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EXHIBITION, NARRATIVE, AND CIVIL WAR MEMORY: THE HISTORY OF THE
BATTLE OF ATLANTA CYCLORAMA

by

JESSICA BROWN

Under the Direction of Kathryn Wilson

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2021

ABSTRACT

In the summer of 1886, the American Panorama Company hired seventeen artists to produce *The Battle of Atlanta Cyclorama*, a 360-degree painting depicting the Civil War battle on July 22, 1864. This paper explores and analyzes the history, exhibition, and narratives of the *Battle of Atlanta Cyclorama*. The goal of this study is to understand how the Cyclorama's exhibition and narrative have changed over time while engendering an authentic and historical relationship with different audiences for 135 years. My research is contingent on theories of narrative, exhibition, and Civil War memory, as well as previous works written about the Cyclorama, newspaper articles, and archival materials and transcripts from the Cyclorama narrations of the 20th century. I conclude that the Cyclorama is an immersive spectacle where the audience holds the power to cocreate and reinforce meaning for and about the Cyclorama.

INDEX WORDS: Cyclorama, Civil War Memory, Exhibition, Narrative, Spectacle, Audience, Nostalgia

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2021

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BATTLE OF ATLATNA CYCLORAMA

by

JESSICA BROWN

Committee Chair: Kathryn Wilson

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Georgia State University

August 2021

DEDICATION

To my sweetest love and the pillar on which I lean, Phillip Grant. He often believes in me more than I believe in myself and always inspires me to be better in my work and in my life. He is hardworking, unwaveringly supportive, thoughtful, and kind; he and Ziggy are my home. I dedicate this work to him.

To Glenn Jacoby, Kevin Jones, and Katherine La Mantia for their irreplaceable companionship and love. I am endlessly inspired by each of them.

To Hannah Brecker, a true friend I found amongst the stress of graduate school and a remarkable woman in the preservation field.

To Sarah Griswold and Eric Thompson who taught me the ropes of the Cyclorama and undoubtedly sparked my passion for its complex and tumultuous history.

To the Phi Kappa Literary Society, an organization full of phenomenal individuals who shaped my undergraduate years and undoubtedly taught me the greatest lessons in debate, research, and presentation.

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I cannot imagine being where I am today without being raised by a mother who encouraged my love for books, learning, and my endless, unanswerable questions. Nancy Przybyl Brown is a lifelong educator and a selfless force. To this day, she continues to be an example of self-improvement and growth, a trait I hope to never lose sight of. I may have gained many features from my mother but most of all I am incredibly thankful to have gained her passion for learning.

I was an incredibly boisterous, argumentative, and outspoken child and I am grateful for educators along the way who honed that energy into a passion for learning and history. There are many teachers who shaped my education, including Brent Camden, Stephen Salamon, Deborah Slayton, Pamela Hitt, Kelly Gotkin, and Reginald Purvis. Each of these teachers challenged me to reach beyond my means and excel wherever I was and wherever I would end up. Most specifically, Mr. Purvis has been instrumental in my life's trajectory, teaching me to seek excellence and joy and hold my head up high.

As a freshman at the University of Georgia, I applied to the Summer Public History Program in Washington, DC. This program, created by my mentor, Dr. Akela Reason, catapulted me into my passion for the public history field and accessible, community focused scholarship. Dr. Reason has continued to support me and my professional goals through both my undergraduate and graduate studies. I am unsure of what professional path I would be on if I had not encountered Dr. Reason but I know her influence on the University of Georgia History Department has only helped to guide me to where I need to be. Along with Dr. Reason, many professors have provided me unwavering support and guidance throughout the years, including Dr. John Inscoe, Dr. Brian Drake, Dr. Joselyn Leimbach, Dr. Donna Alvermann, Dr. Kevin

Burke, and Dr. Kelly Happe. My time at the University of Georgia was truly one of the most precious periods of my life, shaped by intelligent and caring instructors.

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As I complete my thesis at Georgia State University, I am grateful for the guidance I received from my professors. Dr. Kate Wilson has been instrumental in my completion of my program as an instructor, supervisor, and thesis chair. I also thank Dr. Jeffrey Trask, my second reader, for his guidance and input throughout this stressful process.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The Battle of Atlanta Cyclorama is an artistic rendition of the historic Civil War battle of 1864 that evolved into a spectacle of memory, history, and nostalgia. From its creation in Milwaukee in 1886 to its relocation to the Atlanta History Center in 2017, the physical presentation of the *Cyclorama*, as well as its messaging and exhibition, have been unfixed, modified, and manipulated. The gargantuan painting has served as a sounding block for Confederate memorialization and celebration, the New South Creed, and Lost Cause ideology and nostalgia. *The Battle of Atlanta Cyclorama* is a unique artifact that reflects the power of historical narrative and, more poignantly, reinforces the power of audiences to not only authenticate or repudiate historical interpretation but take part in the creation of historical narrative themselves. This study, utilizing literature on historical interpretation, spectacle, Civil War memory, and exhibition, will first holistically trace the history of *The Battle of Atlanta Cyclorama* and then analyze how the painting itself and its interpretation have been changed. The Cyclorama was first an economic enterprise, then a space for memorialization, then a platform for the Lost Cause, and finally has been reinterpreted as a historical artifact. The question is not *if* the Cyclorama's interpretation and exhibition has changed over time but *how* the Cyclorama's interpretation and exhibition has changed overtime and what events and stakeholders led to those changes.

In the 19th century, large rotundas were constructed around the world to fit cycloramas. A cyclorama is a large 360-degree painting in which the audience stands inside the canvas.¹

¹ The term 'cyclorama' may be used interchangeably with 'panorama,' with the latter term favored by non-Americans. The purpose of both a panorama and a cyclorama is to give a complete view of a scene or landscape. However, cycloramas have the specific intention of

Cycloramas depict great and dramatic scenes, usually of battles or biblical events. The invention of cycloramas is credited to Robert Baker, an Irish painter who opened the first cyclorama building, located in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1787. Cycloramas were most popular at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, preceding motion pictures as both modes of mass entertainment and lucrative business opportunities. Furthermore, cycloramas emerged at a time of economic growth and technological advancement, particularly when American cities

Cycloramas are a reflection of their time. Initially appearing in Europe, cycloramas became popular due to technological advancements. “Increasing speed of travel (the railroad) and an increased speed of information (the telegraph) brought the static, and distinctly European, panoramas of cityscapes and pastoral landscapes into conflict with the late-nineteenth-century American culture.”² The creation of cycloramas themselves was aided by technology. Painting on enormous canvases required careful planning, large studio spaces with scaffolding, and the use of camerae obscurae to project smaller outlines onto a space ten times the size.

Cameras were utilized when artists traveled to complete their sketches. Because of these technological advancements, international companies were formed in the early 19th century, “employing artists that could produce a panorama in less than a year (operating out of company-owned workshops built to the shape of exhibition rotundas where they would eventually be shown) and managing a network of these exhibition houses, in coordination with local

immersing audiences within the scene. Most cycloramas produced between 1880 and 1920 were of the same size: 375 feet long by 49 feet tall. Therefore, standardized buildings were constructed to house them. However, panoramas were often laid flat and without the specific intention of audience immersion. Therefore, a cyclorama is a panorama but a panorama is not always a cyclorama. Additionally, a “diorama” is simply described as a three-dimensional rendition of a person, scene, event, or thing. *The Battle of Atlanta* contains dioramic elements but is primarily categorized as a cyclorama.

² John Trafton, *The American Civil War and Hollywood War Film* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 5.

businessmen, promotion agents, and financiers.”³ The hefty task of creating and exhibiting cycloramas was first and foremost an economic endeavor. The scenes that would attract audiences, and thus make the panorama companies money, had to be culturally relevant and interesting. Since the cyclorama boom happened in America in the late 19th century, the most popular subject matter was the Civil War, an event still looming in the minds of Americans decades later. *The Battle of Gettysburg*⁴, *The Battle of Shiloh*, *The Battle of Vicksburg*, and *The Battle of Atlanta* toured American cities and informed the public about what happened when they were eager to comprehend and reconstruct the past. Cycloramas “dazzlingly combined art and spectacle, reproducing war with stunning scale in specially constructed buildings that offered the aesthetic imperative of an art gallery together with the breathtaking experience of theater.”⁵ Artists were transforming gruesome battles, unexperienced by the general public, into consumable and intelligible entertainment, a place to not just see but experience the past and, for many, to reminisce. The art form emerged in America during a period of economic growth and technological advancement, particularly at the time of World’s Fairs and expositions when American cities were eager to showcase their post-war progress to tourists⁶. In Atlanta, thousands of tourists traveled to experience “several multiple expositions...the construction of

³ Trafton, *The American Civil War and Hollywood War Film*, 40-41.

⁴ Besides *The Battle of Atlanta*, *The Battle of Gettysburg* is the only other known surviving cyclorama in North America in 2021. French Artist Paul Philippoteaux brought *The Battle of Gettysburg* to life and inspired more 360-degree depictions of Civil War battles. Four copies were made of *Gettysburg*, with at least eight other renditions by different artists. The extensive documentation of *The Battle of Gettysburg* and the expertise of professionals at Gettysburg National Military Park helped to inform the restoration of *The Battle of Atlanta* Cyclorama in the late 2010s.

⁵ Harold Holzer and Mark Neely, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: The Civil War in Art* (New York: Orion Books, 1993), 173-174.

⁶ Reiko Hillyer, *Designing Dixie: Tourism, Memory, and Urban Space in the New South* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014), 17.

metropolitan architecture...and key elements of the Atlanta Spirit: progressiveness, opportunity, and unfettered business-orientation along northern lines”⁷ that was boasted by city officials and newspapers. Additionally, cycloramas emerged as the United States, veterans, and their families reckoned with the consequences of the Civil War. As a result of the intersection between economic growth and historical reconstruction, *The Battle of Atlanta* Cyclorama intentionally reached large audiences but unintentionally became a vehicle for Civil War memory, nostalgia, Lost Cause ideology and power. While many scholars have studied how the Confederacy found power and legitimacy in public spaces, schools, and politics following its loss in the Civil War, as well as how art and exhibition translate messages of power and order to the public, none have fully combined these theoretical frameworks to explore how *The Battle of Atlanta* Cyclorama evolved from an artistic interpretation of a battle into a historical document utilized by Confederates, their ancestors, and their supporters. To remedy this gap in scholarship, I will trace the history of the Cyclorama, evoke key scholars of exhibition, narrative, and Civil War memory, and then analyze specific changes to the paintings narrative throughout its history.

