not being “renovated,” it is being “desecrated.” This is a “desecration of memories” that make Atlanta home for Black people that reside in and outside of the central city.

What I hope I have revealed is that “we,” the audience of readers addressed by this text, are left with a “something-to-be-done” to rectify the cultural gentrification and displacement of Black Life Worlds perpetrated by the neoliberal and racist ideologies endemic to the dominant hegemony in the United States. This dissertation is placed not only as a work of critical rhetorical analysis of the romanticizing features of space, but a rhetorical address in and of itself.
I stand as both rhetorician and rhetor, seeking my readers to participate in efforts to reconstruct Atlanta, and all of our cities formed by diverse historical trajectories in such a way that the diverse spatial narratives can coexist within the places we call home. In this way, my audience may take on the calling to become “witnesses” as best described by Cross and Peck in their reflections on Walter Benjamin’s writing. They write:

The Angel of History, as Walter Benjamin relates in his ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History,’ stands with his face turned towards the past while the wreckage of history grows before him. The storm in which he is caught is called ‘progress’ and the angel is propelled backwards towards the future. A sad figure, he ‘would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole again what has been smashed’.  

But the storm is too violent. In the light of this allegory we might begin to question: what is the use in being turned longingly towards the past? The angel is not able to breathe life into the debris and reassemble the wreckage that is left behind but can at least be a witness to the past and its destruction. But there are other possibilities. The historical materialist, unlike the angel, is turned towards the future in the hope of change to come. The aim is not to reassemble the past as it was but rather to ‘seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger’ and arrest the image of the past in order to confront the past with its own creations. The task of the historical materialist, having witnessed the ‘barbarism’ of the document and its transmission, is to ‘brush history against the grain.’

Thus far, each of my three cases placed me as the “historical materialist.” I have attempted to be a witness to the past by excavating it within the spatial, racial, and neoliberal context of the Atlanta BeltLine formation. But rather than staying in the past, I have looked at the present, and sought to capture the areas of the present where our past faults are set to reappear. In this way, I have sought, hopefully, that we can change our future. In this final

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380 Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” 247
381 Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” 248
Cross and Peck, “Editorial: Special Issue on Photography and Memory,” 12
chapter, I describe how we as rhetoricians may use the methods, I have presented here for revitalization projects across the nation.

As a step in the direction toward relieving the detrimental effects of cultural gentrification to diverse collective identities, I consider the methods used in this dissertation as critical for community engagement in urban renewal processes as they allow designers and researchers to position themselves as witnesses seeking to expose the historical narratives for a revisioning of a collective future that seeks moral reckoning. In this dissertation, I have used what Annette Kuhn described as an “unselfconscious methodological bricolage,”\(^{382}\) that produces and invents a means for tracing history and extrapolating narratives from the critical objects of study. This integrative approach to methodology that brings together narrative criticism, oral history interviews, archival studies, and narrative mapping, can be used by scholars and practitioners in the planning phases of urban redesign and revitalization. Using these methods to extract the spatial narratives of marginalized voices will give urban designers, policy makers, and community leaders a necessary data point for reimagining our public spaces. In this dissertation I identify a method where rhetoric can be used in practice to uncover a spatial narrative, evaluate elements for sublime coherence, moral visioning, and transcendent narration, and provide suggestions for designing a place that witnesses the historical trajectories of its diverse residents.

First, rhetoricians should work to identify the intersecting cultural groups that currently and historically reside(d) in the space. Once identified, the critic can use an integrative approach to develop a method for uncovering the spatial narrative. This can be unique to each case as it

will be necessary to determine the visual, textual, archival, and demographic data available for
critique. In some cases, the people may have been displaced, thus requiring the critic to utilize
the things they left behind as resources for uncovering the narrative. For instance, in the case of
Blandtown, the only symbolic relic of the past community was in the name they left behind,
making an excavation of the narrative associated with the neighborhood name the most apt text
for analysis. Since the public history of the name was erroneous, it was necessary to use archival
data from newspapers, census, and deeds to fill in the gaps. In addition, I had to use the oral
history of living residents to provide access to the individual narratives that made Blandtown
“home” to the group. What I seek to articulate here is that in order to uncover the spatial
narrative, rhetoricians will need to use nontraditional and diverse means to access these stories. It
is a non-linear process requiring creativity and attention to the symbols of culture that are
available to you.