2 A HISTORY OF THE CYCLORAMA

On March 1, 1884, The American Panorama Company formed in Chicago with over \$200,000 in the bank from investors eager to cash in on an increasingly popular art form: cycloramas. The majority stockholder, Franklin H. Watriss traveled to Europe that same month to contract for an American Civil War battle cyclorama, a seemingly obvious choice to display for American audiences. German-born businessman William Wehner was hired to manage the company. Wehner “recruited a staff of artists in Germany, some of whom had worked on a

⁷ Hillyer, *Designing Dixie*, 137.

number of cycloramas glorifying German victories of the Franco-Prussian War.”⁸ Wehner also hired Theodore Davis, a combat artist from Harper’s Weekly who witnessed both the Battles of Chattanooga and the Battle of Atlanta. Davis’ experience in Atlanta would be the dominant first-hand account available to the artists while painting *The Battle of Atlanta*, along with the stories of veterans who passed through the Wells Street studio. Under Wehner’s leadership, seven cycloramas were painted between 1885 and 1888 in a studio in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, just across the street from a competing company, the Northwestern Panorama Company of Milwaukee.⁹ It appears that Cycloramas were mostly a Northern production as “only in the North were there cities with populations large enough and sufficiently prosperous to make cycloramas profitable.”¹⁰ Of the seven paintings produced by the American Panorama Company, *The Battle of Atlanta* is the only one still on display. Plans to produce a cyclorama depicting the Battle of Atlanta began in 1885, as the American Panorama Company wrapped up production of *The Battles of Chattanooga*. These plans were most likely expedited when Wehner caught wind of the Northwestern Panorama Company of Milwaukee’s efforts to procure stakeholders for a cyclorama depicting the same event.

The *Battle of Atlanta* Cyclorama depicts a specific moment in time: July 22, 1864 at 4:45pm. It is not confirmed why the American Panorama Company chose 4:45pm but it is most likely due to the fact that it was the turning point of the battle, when General John A. “Blackjack” Logan led the Army of the Tennessee’s 15th and 16th corps against Cheatham’s Corps. Logan took the place of General James B. McPherson after his death on the battlefield

⁸Wilbur Kurtz, *The Atlanta Cyclorama: The Story of the Famed Battle of Atlanta*, (Atlanta: City of Atlanta, 1954), 24.

⁹ Gordon Jones, *The Battle of Atlanta Cyclorama: Myths and Facts*, (Atlanta, 2019), 4.

¹⁰ Gordon Jones, *Yankees in Georgia? How the Battle of Atlanta Became a Confederate Icon*, (Atlanta, 2019), 3.

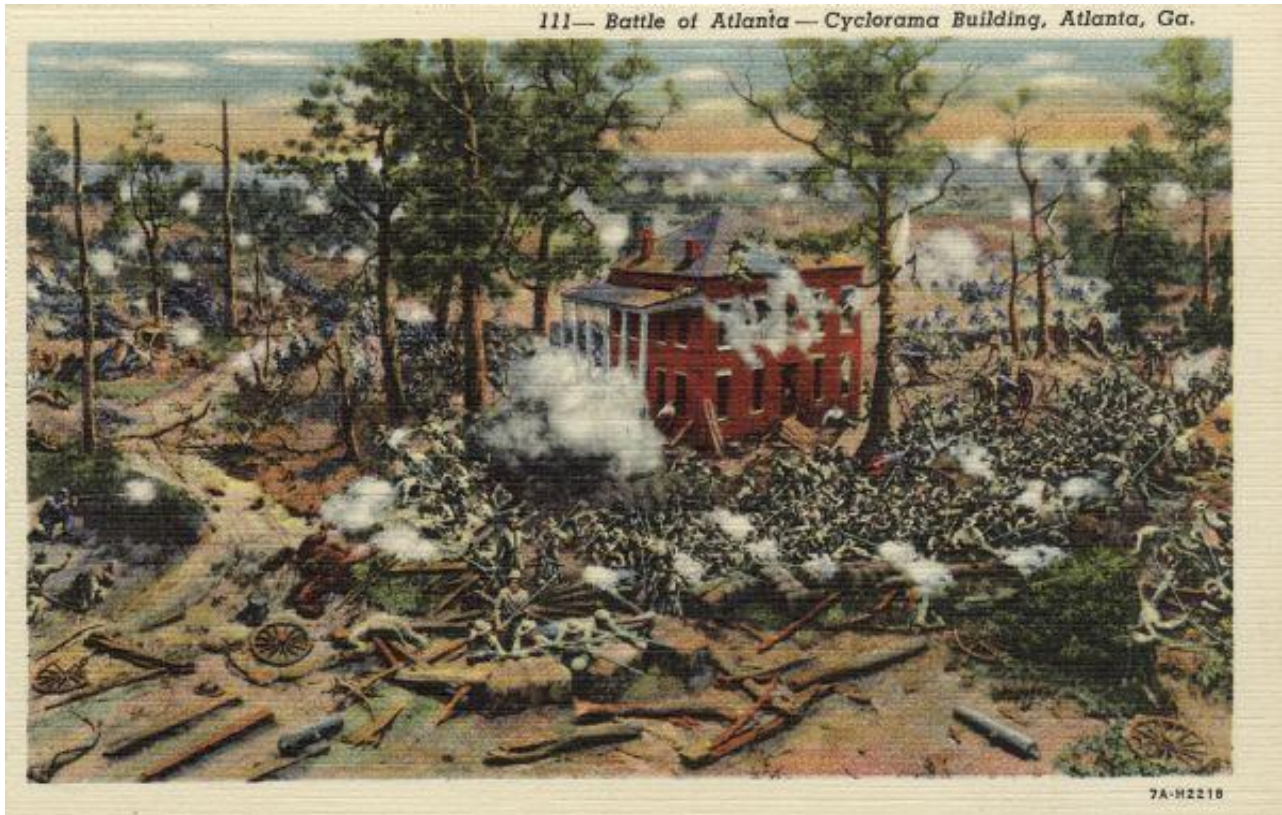


Figure 2.1. *The Troup Hurt House*. Wisconsin Historical Society, Battle of Atlanta – Cyclorama Building, Atlanta, Ga., 70347. Viewed online at <https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Image/IM70347>

earlier that day. General McPherson is identified as a figure in a hospital wagon in the Northern portion of the painting by General Sherman’s headquarters. Just before the point that the Cyclorama depicts, “four Confederate bridges, led by General Arthur Manigault, [had] just broken through the Union line near the Troup Hurt House, where the Union’s 15th Corps [was] stationed.”¹¹ A gap was created in the Union line but General Logan prevented further damage from Confederate forces. Ultimately, the Cyclorama served a commercial purpose and intended

¹¹ Daniel Judt, “Cyclorama: An Atlanta Monument,” *Southern Cultures* 23, no. 2 (2017): 4.

first and foremost to entertain and make money. “Cycloramas needed to sell, and here Wehner had found a Civil War moment that appealed to North and South alike.”¹²

Several structures and figures are of note in the Cyclorama. When you ascend the platform today at the Atlanta History Center, you emerge to look at the Western portion of the canvas. “The scene is depicted from the point of view of the Union lines, and it seems probably that it was not intended originally for permanent exhibition at a Southern site.”¹³ On the horizon is downtown Atlanta and, towards the front, sits the Troup Hurt House. The action is focused around the Troup Hurt House and along the railroad. “Dead men and horses felled in Confederate general Benjamin F. Cheatham’s successful breakthrough litter the tracks along a battle-scarred cut of the Georgia Railroad...as Illinois troops advance toward the unfinished brick plantation house...from whose upper windows Confederates unleash steady rounds of gunfire.”¹⁴ Turning towards the north sits the Augustus Hurt House, which served as General Sherman’s Headquarters. Sherman is small, sitting on a horse, “calmly surveying the battlefield.”¹⁵ To the right, General Logan, “hat in hand and mounted on a foaming black charger...leads his staff across the corpse-littered field,”¹⁶ followed by Captain Degress towards the Troup Hurt House. Above them flies an eagle. Further to the right, facing east, lies another house and the railroad traveling into Decatur. In this section of the painting, the only African American figure, out of over 6,000 figures, is depicted. Until recently, this figure was not regularly acknowledged in the Cyclorama’s presentation, and the nature of his inclusion is undetermined. Finally, facing south towards Bald Hill, Confederate prisoners are being led away

¹² Judt, “Cyclorama: An Atlanta Monument,” 6.

¹³ Holzer and Neely, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory*, 176.

¹⁴ Holzer and Neely, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory*, 175.

¹⁵ *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory*, 177.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 177.

from the battle. With the lack of thick battle scenes surrounding this area of the painting, the artists put a specific focus on these prisoners of war, signifying the inevitable win of the United States in the Battle of Atlanta

2.1 Germans in Atlanta: The Creation of the Cyclorama

In 1885, several artists met in Atlanta for field study. Wilbur Kurtz writes that F.W. Heine, August Lohr, Richard Lorenz, Harper's Weekly's Theodore Davis, and potentially others met in Atlanta to choose a vantage point for the painting.¹⁷ Heine and Davis selected the vantage point along the Georgia railroad in modern day Inman Park, where Moreland and Dekalb Avenue intersect, for two reasons. First, the position offered the most dramatic and vivid potential and allowed for space to depict the additional skirmishes on Bald Hill, now Leggett's Hill, and in Decatur. The second reason is that the artists were informed by Atlantans that the Northwestern Panorama Company of Milwaukee had already sketched from the vantage point of Bald Hill, though nothing would ever come of their project. Artists for the American Panorama Company would return to the city again to take more sketches of tree and terrain around the chosen vantage point.¹⁸ Scaffolding was constructed up to 40 feet tall around the areas of interest for the artists to work from.

By April of 1886, sketches by Lohr and Heine, as well as Wilhelm Schroeter and Gustave Wendling, were largely finished. On April 16, 1886, an enlarged sketch of the major features of the battle was completed. The enlargement was completed by the use of a magic lantern projector, in which the smaller sketches were loaded on to transparent plates and reflected upon a larger canvas to trace. The images were traced with the canvas already stretched and hung,

¹⁷ Kurtz, *The Atlanta Cyclorama*, 25.

¹⁸ Jones, *The Battle of Atlanta Cyclorama: Myths and Facts*, 4.

requiring the construction of scaffolding to reach the top of the 49-foot-tall structure. In June of 1886, the final touches were added to the canvas, including the addition of General Sherman in the Northern portion of the painting, looking down on the battle. General Sherman is one of only 24 identified United States officers depicted. The officers are explicitly identified by the artists from their sketches. Of the over 6,000 figures in the Cyclorama, no Confederates are identified in the painting, further emphasizing the artists favor towards the US troops and Northern audiences.

Another identified figure in the painting is General John A. “Blackjack” Logan, the largest figure in the painting. Due to his prominence in the painting, rumors began that Logan was a major financial backer of the painting, though there is no evidence of this. Many also assumed that it was to aid his political career while he ran for Vice President in 1884 with



Figure 2.2. Joshua Rashaad McFadden, *Sketch of Troup Hurt House*. Viewed online at <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/atlanta-famed-cyclorama-tell-truth-civil-war-once-again-180970715/>

presidential candidate James G. Blaine, an election ultimately won by Grover Cleveland. However, Logan's prominence is most likely due to the fact that the painting depicts 4:45 pm on July 22, the turning point of the battle. Additionally, Theodore Davis encouraged the inclusion of famous figures in the painting to draw larger crowds and, although Logan never became Vice President, the campaign would have made him recognizable. Logan's inclusion was akin to including a major Hollywood star in a blockbuster movie, attracting visitors to see a popular figure and ultimately boost attendance.

During the Cyclorama's creation, the artists used first-hand accounts, as well as the experience and perspective of Theodore Davis, to give realism to the landscape. While in Atlanta, the artists "interviewed dozens of Confederate veterans who had fought in the battle – with an interpreter, since not one of them spoke English."¹⁹ Throughout the summer in Wisconsin, the artists welcomed veterans into their 628 West Wells Street studio to share war stories. These stories influenced how the painting was composed, including the inclusion of Old Abe the War Eagle.²⁰ Old Abe, named in honor of Abraham Lincoln, was the mascot of Company C, 8th Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry Regiment. The eagle, carried on a special perch, accompanied the 8th Wisconsin through campaigns in Arkansas, Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, Missouri, and Louisiana; the regiment was not present at the Battle of Atlanta. Old Abe's presence in *The Battle of Atlanta* is attributed to the relationship that the artists formed with local Wisconsin veterans. Abe died in 1881 and his body was stuffed for display in the Wisconsin State Capitol. His image lives on as The Screaming Eagle insignia for the 101st Airborne Division of the United States Army.

¹⁹ Judt, "Cyclorama: An Atlanta Monument," 6.

²⁰ Jones, *Myths and Facts*, 5.

On June 14, 1886, the first copy of *The Battle of Atlanta* Cyclorama was completed and moved to Minneapolis by rail. On June 29, the painting was premiered in Minneapolis, on the corner of present day First Avenue South and Fifth Avenue South. At its premiere, the diorama at the base of the cyclorama was very minimal, only including faux foliage and fencing. By August of 1886, work on a second copy of the painting began in Milwaukee. The copy was displayed in Detroit and Baltimore until 1899 but it is unknown what became of the painting.

2.2 Movement and Ownership of The Cyclorama

On May 29, 1888, *The Battle of Atlanta* moved from Minneapolis to Indianapolis, in the location where the Hilton Indianapolis Hotel currently stands. A year earlier, in March of 1887, artists Franz Biberstein and Herman von Michalowski added an ambulance to the canvas, half painted and half 3D prop protruding from the painting. By 1890, the American Panorama Company faced bankruptcy and, in order to settle their debts, their paintings were sold at auction, including the *Cyclorama*. In March of 1891, Paul Atkinson of Madison, Georgia purchased *The Battle of Atlanta* Cyclorama in Indianapolis for \$2,500. Atkinson was a businessman and entertainer whose four brothers fought for the Confederacy in the Civil War. When Atkinson purchased *The Battle of Atlanta*, he had already owned Wehner's *The Storming of Missionary Ridge and Battle Above the Clouds* cyclorama, "which he exhibited at Chattanooga until replaced there by the *Atlanta*."²¹ Atkinson was not only interested in the financial gain from the painting but also had a personal stake in the efforts to remember and reconstruct the events of the Civil War. Once closed in Indianapolis, Atkinson moved the Cyclorama and opened it to the public in Chattanooga on June 12, 1891 on the corner of 11th Street. The Cyclorama would only be on display until January 31, 1892. On February 22, 1892, *The Battle of Atlanta* Cyclorama opened

²¹ Kurtz, *The Atlanta Cyclorama*, 26.

in Atlanta, Georgia. A cyclorama rotunda had been constructed on Edgewood Avenue, near Georgia State University, first to showcase *The Storming of Missionary Ridge* and then *The Battle of Atlanta*. The Cyclorama was an instant yet shortlived hit in Atlanta, with Atkinson rapidly losing money due to a decline in attendance. One limitation for Atkinson was the debate over whether or not Cyclorama shows should be given on Sundays, with Mayor Hemphill afraid that Sunday Cyclorama shows would encourage other shows and disrupt the Sabbath.²² In October 1892, Atkinson sold *The Battle of Atlanta* to businessman H.H. Harrison. Harrison and other investors planned to move the Cyclorama to Chicago but never did.

It appears that the Cyclorama sat unvisited for about a year. In January 1893, a heavy snow storm hit Atlanta and a portion of the roof of the Cyclorama building caved in. The painting was damaged and left with a 54-inch-wide tear to the top left of the Troup Hurt House, facing West in the painting. Come August of 1893, the cyclorama building and *The Battle of Atlanta* were sold at auction. Ernest Woodruff, an Atlanta businessman and cofounder of the Atlanta and Edgewood Street Railroad, bought the painting for \$1,100 and then resold the painting to George V. Gress, a Lumber tradesman turned Zoo owner, and businessman Charles Northen. Gress began the Atlanta Zoo in March of 1889 when he “presented to the city the menagerie of a bankrupt circus which he had bought in order to secure the heavy horse-drawn wagons for use in his lumber business. Gress also erected the first shelter to house the animals and their keeper.”²³ When Gress and Northen owned the painting, it was dismantled and rolled into sections to be moved to Grant Park and the building itself was torn down. The Cyclorama

²² “No Sunday Show Can Be Given in the Gate City for Some Time to Come, So Says Mayor W.A. Hemphill,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), April 9, 1892.

²³ “Atlanta: Capital of the South,” ed. Paul W. Miller (New York: Knickerbocker Printing, 1949), 222.

was moved on two wagons and sat outside while a temporary building was constructed in Grant Park on Cherokee Avenue. This exposure to the elements undoubtedly resulted in further deterioration and damage to the painting.

Gress did not experience success with the Cyclorama and donated it to the City of Atlanta. By this point, the painting was still greatly damaged from improper storage and the 1893 snow storm. Newspapers reported the closing of the Cyclorama in 1897, saying “it seemed to be the general opinion [of the board at the Chamber of Commerce] the cyclorama had seen its best days, and that it would be useless to exhibit it any longer.”²⁴ However, the board quickly changed their mind when repairs were deemed inexpensive enough so that “the battle of Atlanta [would] continue to be the chief attraction of the park”²⁵ In June 1898, the painting experienced another tear, this time 30 feet long and 3 feet wide on the Northern portion of the painting near General Sherman. Repairs were made quickly for a reunion of Confederate veterans on July 22 and 23 of 1898. “The ten cents admission fee totaled \$1,000 the first week of City ownership, notwithstanding the fact that veterans were admitted free of charge. Watching the reaction of the veterans was, in itself, a spectacle, what with rekindled emotions evoked by the pictured thrust and parry of the contending forces, the serried ranks in battle smoke, the galloping horsemen – all of which are strangely impressive in the utter silence to ears attuned to sound effects.”²⁶ The reunion was the first of many as a relationship between the painting and the lost Confederate cause began to solidify.

²⁴ “Park Cyclorama Will Be Closed: The ‘Battle of Atlanta’ on Exhibition for the Last Time,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), Aug 28, 1897.

²⁵ “Looks Brighter for: The ‘Battle of Atlanta’ May Yet Be Preserved,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA) Aug 29, 1897.

²⁶ Kurtz, *Atlanta Cyclorama*, 28.

Over the next few decades, the City of Atlanta struggled to maintain the quality of the Cyclorama, particularly due to the temporary building that housed it. It was not until 1921 that a new building in Grant Park, designed by Atlanta architect John Francis Downing, was finally erected to permanently house the painting. “The front section of the building, which is situated on a broad paved terrace, is constructed of white, stone-flecked terra cotta in neoclassic design. The rear section is of white stucco, especially constructed in a circular design to fit the dimensions of the great canvas.” The new Cyclorama building reflected style elements of the Antebellum South. Antebellum mansions and plantations were built primarily between the 1830s and the 1860s and traditionally evoked Greek Revival, Neoclassical, and Georgian architecture. The grand estates of the pre-Civil War South reflected the wealth and power of white landowners, as these homes virtually always utilized the labor of enslaved Africans to maintain its idyllic image. However, while the Atlanta Cyclorama & Civil War Museum featured the large columns and white façade of traditional Antebellum mansions, the shape of the building mostly reflects neo-classical architecture and style with its symmetrical and structured appearance, resembling civic buildings and monuments in the United States. The architectural choices for the structure associate it with traditions of white supremacy and suggest monumentality. Dr. Lyra Monteiro writes that “classicizing architecture in the United States – along with neoclassical statues of white men – serves as a permanent, physical dog whistle, one that avowed white supremacists readily recognize as such...”²⁷ The façade of the Grant Park building constructed to house the Cyclorama served as yet another dog whistle.

²⁷ Lyra D. Monteiro, “Power Structures: White Columns, White Marble, White Supremacy,” *Medium*, Oct 27, 2020, <https://intersectionist.medium.com/american-power-structures-white-columns-white-marble-white-supremacy-d43aa091b5f9>.