Secondly, critics seeking to get involved in this process need to evaluate the narratives
they have uncovered to understand the structuring elements that make the stories “witnesses” to
the historical and present lives of the people in the space. As identified in the three cases of this
dissertation, spatial narratives are most effective in witnessing when they provide dialogical
coherence, a moral visioning and open ending, and visibility to the marginalized group’s
mnemonic narratives. While I consider these three elements a necessity, it would be the goal of
the critic to determine what element of the narratives structure results in these rhetorical
attributes. For instance, regarding dialogical coherence, the critic should answer “What are the
dialectical tensions that make up the narrative and production of the space? What mediates or
unifies these dialectical tensions?” In the instance of moral visioning, the rhetorician should
answer, “What is the moral value learned or sought after by the agents that acted within this
space? Was there a moral reckoning to end this particular narrative in the group’s historical trajectory?” And for visibility, the assessor should ask, “How are the new changes transforming the flow of movement in the neighborhood? What narratives are visible in the new flow? What are the historical and current implications of those narratives to belonging?”

It is important to note that while my dissertation revealed these three key elements to witnessing, future research may consider additional narrative elements as a requirement. As scholars we must be open to these revelations as we uncover spatial narratives and continue asking the initial question of this dissertation, “how can a group’s collective identity be maintained or disrupted in the wake of urban renewal?”

Finally, rhetorical scholars should be prepared to provide suggestions and insights to developers, designers, and planners. As we seek to take rhetorical scholarship outside of the marls of university bookshelves and paid-subscription online journals, we should consider how to present our research to change makers and decision makers. This requires involvement in local projects, seeking grants, and joining grassroots organizations. It also entails strategically communicating your work for a new audience without the requirements of academic, theoretical and rhetorical jargon. Rhetoricians can learn to make their work palatable to a larger audience and engage them on using these practices in their community-facing projects.

With that in mind, I bring us to thinking about these methods beyond Atlanta and beyond the BeltLine. “Displacing the ‘Black Mecca’” begins with two goals: 1) to explore the importance of narrating metaphorical spaces for African American identity, and 2) to determine how we, scholars, planners, architects, officials, and residents, can make diversely shared spaces articulate and be articulated by the diverse historical trajectories that reside in them. The project found itself in Atlanta, but also makes the claim that these methods of spatial analysis and
recommendations regarding spatial narration in neighborhood design can be used beyond the Atlanta BeltLine and African American histories. I provide two examples of how these methods could be used in other gentrification research including cultural gentrification and university expansion.

For instance, in 2018, Jesse Keenan, Thomas Hill, and Anurag Gumbar disclosed that climate gentrification was affecting property markets in Miami-Dade County, Florida. Climate change gentrification is based off the proposition that changes in the climate and its effects on the environment will cause a shift in land desirability. Specifically, for Miami-Dade and other coastal areas, it is speculated that once-desirable coastline properties in low-elevation areas could see a decrease in property valuation, while in-land areas with high-elevation have increased property valuation. 383 Those in-land communities, like Miami’s Little Haiti, are home to primarily black, Caribbean, and Latino residents. Little Haiti, an area built by working class Haitian immigrants, is already seeing the results of cultural gentrification as its once “naturally occurring affordable housing” 384 with rents below $1000, is being demolished to make way for new offices, hotels, and high rise buildings. 385

While Keenan’s research discusses how climate change affects property values and housing, transportation, and public facilities in the built environment, the research methods of this dissertation can be used to assess how climate gentrification affects the social and cultural


385 Green, “As Seas Rise, Miami’s Black Communities Fear Displacement From The High Ground.”
dynamics of these neighborhoods through environmental racism. In the case of climate
gentrification, rhetoricians can ask “how are current practices in market valuation based on
elevation, leading to a repetition of the historical environmental traumas marginalized groups
have had in space?” “How are activities that lead to environmental gentrification and
environmental threat for marginalized groups publicized or encouraged?” Using a process of
deep mapping, scholars can chart the shifts in property valuation and ethnic changes along with
the historical narratives that produced neighborhoods like Little Haiti. By viewing the change
geographically, culturally, and chronologically, rhetoricians can provide a larger assessment of
how environmental risk factors are being romanticized through covert strategies of neighborhood
change.

In another example, in 2019, Rhetoric Society of America sought to understand how the
expansion of University of Nevada, Reno (UNR) would affect the residential population, the
culture, and the history of the city of Reno. For this research, nearly 200 rhetorical scholars were
invited to Reno to explore the redevelopment of UNR and how rhetoricians could be civically
engaged in the change. As a participant in this project, I found that much of the questions resided
with understanding what is the rhetorician’s role and significance in addressing the concerns
surrounding power, place, and publics. In regard to gentrification and displacement, UNR’s
expansion would particularly affect Native American communities and residential areas close to
the school that have a collective connection to Reno’s casino and hotel market. The research I
have done with this dissertation provides a functional position for rhetoricians in situations like
these. Rhetoricians are particularly apt at assessing the historical narratives that have produced
the collective identity of the community and determining whether the proposed changes in the
landscape will disrupt or maintain the narratives that are central to continued production of
belonging. In the case of UNR and other university expansions, rhetoricians can provide consultations to universities regarding the results of this research, providing them the answer to the question, “what makes this city ‘home’?”