Figure 2.3. Scott Edhardt, The Atlanta Cyclorama and Civil War Museum. November 18, 2005. Viewed online at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atlanta_Cyclorama_%26_Civil_War_Museum

The inside of the structure housed Civil War exhibits and the Cyclorama. One visitor wrote that the display was “full of articles, displays and information on the Civil War...[ranging] from the Civil War through *Gone with the Wind!*”²⁸ Little remains of the specifics of these exhibits. The Cyclorama building would go on to house the painting into the 21st century, with renovations occurring in the 1980s. In the early 2000s, plans were set in motion to find a new home for the Cyclorama where it would be better preserved. In 2014, The City of Atlanta made a deal with the Atlanta History Center to house the Cyclorama for 75 years. The Cyclorama officially closed in Grant Park on July 1, 2015. Four years later, on February 22, 2019, *The Battle of Atlanta*

²⁸ “Atlanta Cyclorama and Civil War Museum,” Living History Sites, accessed July 21, 2021, <https://www.livinghistorysites.com/georgia301/sites/289-georgia/sites2/283-atlanta-cyclorama-and-civil-war-museum-atlanta-ga>.

Cyclorama opened to the public where it is still on display today. However, the Cyclorama experience is no longer focused on the events of the battle but instead the history of the painting.

2.3 Unfixed Canvas: Changes to The Cyclorama

Overtime, the Cyclorama was changed not only in image but also in size, quality, and content. According to records, between the construction in Milwaukee and its current home at the Atlanta History Center, the Cyclorama has been moved a total of six times. However, the task of taking down the Cyclorama, scrolling it up, transporting it, and rehangng it was tedious. Rather, it would have been tedious to remove each individual peg that hangs the Cyclorama from its frame. Instead, the Cyclorama was removed from each respective home by a clean slice around its top. As a result, the Cyclorama lost height over time. To transport, the Cyclorama features two main seams where the painting was split, and two main sections were scrolled for transportation. The painting, originally 49 feet tall, measured 42 feet tall when it was moved to the Atlanta History Center. Approximately 7 feet of canvas was added back to the sky.²⁹ Additionally, sections that had been damaged by building infrastructure facing both West and East in the painting were reincorporated.

The American Panorama Company made few changes to the painting. The most prominent change, however, occurred in 1888 when the likeness of Theodore Davis, on the Northern hill of the painting near the Augustus Hurt House, which served as General Sherman's headquarters, as replaced with Brigadier General Benjamin Harrison. Harrison had not been present at the Battle of Atlanta but instead at the Battle of Peachtree Creek on July 20, 1864.

²⁹ Jack Hitt, "Atlanta's Famed Cyclorama Mural Will Tell the Truth About the Civil War Once Again," *Smithsonian Magazine*, December 2018, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/atlanta-famed-cyclorama-tell-truth-civil-war-once-again-180970715/>.

Regardless, Harrison was added to the painting, likely to aid his 1888 presidential bid. Politicians like Harrison seemed to recognize the power of historical depiction. Newspapers advertised “Harrison at Atlanta” and Harrison won the 1888 election. However, the change to the Cyclorama created controversy, with some believing the inclusion of Harrison as a case of stolen valor.³⁰ The Cyclorama manager, Joseph R. Perry, resigned in disgrace due to the embarrassment. Still, Harrison remained on the canvas until 2017 when the Atlanta History Center restored Theodore Davis’s likeness.

By the turn of the century, the Cyclorama had experienced a lot of wear and tear. Newspapers reported the painting and Cyclorama building in disarray and several efforts were made to repair it. In February of 1909, \$500 of city funds were allocated towards the cleaning and repainting of damaged areas of the Cyclorama.³¹ Over a decade later, in 1921, a new building was erected in Grant Park to house the Cyclorama and a variety of artifacts. The building, however, did not fit the full 17,866 square foot painting. To remedy this problem, a 22-inch-wide vertical slice of the painting was removed on the Eastern portion of the painting, facing Decatur.³²

Between 1922 and 1928, two efforts were made to further restore the canvas. Local artist Frank Mack was hired by the City of Atlanta to clean with painting and repaint the sky, which showed years of water damage from improper storage. Mack also included sculpture work with

³⁰ Hitt, “Atlanta’s Famed Cyclorama Mural Will Tell the Truth About the Civil War Once Again,” <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/atlanta-famed-cyclorama-tell-truth-civil-war-once-again-180970715/>.

³¹ “New Cyclorama Building Opened: Governor Hardwick, Mayor Key, Martin Amorous, C.J. Harden and A.N. Thom Make Addresses,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), Oct 2, 1921.

³² “New Cyclorama Building Opened: Governor Hardwick, Mayor Key, Martin Amorous, C.J. Harden and A.N. Thom Make Addresses,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), Oct 2, 1921.

figures showcasing a united North and South, as well as the part that women played in the Civil War.³³ Another artist, Athos Menaboni, was also hired to fix the sky.³⁴ It is unknown if Mack or Menaboni is responsible, but one of the artists covered the water damage with large, white fluffy clouds.

During the Great Depression, one of the most drastic changes to the Cyclorama's appearance was initiated. The Works Progress Administration (WPA), established by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1935, was a Second New Deal initiative to provide economic relief through public works projects. The WPA included projects such as the Federal Music Project, the Federal Theatre Project, and the Federal Art Project. As part of a WPA initiative, Joseph Victor Llorens, Weis Snell, and Wilbur Kurtz began creating a team to construct a diorama for the Cyclorama. Llorens said "the diorama was a boyhood dream of mine. I used to go to see the Cyclorama when I was just a kid and I could just visualize what I could do with that groundwork in front of the painting,"³⁵ Llorens and Snell created 128 plaster figures, ranging in size, to add to a 3D landscape built on real Georgia red clay soil taken from excavation sites all around the city.³⁶ To create the lifelike scene, "the figures were first modeled in clay, moulds were made, and then hollow figures were cast in plaster. Llorens wanted the objects to last as long as possible, so, distrusting the lasting properties of manufactured artists' tube colors, he used automobile paints to color the figures."³⁷ A cannon and additional foliage was also added to

³³ "Ask Higher Pay and Fewer Hours: Restoration of Old Rate Asked by Men Who Are at Work on Cyclorama Building" *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, Georgia), Feb 3 1921.

³⁴ W.C. Burnett, *Diorama at Cyclorama was WPA Project Directed by Atlantian*, (Atlanta Constitution: Atlanta, 1979).

³⁵ W.C. Burnett, *Diorama at Cyclorama was WPA Project Directed by Atlantian*, (Atlanta Constitution: Atlanta, 1979).

³⁶ Burnett, *Diorama at Cyclorama was WPA Project Directed by Atlantian*.

³⁷ Ibid.

make the diorama that much more lifelike, blending into the canvas so that audiences could not tell where the diorama ended and the painting began. The diorama took a total of 33 months to complete, with anywhere from 15 to 150 men having worked on the project and \$250,000 spent.³⁸ The project brought new attention to the Cyclorama and was finished in time for the Atlanta premiere of *Gone with the Wind* in 1939.

Joseph Victor Llorens also took it upon himself to try to clean up the painting, against the word of Mayor James L. Key. First, Llorens washed the painting with castile soap and “because the thick paint had many aging cracks in it, he coated it with linseed oil, which bound the surface together.”³⁹ However, the effect was not as desired, with the dried linseed oil creating a sheen on the canvas. To remedy this, Llorens “coated [the canvas] with buttermilk and that dried into a layer of transparent material. Milk is the basis for casein glue, which is a medium for one type of artists’ paints. It dries with a matte, or dull surface.”⁴⁰ Kurtz took up other projects regarding the Cyclorama, restoring its original depiction of Confederate prisoners of war and the 15 Confederate flags that Paul Atkinson had removed. Kurtz kept extensive documentation of his work, referring to photographs of the original composition and recording all of his changes and restorations. The two-year project brought life to the Cyclorama again and, in 1939, a new lighting system and the first recorded soundtrack were added to the experience. A narration accompanied the show by John Fulton and a rendition of “Dixie.” The entertainment value of the Cyclorama, “inspired in part by movies, which had created a higher standard for realism,”⁴¹ was changing with the times.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Judt, “Cyclorama: An Atlanta Monument,” 11.

The Cyclorama experienced a steady stream of attendance in the 1940's and 1950's. During World War II, soldiers frequented the Cyclorama in large numbers, with the Parks Department reporting 33,595 group admissions in 1943, most of them to soldiers.⁴² One visit from sailors highlighted the glee with which Cyclorama staff presented southern valor. "We want these Yankees to see what a good fight the Confederates put up," explained Charles Dale, whose father, H.A. Dale...engineered the sight-seeing tour."⁴³ While the United States was at war, the war over how the Civil War and the Confederacy should be understood was raging one. The Cyclorama was in a constant state of renewal, including the space surrounding it. In the exhibition portion of the building, "A large room to the right of the foyer contain[ed] eight enlarged photographs taken by Sherman's official photographer."⁴⁴ The attraction also included objects not related to the Cyclorama, including "Confederate money and weapons, Indian arrowheads, beadwork from Constantinople, paddles from South America, stuffed birds and animals, a swordfish, a vampire bat from Sumatra, a Patagonian shrunken skull, and a Spanish halberd found near Atlanta."⁴⁵

With an increase in visitors and a new presentation style, Atlantans were keenly aware of how the Cyclorama was being presented. Many people expressed their opinions on what auditory experience was most fitting, with one woman writing to the Atlanta Constitution that "the town needs a tongue-lashing."⁴⁶ The offense? The Cyclorama presentation included music

⁴² "'Yankee Doodle' Soldiers Thrill to Forebears in Cyclorama," *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), March 26, 1944.

⁴³ Cecile Davis, "50 Sailors Thrill at Sight of Cyclorama," *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), Nov 3, 1944.

⁴⁴ "Atlanta: A City of the Modern South," compiled by the Writer's Program of the Work Projects Administration in the State of Georgia (New York: J.J. Little and Ives, 1942), 192.

⁴⁵ "Atlanta: A City of the Modern South," 192.

⁴⁶ Celestine Sibley, "Florence Reed Protests Cyclorama Music Choice," *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), Jan 7, 1950.

by John Philip Sousa. Florence Reed wrote, “I stood before it speechless. Indeed, I was so deeply moved by its impact that speech was impossible. Suddenly, out of the nowhere came a sound of music, music so inappropriate, so completely mood destructive that gave one such offense, I must beg leave to make this protest. SOUSA MARCHES! Mr. Editor, cannot SOMETHING be done about it?”⁴⁷ Older audiences were fruitlessly holding on to the reverence that they felt the Cyclorama should offer, despite the fact that the experience “attracted approximately 200,000 persons in 1950 – an all-time high.”⁴⁸ In 1959, a second soundtrack was added to the Cyclorama experience with more sound effects. A new narration was written by Wilbur Kurtz and narrated by James S. Robinson. Less than a decade later, in 1968, a Victor Jory replaces Robinson’s narration with virtually the same script. Jory’s addition was particularly interesting, as he had played Jonas Wilkerson in *Gone with the Wind*, further solidifying the relationship created between the painting and the film.

During the Civil Rights movement, the Cycloramas relevance and importance was yet again put into question. The City of Atlanta recognized its value as an attraction for outside visitors: “A survey of visitors a few years ago showed that approximately 85 percent of Cyclorama’s visitors come from out of town. About 75 percent of these are from out of state, reported Stan Martin of the city Parks and Recreation Bureau.”⁴⁹ Another survey explored how the citizens of Atlanta felt about the painting, with “...4,797 people responded in favor of restoring the painting, and 25 against it. Of those in favor, about 412 specifically asked that the

⁴⁷ Celestine Sibley, “Florence Reed Protests Cyclorama Music Choice.”

⁴⁸ Dorothy Cremin, “Cyclorama Too Real for Blue Vet and a Bird,” *The Atlanta Journal and the Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), Feb 25, 1951.

⁴⁹ Beau Cutts, “The Battle of Atlanta (Cyclorama),” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), Mar 25, 1977.

painting be removed from city control and given to Stone Mountain park.”⁵⁰ One woman, homemaker Gloria Lotz, aged 32, believe that the Cyclorama was an attraction that needed to be maintained to “tell the history of the way it used to be, (compared to) the way we are today now that the South is changing...”⁵¹ Though only 25 people were against the restoration of the Cyclorama, they were passionate about their stance, with one person wanting to “burn the painting because it is ‘an ugly, expensive monument to the glory of war.’”⁵²

The suggestions to move the Cyclorama to Stone Mountain Park gained traction while new plans were unveiled in 1972 to build a new building in Grant Park. For years, the public and the state legislature battled over budgets and the Cycloramas appropriate location. Attendance was declining in the 1970’s, with 309,415 visitors reported in 1970 and only 255,263 visitors reported in 1976.⁵³ However, a seemingly unlikely champion of the Cyclorama emerged: Mayor Maynard Jackson, Atlanta’s first Black mayor. Jackson, elected in 1973, was criticized for delays in Cyclorama renovations. More specifically, many in opposition to Jackson believed that, because he was Black, he would allow the Cyclorama to rot.⁵⁴ However, Jackson pushed back against this criticism, expressing a personal and political stake in the painting and expressing the value he saw in the Cyclorama as an artifact. Jackson famously said that “The Cyclorama depicts the Battle of Atlanta, a battle that the right side won (the Union Army). It was a battle that helped to free my ancestors, and I’ll make sure that that depiction is saved.”⁵⁵ Jackson kept his promise

⁵⁰ Larry Shealy, “4,797 readers say ‘yes’ to restoring the painting; 25 say ‘no’,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), Aug 5, 1979.

⁵¹ “Mini Issue: Is Atlanta’s Cyclorama Worth Saving?” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), Sept 16, 1978.

⁵² Shealy, “4,797 readers say ‘yes’ to restoring the painting; 25 say ‘no.’”

⁵³ Cutts, “The Battle of Atlanta (Cyclorama).”

⁵⁴ Alexis Scott Reeves, “Mayor Rebuffs Attacks on Cyclorama Project” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), Feb 6, 1979.

⁵⁵ Reeves, “Mayor Rebuffs Attacks on Cyclorama Project.”

and, in September of 1979, major renovations led by Gustav Berger, the artist of Mount Rushmore and the initial artist of Stone Mountain, were underway. A major issue that the painting faced was the fact that it was sitting in actual dirt, as the WPA project boasted the addition of real Georgia red clay. The dirt was replaced with fiberglass. A new entertainment value is added as well with the introduction of a rotating seating platform and a new lighting system. The rotation followed a new soundtrack and narration by Shepperd Strudwick. By the end of renovations in February of 1982, the total cost came to about 11 million dollars.

Following the restorations of the late 70s and early 80s, there was a new fight over the Cyclorama, this time about who would manage it. In the midst of great social change, and the Cyclorama residing in an increasingly Black neighborhood, run by predominantly Black staff, Dennis A. Walters Jr. felt that he was not given the job of director of the Cyclorama because he was white.⁵⁶ A space that had once been dominated by white Southerners was threatened by new voices and new perspectives that had been virtually absent from the experience. Walters believed that he had been discriminated against as a white man, with the city “hiring less-qualified black and women candidates as directors of a Civil War attraction”⁵⁷ compared to his degrees in anthropology and history, as well as his love for the Cyclorama.⁵⁸ In 1985, Walters filed a reverse discrimination suit against the City of Atlanta. The United States Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit upheld a district ruling that resulted in the appointment of Walters as director of the Cyclorama.⁵⁹ Walters was awarded \$227,000 in damages, as well as \$19,000 in interest and

⁵⁶ “A Whites Charge of Bias Upheld by Appeals Court,” *New York Times* (New York, NY), Nov 11, 1986.

⁵⁷ “A Whites Charge of Bias Upheld by Appeals Court.”

⁵⁸ “Walters Wins Cyclorama Job and \$227,500 in Damages,” *Atlanta Daily World* (Atlanta, GA), April 9, 1985

⁵⁹ “A Whites Charge of Bias Upheld by Appeals Court.”

\$2,700 to account for the time between the verdict and his first day as director.⁶⁰ Because of the courts agreement with Walters, Carole Mumford, a white woman, lost her position as director and was demoted to an administrator for the Department of Cultural Affairs.⁶¹ The city worked to reinstate Mumford but was unsuccessful, thus marking a curious period of time for the Cyclorama.

Upon taking his position as Director of the Cyclorama, Dennis Walters instated many changes to the experience. Walters personally repainted the cannons in the diorama because he felt that the colors were historically inaccurate.⁶² Walters most notable attempt at changing the experience was trying to gain access to the film *Birth of a Nation* to premiere as part of the experience. Walters alleged that he had not seen the film and was unaware of its racist nature.⁶³ However, he certainly drew a link between a movie which promotes racism and the Lost Cause the Cyclorama. With *Gone with the Wind* as the only other film directly associated with the Cyclorama, stakeholders not only saw a connection to films that depicted white supremacy but deemed their inclusion appropriate and relevant to their audiences. Walters strange tenure as director lasted 5 years, coming to an end when, on August 9, 1990s, he shot and killed his fourth wife (who was the daughter of his third wife) and then committed suicide.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ “City Ordered to Employ Dennis Walters,” *Atlanta Daily World* (Atlanta, GA), May 31, 1985.

⁶¹ “City Seeks Way to Reinstate Mumford,” *Atlanta Daily World* (Atlanta, GA), Aug 2, 1985

⁶² “City Seeks to Reinstate Mumford.”

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Jim Galloway, “The Cyclorama and an End to a 40-year Fight Over Confederate History,” *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, July 15, 2015, <https://www.ajc.com/news/state--regional-govt--politics/the-cyclorama-and-end-year-fight-over-confederate-history/7qhQVmljlfTvtGNRGojy5L/>.

Into the 1990s, the Cyclorama faced more changes. The 1983 script was later narrated by actor James Earl Jones.⁶⁵ In preparation for the Olympics in 1996, upgrades to the surrounding exhibits in Grant Park were made. Unfortunately, attendance in Cyclorama still dwindled. In 2005, the City of Atlanta offered a contract to the Atlanta History Center to manage the Cyclorama. This offer began an over a decade of exchange between the City of Atlanta and the Atlanta History Center. In 2011, Mayor Kasim Reed formed the Atlanta Cyclorama Task Force to gain information about the future of the Cyclorama. In May of 2012, the Task Force recommends that the Cyclorama be moved to the Atlanta History Center and the plan was put in motion when Lloyd and Mary Ann Whitaker donate \$10 million dollars to move and preserve the painting. The City of Atlanta and the Atlanta History Center agreed on a 75-year loan of the Cyclorama and its artifacts. On July 1, 2015, the Grant Park building closed its doors to Cyclorama visitors and the work begins to move the Cyclorama. The project required four years of work and 35 million dollars. The original circumference and height was restored, as well as anything that had been changed over the span of a century. Most notably, the Atlanta History Center did not adopt the rotating platform that was introduced to Grant Park in the 80s. The move and restoration aimed to transition the painting “from attraction to artifact.”⁶⁶ This study aims to further the mission to clarify the Cyclorama as artifact and fully place the changes to the painting in historical context.

⁶⁵ Jones, *Myths and Facts*, 11.

⁶⁶ Judt, “Cyclorama: An Atlanta Monument,” 23.

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: REASSESSING HISTORICAL NARRATIVE THROUGH EXHIBITION

The Battle of Atlanta Cyclorama and its history encapsulate significant conversations about the power of narrative and relevant exploration into the more elusive tools of the Lost Cause. While public historians, anthropologists, and social scientists have extensively researched collective memory, historical narrative, the Lost Cause, and exhibition, none have yet located the Cyclorama as an intersection of these ideas. The Cyclorama can be defined in multiple ways: by its intention, by its exhibition, and by the ways audiences have understood it and remembered it for decades. To better analyze the instability of the Cyclorama's interpretation and meaning, certain theoretical frameworks will be introduced.

3.1 Exhibition and Historical Narrative

The Cyclorama's intended meaning can be traced through its exhibition and narration. Notions of exhibition and narration are often discussed relating to museums but the Cyclorama was not situated in a museum context until its move to the Atlanta History Center. However, in Grant Park at the Atlanta Cyclorama and Civil War Museum, the space claimed the title of a museum along with the actual premise of tourist attraction and spectacle. The Cyclorama's exhibition had been influenced by that quasi-museum, as well as has been influenced by the ownership and control of several figures, including its original creators, Paul Atkinson, and Wilbur Kurtz. Those who have had control over the Cyclorama have had their own agendas and biases for how and why the Cyclorama was exhibited. Each owner made conscious choices about the content of the Cyclorama experience in order to translate specific messages about the painting to their audiences.