In my final remarks, I submit that the past, including its failures and successes, traumas and healings, cannot just be witnessed once, but requires a continual enactment of remembrance. Perpetual remembering is an act of constant learning, requiring each generation to recognize the ghost of the past and at the same time seek the spiritual calling of the future. By doing so we don’t simply claim the history as “nice to know,” but we consider the history as a starting point for change and a requirement to not recycle the sins of the past, but shed those detrimental practices to turn toward a future where everyone belongs. James Baldwin wrote in *The Fire Next Time*, that “if the word integration means anything, this is what it means: that we with love, shall force our brothers to see themselves as they are, to cease fleeing from reality and begin to change it.” This is the goal of witnessing. This is the something-to-be-done. This is the fire this time. This is our role in making “America what America must become.”
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APPENDICES

Blandtown Case Study – Interview Questions

1. What do you know about the history of Blandtown?
2. Why is the history of Blandtown important to you?
3. What does this neighborhood mean to you?
4. What are some of your fondest memories living in Blandtown?
   a. What about Blandtown makes you smile?
   b. What about Blandtown brings happiness or joy?
5. What are some of the hardest memories you have from living in Blandtown?
   a. What about Blandtown gives you sadness?
6. What is your experience with diversity in Blandtown?
7. What are key features of Blandtown today?
8. What does the name “Blandtown” mean to you?
9. What does the name “Westtown” mean to you?
10. What is the future of Blandtown?
    a. How does the Beltline affect the present aspects of Blandtown? How will it affect the future?
Blandtown Case Study – Informed Consent

Georgia State University
Department of Communication
Informed Consent

Title: Displacing the “Black Mecca”: Romanticizing or Witnessing African American Historical Trajectories in the Case of the Atlanta Beltline
Principal Investigator: Patricia G. Davis
Student Principal Investigator: Rhana Gittens

I. Purpose:
You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to understand Black spatial narratives in the city of Atlanta and use their spatial and temporal structure to answer this question: Does the re-establishment of the place-name “Blandtown” romanticize the past or draw witness to it? You are invited to participate because you are a former resident of Blandtown or a current resident of Blandtown. A total of 6 participants will be recruited for this study. Participation will require 2-4 hours of your time.

II. Procedures:
If you decide to participate, you will be involved in a face-to-face interview with the student principal interviewer regarding your relationship to Blandtown, the history of Blandtown as you remember it, and the vision for Blandtown’s future. The interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. There will be one full 2-hour interview completed, and a scheduled second interview if additional information is necessary. The interview location can be in the area surrounding Blandtown or what is most immediately comfortable for the participant. The researcher is willing to come to the participant if needed. Interview durations are also flexible according to the comfort of the participant.

III. Risks:
In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life. However, if at any time you feel uncomfortable, we will skip certain questions or take a break or stop completely at any time.

IV. Benefits:
Participation in this study may or may not benefit you. Overall, we hope to gain information about Blandtown, Georgia’s spatial narrative and understand whether re-establishing the neighborhood name in popular conversation and signage will romanticize the past or draw witness to it.

VI. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:
Participation in research is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in
the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. You may skip
questions or stop participating at any time. Whatever you decide, you will not lose any benefits
to which you are otherwise entitled.

VII. Confidentiality:
We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. Rhana Gittens will have access
to the information you provide. Information may also be shared with those who make sure the
study is done correctly (GSU Institutional Review Board, the Office for Human Research
Protection (OHRP). We will use a pseudonym rather than your name on study records. The
information you provide will be stored on a password- and firewall-protected computer. Your
name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or
publish its results. The findings will be summarized and reported in group form. You will not be
identified personally unless you so choose to be.

VIII. Contact Persons:
Contact Patricia G. Davis at pdavis20@gsu.edu if you have questions, concerns, or complaints
about this study. You can also call if you think you have been harmed by the study. Call Susan
Vogtner in the Georgia State University Office of Research Integrity at 404-413-3513 or
svogtner1@gsu.edu if you want to talk to someone who is not part of the study team. You can
talk about questions, concerns, offer input, obtain information, or suggestions about the study.
You can also call Susan Vogtner if you have questions or concerns about your rights in this
study.

IX. Copy of Consent Form to Participant:
We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.

If you are willing to volunteer for this research, please sign below.

____________________________________________
Printed Name of Participant

____________________________________________
Signature of Participant                               Date

____________________________________________
Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent     Date