The exhibition of a historical product is preceded by many steps, including the means by which historical content is archived and situated. The majority of the Cycloramas archival material comes from those who had influence over its narrative, including Paul Atkinson and Wilbur Kurtz. An overlap in the influence of historical narrative construction holds a great deal of power, specifically regarding what is said to have happened. In his work, Sociologist Tony Bennett explains his notion of the Exhibitionary complex, in which objects and bodies, once private, are put on full display to the public and enshrine cultural norms and messages of power.⁶⁷ The very notion of an object on display communicates permanence, accuracy, authority, and the purposefully constructed interests of governments and private institutions. The Cyclorama has always been intended to be viewed by the public, though the experience was limited to white visitors up until segregation. Initially, the Cyclorama was intended to travel, similar to a festival but and was later situated in a “museum” setting when the painting moved to Grant Park. The public museum as we know it had formed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, making objects and images once displayed in the homes of the elite became more accessible to the public.⁶⁸ With museums primarily run by the government, they were “an exemplary space in which the rough and raucous might learn to civilize themselves by modelling their conduct on the middle-class codes of behavior to which museum attendance would expose

⁶⁷ Tony Bennett, “The Exhibitionary Complex,” in *Thinking About Exhibitions*, ed. Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne (New York: Routledge, 1996), 82.

⁶⁸ Accessibility to the public museum was still very much limited at its conception, despite its “public” nature. Tony Bennett summarized German philosopher Jürgen Habermas’s thoughts on this contradiction, saying, “[Habermas’s] concern in doing so...is largely to point to the conflict between the theoretical commitment to the universalist and equitably dialogic principles of discourse which characterized these institutions and their practical limitation to middle-class men as a means to retaining the view that such discursive norms might yet be realized in a more ideal speech situation.” Public museums were still very much an instrument of the bourgeois when created but distinctly exhibited objects and bodies for a larger audience. The birth of the museum Bennett 27

them.”⁶⁹ In the case of the Cyclorama, its stakeholders, predominantly Atlanta officials, adopted the title of a museum but maintained the painting as a spectacle. The experience utilized Exhibitionary elements to model Confederate honor along with reconciliation. By claiming the title of museum, the Atlanta Cyclorama and Civil War Museum also claimed a position of power and authority to communicate and analyze information about a significant event in American history. The Cyclorama experience, a spectacle under the guise of historical education, inscribed messages of power, exhibiting to audiences how the Battle of Atlanta, the Civil War, and the Confederacy should be understood.

Curator Bruce W. Ferguson believes that the elements of Exhibitionary procedures, including “labels, didactics, advertising, catalogues, hanging systems, media in their modernist sense, lighting, wall colors, security devices, posters, handouts, etc. – combine as aspects of the exhibition’s active recitation.”⁷⁰ The Exhibitionary elements of the Cyclorama experience emphasize its intended meaning and messaging and that message is rearticulated or shifted with each change in content and presentation. The elements of the Cycloramas exhibition are not simply communicative but persuasive. When Paul Atkinson purchased the *Battle of Atlanta*, he approached the exhibition of the painting with a Southern audience in mind. Atkinson took his future audiences in Chattanooga and Atlanta into consideration and chose to edit the painting to appease a crowd more sympathetic to the Confederacy. One of Atkinson’s key modes of persuasion was through the way he advertised the Cyclorama as the “Only Confederate Victory Ever Painted.” Atkinson’s advertisement as a key Exhibitionary element of the Cyclorama

⁶⁹ Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 28.

⁷⁰ Bruce W. Ferguson, “Exhibition Rhetorics,” in *Thinking About Exhibitions*, ed. Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne (New York: Routledge, 1996), 181.

articulated meaning as well as offered a once in a life time experience. It offered, for anyone who desired to experience it, an opportunity to behold Confederate glory and valor. The Cyclorama was not just an image on display but entertainment, an attraction, a spectacle.



Figure 3.1. Display ad 11 – No Title, Nov 16, 1892, Atlanta Constitution

Bennett and Ferguson highlight the key roles of exhibiting institutions, in which bodies and objects are not just haphazardly placed but intentionally and meaningfully arranged and translated to express utopian ideals. Exhibitions and their elements are “part spectacle, part socio-historical event, part structuring device, exhibitions...establish and administer the cultural

meanings of art.”⁷¹ Spectacles demand not just the attention of audiences but their participation, the collective affirmation of the spectacle, the performance within the spectacle, a moment of reassertion of social order and values; The Cyclorama does all of this but with a promise of nostalgia and history tacked on. The spectacle puts the audience into action, and, “with its persistent indoctrination and commodification of our bodies, spectacle culture continues to establish itself as a driving force in determining both private and public desires...”⁷² The spectacle is contingent on the spectator to accept and reiterate its messaging and, for the spectators of the Cyclorama, they reiterate the information from an experience that highlights the glory and honor of the Confederate cause.

The entertainment that the Cyclorama promised was also integral to the paintings financial purpose. The Cyclorama displayed technological wonder, a hyper-realistic transfiguration into the past. In the late nineteenth century, “commercial and civic spectacles bathed the historical imagination across America with a pageantry of nationhood that celebrated patriotic mythologies on local and national scales.”⁷³ The *Battle of Atlanta* Cyclorama became a pageantry of the Lost Cause under the premise of post-war reconciliation and education; the experience boasted the unity of the figures in the painting yet specifically delighted in the heroism of the Confederate army. The Cyclorama’s meaning was always in production but it came to be particularly defined and recognized at a time of great economic and technological growth, when World’s Fairs boomed and ideas of the New South flourished.

⁷¹ Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne, “Introduction,” in *Thinking about Exhibitions*, ed. Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne, 1-4. (New York: Routledge, 1996), 2.

⁷² Charles R. Garoian and Yvonne M. Gaudelius, *Spectacle Pedagogy: Art, Politics, and Visual Culture*. (Albany: New York Press, 2008), 26.

⁷³ Susan Tenneriello, *Spectacle Culture and American Identity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 94.

3.2 Commodifying Culture: World's Fairs and the New South

The Cyclorama was created within the context of a growing post-Civil War economy, the era of the New South. As the Cyclorama grew in popularity, a variety of World's Fairs and expositions popped up across America in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, notably the Centennial International Exhibition in Philadelphia in 1876, World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, and the Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta in 1895. These expositions marked important American anniversaries, such as centennial celebrations, and displayed the wealth and knowledge of the United States. The Atlanta expositions, in particular, “capitalized on the city’s relatively short antebellum history and drew a straight-line form Atlanta’s earliest white pioneer settlers to the enterprising men of the New South.”⁷⁴ Atlanta “boosters” constructed a Southern culture that idealized the Old South and advocated for modernization as a commodity to be invested in and sold. A New South preserved nostalgia and power structures but utilized those elements to for financial growth.

The term “New South,” while initially “a propagandistic slogan wielded by business-oriented southern leaders and their northern allies in the decades following the end of Reconstruction,”⁷⁵ has been used by historians to identify the period of political, economic, and societal shift in the South between the late 1870s and early 1910s. During the 1880s, “the rate of urban growth in the South was almost twice that of the national average.”⁷⁶ The Southern United States was emerging from a time of not only economic hardship but the loss of a war based on their resistance to ending slavery. The South had to reconcile their desire to expand, grow, and prosper industrially with their desire to hold on to the ideological roots of the Old South. “The

⁷⁴ Hillyer, *Designing Dixie*, 138.

⁷⁵ Hillyer, *Designing Dixie*, 2.

⁷⁶ Hillyer, 8.

New South creed provided a subversive avenue to “eulogize the Lost Cause as a heroic, but mistaken, event of the past...tributes to Confederate heroism were often accompanied by subtle but deliberate disavowals of the basic principles of slavery and secession that [had] motivated the Confederates, and, most importantly, by the compelling admission that the cause was *lost*.”⁷⁷ Of course, the Cyclorama was not created as a vehicle for the New South era, it was instead created by businessmen who saw an opportunity to capitalize on highly relevant historical events. However, the Cyclorama flourished during the New South era, as the population of Atlanta grew and the city had established itself as a “Phoenix” rising from the ashes.

The Cyclorama became one of the largest attractions in Atlanta when the city was working to attract Northern investors and tourists. No one represented and stimulated New South ideals more than Henry Grady, the editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*. Grady promised that the ‘New’ South would always honor the ‘Old.’⁷⁸ He promised redemption after the Confederacy’s embarrassing defeat in the Civil War. Judt argues that “Grady was a master of reconciliation. To the North, he preached understanding through commerce; to the South, glory through growth.”⁷⁹ Atlanta leaders, including Grady, used the Cyclorama as an artifact of modernity, a vehicle for propelling the South, specifically Atlanta, into the future. Dixon argues that “...the Cyclorama was a condensation point of past and future ideals for many Atlantans as they sought to reconcile their modern identity with a Confederate past.”⁸⁰ The cyclorama was a perfect merging of technology and history at the turn of the century, a magnificent, modern painting depicting a

⁷⁷ Don Harrison Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 315.

⁷⁸ R.B. Rosenburg, *Living Monuments: Confederate Soldiers’ Homes in the New South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 46.

⁷⁹ Judt, “Cyclorama: An Atlanta Monument,” 1.

⁸⁰ Elsabe Dixon, “Artifact of Modernity: The Atlanta Cyclorama and Civil War Memorialization in a New South.” (The University of Chicago, 2013), 4.

past, yet still culturally relevant, event. As an artifact of modernity, Dixon argues, the cyclorama helped to situate audiences in the past, showing what once was yet displaying what could be again.

The Cyclorama grew to appeal to a romantic past. As the Cyclorama was inviting its largest crowds during an economic boom, the painting was framed as an exhibition, an informer of historical events and a model for Confederate ideals. In understanding the motivations for Cyclorama stakeholders to construct an idealized Confederate victory in the midst of reconciliationist messages, we can further dive into the formation of historical narratives

3.3 The Construction of Historical Narratives

There is power in the construction of history, who makes it, who has access to it, and even who can contest it. Michel-Rolph Trouillot grapples with this idea in *Silencing the Past* and how “each historical narrative renews a claim to truth.”⁸¹ *Silencing the Past* reaffirms that history is not static or unchanging or waiting to be revealed but instead is the creation and renewal of historical truth. The creation of historical narratives, the recording of events, the retrieval of its details, and the presentation or consumption of it, is predicated on previous historical narratives and their construction and overlap. Therefore, that process contains deletions, omissions, and misrepresentations.

Trouillot settles his thesis on the distinction between “historicity 1”, the materiality of the social historical process, and “historicity 2,” the future historical narratives.⁸² In other words, there is a person, place, thing, or idea as well as the production of its narrative, both of which contain historical value. “What is at stake is the interplay between historicity 1 and historicity 2,

⁸¹ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2015), 6.

⁸² Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 29.

between what happened and that which is said to have happened.”⁸³ It may not ever be possible to fully access historicity 1, an insoluble, objective truth of what happened, as the creation of history lies in the creation of narratives, a record that is determined and molded by individuals with their own distinct experiences and knowledge. Historical narratives (historicity 2), as Bruce Gronbeck writes in his essay *The Rhetorics of the Past*, “[are] always partial, usually self-centered, and even self-interested, and subject to the vagaries of surviving documentation.”⁸⁴ This point is particularly relevant for the Cyclorama, whose narrative was under the management of its owners, such as Paul Atkinson, its orators, compiled prominently of Confederate veterans and their descendants, and its audiences, who not only viewed the painting but authenticated its messaging. Because of the very real and overwhelming input of these narrators, “the value of a historical product cannot be debated without taking into account both the context of its production and the context of its consumption.”⁸⁵ The meaning of a historical product is accessed in its consumption, by the audience that encounters it. “Historical narratives can certainly serve as *entertainment*, as amusement, as admonition, and so forth. Like all narrative embedded in concrete, interactive situations, historical narrative can fulfill *phatic* functions: the act of telling and listening can create a social bond between speaker and listener largely irrespective of the verbal content.”⁸⁶ This bond is not easily broken between the Cyclorama and its audience,

⁸³ Trouillot, 106.

⁸⁴ Bruce E. Gronbeck, “The Rhetorics of the Past: History, Argument, and Collective Memory,” in *Doing Rhetorical History: Concepts and Cases*, ed. Kathleen J. Turner (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998), 48.

⁸⁵ Trouillot, 146.

⁸⁶ Jürgen Straub, “Telling Stories, Making History: Toward a Narrative Psychology of the Historical Construction of Meaning,” in *Narration, Identity, and Historical Consciousness*, ed. Jürgen Straub (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), 46.

including many Confederate veterans and their descendants. The audience of the Cyclorama has always had the power to construct its meaning; power is a salient theme in the Cyclorama.

There is power in the production of history but there is also power in the consumption of history, where the audience itself produces meaning; “it engages us both as actors and narrators.”⁸⁷ Historians Michael Frisch and Dwight Pitcaithley suggested “an interpretive tension in which both audience and presenters are complicit. Rather than being distinguished from each other as active/passive, provide/receiver, both audience and presenters bring active interpretive processes to their onsite meeting.”⁸⁸ The experience of an exhibition, a movie, a live action performance, a song, are all incomplete without an audience. The true connection is at the experience of the production, what an audience sees, hears, learns, or thinks about from a production and, in the case of this research, an exhibition showcasing a large circular painting and a variety of artifacts deemed relevant and necessary in the story the painting is telling. Those decisions were made not for the sake of situating objects but for those objects to be in dialogue with one another, to convey a message to audiences.

3.4 The Cyclorama and Civil War Memory

The Cyclorama emerged on the scene at a key point in American history, after Reconstruction but during a rise in combative Civil War memories. David Blight says that there are three central visions of Civil War memory that were combined over time: the reconciliationist vision, the white supremacist vision, and the segregated vision.⁸⁹ The

⁸⁷ Trouillot, 150-151.

⁸⁸ Michael H. Frisch and Dwight Pitcaithley, “Audience Expectations as Resource and Challenge: Ellis Island as Case Study,” in *Past Meets Present: Essays about Historic Interpretation and Public Audiences*, ed. Jo Blatti (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1987), 155.

⁸⁹ David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 2.

Cyclorama, while perhaps not intended to emerge as a historical document or holy pilgrimage to the Civil War, became enveloped in reconciliationist visions and nostalgic retellings of the days before brother fought brother. As a now technically unified country, the United States struggled to comprehend the horrors of battle and the loss of war, prompting an ideological war over the true meaning and reasoning behind the Civil War.

The reconciliationist vision of the Civil War invited a collective mourning and remembering of the Civil War that found a physical presence by the 1890's, which is when the Cyclorama arrived in Atlanta. Veteran reunions were particularly popular, initially events where both Northern and Southern veterans appeared as part of the nation's reconciliationist efforts. In city squares across America, memorials rose among its citizens to remember and honor Civil War veterans. "The repetition of these observances," writes Brundage, "like all ritualized expressions of historical memory, established continuity with the past."⁹⁰ These frequent revisitations to the past evolved from a mass mourning to a greater celebration; memorialization of the war turned into monumentalization of the soldiers and their cause, a "cultural salve at a time of acute social stress."⁹¹ The monumentalization of Confederate soldiers in its most extreme case developed into the Lost Cause, the mythology rooted in Southern bravery against Northern hostility which disrupted an idyllic and harmonious society rooted in white supremacy. The Lost Cause of the Confederacy was woven into the Cyclorama's narration and it was first Confederate veterans who took charge in constructing those narratives.

⁹⁰ W. Fitzhugh Brundage, "Introduction: No Deed But Memory," in *Where These Memories Grow: History, Memory, and Southern Identity*, ed. W. Fitzhugh Brundage (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2000), 9.

⁹¹ Robert J. Cook, *Civil War Memories: Contesting the Past in the United States since 1865* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017), 62.

When the Cyclorama first premiered in Atlanta, it was the opinions of white Confederate veterans that were most valued. Blight says that, “during the first fifteen years after the Civil War, ex-soldiers groped for ways to express the trauma of their personal experience as well as its larger legacies.”⁹² Veterans flocked to the cyclorama rotunda with their families to see what they had once lived, to process their emotions, their trauma, and their memories. “I wish I had words to give a faint expression of the scare as it appeared to me,” said one Confederate veteran. “Beneath where we stood, for fifty feet around the buildings, was a true-life picture portrayed on canvas...Nothing but the closest scrutiny would enable you to observe the real from the imaginary.”⁹³ The realism of the painting invoked approval from veterans and, in some ways, that approval invoked an air of historical realism. The veterans served as the original authenticators of the Cycloramas story in Atlanta and told their stories of the day as it happened. Dixon argues that “Atlantans shaped the narrative of the Cyclorama, crafting a more palatable story of Confederate victory at odds with the strength of the Union army depicted in the painting.”⁹⁴ One veteran recalled how the Confederate forces bravely fought back against a better equipped Union. “The scene on the Cyclorama is about as it happened. We whipped the Yanks when they first came at us, and they withdrew,” recalled the Veteran visiting with his nephew in 1931. “The Yanks got heavy reinforcements and came back. When they did we had to get out of the way, and we left the field gracefully but hastily, because the enemy was too strong for a

⁹² Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 170.

⁹³ “The Cyclorama as Viewed by a South Carolinian, Confederate Veteran,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, (Atlanta, GA), Aug 6, 1898.

⁹⁴ Dixon, *Artifact of Modernity*, 11.

handful of men to hold them back.”⁹⁵ It is within reminiscences such as this that veterans blurred the line between audience and narrator.

The Cyclorama was a place for veterans to not just reminisce but recreate their own memories, their own way, with no challenge and only “the old story from the lips of one of their comrades.”⁹⁶ Blight argues that the nostalgia for the war became “increasingly wrapped in patriotic visions of what they had accomplished...such visions, in time, crystalized as abiding myths.”⁹⁷ The stories of veterans became part of the Cyclorama experience and myths became fact. Besides Paul Atkinson, who was reportedly always on stage after the painting arrived in Atlanta,⁹⁸ Confederate veterans were the sole lecturers on the Cyclorama platform until 1926, when Mr. W.H. Aaron took the job.⁹⁹ The platform was the space for Confederate veterans to take control of their memories and their legacy. Today, the very film displayed in the Cyclorama tells the story not so much about the battle but of the painting, which includes the perspective of a Confederate veteran reflecting on the glory of the South and a black United States veteran illustrating the struggle of black soldiers, fighting for their freedom.

The first paid lecturer chosen, C.C. Hay, was chosen in 1898. Hay, who served in the 45th Alabama regiment of Lowery’s brigade¹⁰⁰, was offered a salary of \$1 per day, with the hopes of

⁹⁵ Ben Cooper, “Uncle and Nephew, Last Survivors of One of Desperate Battles Around,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), June 7, 1931.

⁹⁶ “Story of Cycloramea Now at Grant Park,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), July 20, 1898.

⁹⁷ Blight, 189.

⁹⁸ “Right at Home: The “Battle of Atlanta” Being Reenacted Here,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), Feb 23, 1892.

⁹⁹ Barbara Baker, “Lincoln-Roosevelt Parallel Drawn by Cyclorama Lecturer,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), 1934.

¹⁰⁰ “The 22nd OF JULY: How a Great Battle was Fought in Atlanta 23 Years Ago,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), Jul 22, 1887. <https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/22d-july/docview/495082110/se-2?accountid=14537>.

a new lecturer being chosen each month.”¹⁰¹ The opportunity to speak on the platform was a high honor and soon the job was competitive. In fact, “there [was] a perpetual outstanding challenge from the cyclorama lecturer to all the orators of the city, and whenever anyone accepts the challenge the park board will assemble and decide the contest.”¹⁰² Speakers could choose to speak on any topic they wished but it was always suggested that the subject be related to the Cyclorama and the Battle of Atlanta. With the lecturers most often Confederate veterans, veterans gained control on the messaging of the Cyclorama. While many veterans and audience members praised the Cyclorama, some were not so pleased. One veteran, C. Irvine Walker, a lieutenant colonel commanding the Tenth South Carolina regiment of Manigault’s brigade, wrote to the *Atlanta Constitution* in 1901 with a slew of corrections to the Cyclorama, saying “If everything else in the cyclorama is as incorrect as two of the pictures [of it] you have published it should be destroyed and a correct one made. If the owners do not care to portray the truth, of course they can and probably will continue the exhibition of the present fraud.”¹⁰³ Another patron, who undoubtedly saw the advertisements for a confederate victory depicted, was wondering where all of the confederates were in the painting. Lecturer Colonel B.F. Sawyer told her “they were supposed to be hiding, behind the hills and bushes, but you see that the yankee artist makes General John A. Logan very prominent, leading a charge. Now, Logan led no such charge – the only charges made that day were by the confederates.”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ “Hay Will Lecture at the Cyclorama: Board of Park Commissioners Elected Him Yesterday Afternoon,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), July 9, 1898.

¹⁰² “J.T. Keown Wins the Job of Cyclorama Lecturer,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), Feb 2, 1905.

¹⁰³ C. Irvine Walker, “Errors in Cyclorama,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), Aug 4, 1901.

¹⁰⁴ Wallace Putnam Reed, “The Gossip of a Day from My Notebook,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), Apr 30, 1900.

As veterans aged and died, the authority of the Cyclorama presentation shifted to women, just as women overall became the arbiters of keeping the Lost Cause alive. The Daughters of the Confederacy were already the entity in charge of ensuring that school books and the physical landscape remembered southern valor. Women were entrusted with the domestic duties of the Lost Cause, responsible for teaching future generations about Southern pride and furnishing their homes and towns with Confederate messaging and memorials. As the new lecturers, women were systematically equipped with age old answers to age old questions, such as “Where are the Confederate soldiers?” One lecturer explained that “Federal troops predominate, especially in close ups, because the battle was painted from photographs taken behind Federal lines. When a Northern visitor sometimes suggests he feels ‘out of place’ at the Cyclorama, Mrs. Jones puts him straight: ‘This is a Northern masterpiece by Northern artists, but it is preserved and cherished in the South.’”¹⁰⁵ Other common questions include if you had to be a member of the Daughters of the Confederacy, always wear gray, or be from Atlanta to be a lecturer.¹⁰⁶ While this was not an explicit rule, the lecturers reported that they all happened to be from Atlanta and members of the Daughters of the Confederacy. The women on the platform were sure to emphasize several key points, including the realism of the painting and the name behind Grant Park. Lecturer Kate Smith would always tell the story of a bird who “flew right through a broken window and tried to land in the branches of a tree on the painted battlefield...it kept bouncing off the canvas”¹⁰⁷ Grace Woods, who lectured on the Cyclorama platform for 25 years, was always

¹⁰⁵ “Cyclorama Lecturer ‘Loves’ to Tell Story,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), Nov 13, 1949.

¹⁰⁶ Yolande Gwin, “Cyclorama Lecturers Ready with Answer,” *The Atlanta Journal and Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), Aug 15, 1954.

¹⁰⁷ Cremin, “Cyclorama Too Real for Blue Vet and a Bird.”

sure to clarify that Grant Park was named for Atlantan Colonel L.P. Grant and not General Ulysses S. Grant.¹⁰⁸

Women served in a key role for a majority of the 20th century, welcoming school groups and out of town visitors and sharing a story that was constantly under revision. It wasn't until 1970 that the first black lecturer, a short woman identified as "Mrs. Culpepper," was appointed. Culpepper told reporters that "few [black people]...visit the Cyclorama to begin with. And most don't stay for the entire lecture. They'll go back and look, and then when 'Dixie' is played, they leave."¹⁰⁹ Regarding how white visitors treated her, Culpepper responded, "'You can tell that people don't expect a black woman to be the one giving the lecture,' the Atlanta native said. 'They listen more to me, I think, just out of curiosity, because it's unusual to see a black person lecture on the Civil War.'"¹¹⁰ The majority of the Cyclorama's lifespan in Atlanta has been under the control of Confederate veterans and their descendants, as well as white Georgians, and the appointment of Mrs. Culpepper as lecturer was no doubt a shock to the frequent visitors of the painting. The early stages of the Cyclorama's southern interpretation have shaped how the Cyclorama has been understood for generations, with a more sympathetic Confederate narrative.

There is no doubt that the sympathetic Confederate messages produced from the Cyclorama's canvas has been influenced by the space the Cyclorama has inhabited. The Civil War had been primarily fought on in the South,¹¹¹ rooting nostalgia for the war and tours of significant sites in Southern soil. The events of the Civil War became an inherent aspect of

¹⁰⁸ Yolande Gwin, "Cyclorama Lecturer Is Retired," *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), May 30, 1952

¹⁰⁹ Hugh Nations, "Cyclorama Gets Negro as Narrator," *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), Oct 4, 1970.

¹¹⁰ Nations, "Cyclorama Gets Negro as Narrator."

¹¹¹ Hillyer, *Destination Dixie*, 2.

Southern culture and tourism. As Brundage puts it, “historical memory...becomes inextricably bound together with both public space and culture.”¹¹² That space is not only the city of Atlanta, but the physical space and artifacts that have surrounded it, including *The Texas*. *The Texas*, a steam locomotive most famous for capturing *The General* in The Great Locomotive Chase in 1862, was “placed in freight service on the Western & Atlantic Railroad in 1856. After the war, it was converted to a coal burner...until 1907, when it was sent to the Atlanta railroad yards to be scrapped. The pressure of public opinion, however, caused it to be preserved as a historic relic, and in 1911 the City of Atlanta put it on display in Grant Park.”¹¹³ *The Texas* served as another anchor of Confederate valor and victory. The artifacts in The Atlanta Cyclorama and Civil War Museum in Grant Park enshrined a very specific meaning for the Cyclorama, particularly a meaning heavily associated with the Confederacy due to the presence of many Confederate artifacts. “Physical space is central to southern historical memory and identity. The public sphere – that figurative social space located between the home and the state – what claimed by white and black southerners as their own and as the appropriate venue to transform their private concerns into issues of general interest.”¹¹⁴ The Cyclorama was claimed and controlled by white southerners, grounded on the land where the battle was fought.

Perhaps a vital aspect of the ways in which physical space influenced the meaning and interpretation of the Cyclorama is noting who had access to that physical space. Specifically, in the realm of Southern memory, the political power that comes along with determining what is remembered, how it is remembered, and what information makes its way into history books and public spaces was primarily held by white Southerners. “Not until the 1960s did blacks

¹¹² Brundage, *The Southern Past*, 6.

¹¹³ “Atlanta: Capital of the South,” 226.

¹¹⁴ Brundage, *The Southern Past*, 6.

command the political power necessary to insist on a more inclusive historical memory for the South.”¹¹⁵ It is unknown when, exactly, Black Atlantans gained full access to the Cyclorama, as both audience members and arbiters of the painting’s history. Access, in this case, means not just the physical ability to enter a space but the social capital to be welcome or even unbothered and the economic capital to afford it. As a result of lack of access, white Georgians solely determined the Cycloramas interpretation, serving as a small yet powerful example of the control white Southerners had to determine how the Civil War was interpreted and remembered.

A sanitized victory narrative was crafted by white Southerners, those who had the biggest stake in the glory of the Southern cause. If the Confederacy couldn’t win on the battlefield, it would find victor in the public arena, in schools, in politics, in history. Blight writes that, “while the history they had lived ruined them, the history they would help write might redeem them.”¹¹⁶ The United Confederate Veterans (UCV) took the reins of veteran affairs and the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) raised funds for memorials and monuments. “Hundreds of monuments were erected, parades organized, streets named, plaques unveiled, and parks established in a good-natured competition among white southerners to revere the Confederacy. In time, this memorial zeal literally altered the landscape of the South by imposing the Confederate tradition onto it...”¹¹⁷ For the Cyclorama, while it had not been created to celebrate the Confederacy, it was developed and constructed into a vehicle of memory and the Lost Cause.

¹¹⁵ Brundage, *The Southern Past*, 10.

¹¹⁶ Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 262.

¹¹⁷ W. Fitzhugh Brundage *Woman’s Hand and Heart and Deathless Love: White Women and the Commemorative Impulse in the New South Monuments to the Lost Cause: Women, Art, and the Landscapes of Southern Memory*, ed. Cynthia Mills and Pamela H. Simpson (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003), 65-66.

4 CHANGES TO THE CYCLORAMA

The *Battle of Atlanta* Cyclorama is a key example of the construction and reconstruction, production and revision of historical memory about the Confederacy through the lens of a battle. Michel-Rolph Trouillot writes in *Silencing the Past* that “history is always produced in a specific historical context. Historical actors are also narrators, and vice versa.”¹¹⁸ For the Cyclorama, there are a myriad of historical actors: the original artists, Paul Atkinson, the orators that waxed poetic, the soldiers that wove authentication into the narrative, and even those who visit the Atlanta History Center today and recall how the painting and its presentation has changed. The history that the painting has produced exists within and was influenced by the context of the historical actors. The stories that emerged from the Cyclorama have been malleable, forming to new contextual challenges. Several key changes to the narration on the Cyclorama platform occurred throughout the 20th century, further shaping Civil War memory for Georgians and all who visit the Cyclorama.

In order to better understand just how much the painting has changed, three narration scripts from 1938, 1959, and 1982 will be used as a jumping off point to trace changes to the painting while it resided in Grant Park. In these narrations, we see a trend towards increasingly sympathetic Confederate narratives as well as spectacle history through the use of music and drama. Additionally, we see what stories were prioritized, such as the evolving story of the two brothers, and what stories were omitted or overlooked, such as that of the only black figure painted on the canvas. Through these stories, and knowing it was primarily veterans and later white Georgians who had the power to control them, we see Southerners grappling with their identity and using the Cyclorama as a tool of power, a place of mourning, and a flexible public

¹¹⁸ Trouillot, 22.

spectacle to identify with in a time of drastic social change. The changes to the story of the two brothers, the change of Confederate prisoners to frightened United States soldiers, the inclusion of Clark Gable, the omission of black voices, and the manipulation of exhibition elements are just five examples of how the Cyclorama's meaning and interpretation have always been unstable and changing.

4.1 One Confederate, One Federal: The Story of Two Brothers

At the base of the canvas, just right of the Troup-Hurt house, two figures were painted by the Austro-German painters. A small scene among the chaos depicts a United States soldier giving a member of the Confederacy's band (drummer) something to drink. These figures, according to the artists sketches, are original to the painting and can best be understood as artistic liberty. It was an image that could pull in any audience member, whether they identified with the United States or the Confederacy. However, when Paul Atkinson bought the Cyclorama, a tale was spun about the figures, who would come to be known as the Carter brothers of Newton County, Georgia. The Atlanta Constitution wrote that during his lecture, Atkinson would call "attention to a group of federals, of Mercer's corps, who are firing from behind a fence. In their midst lies a severely wounded confederate; by his side is a federal who is supporting his head and trying to relieve his sufferings by giving him water. They are Joe and Henry Carter... When the war broke out, Joe enlisted in the southern army, while Henry cast his fortunes with the federals. They had not met in three years, and now they have met, not as foemen, hilt to hilt, but as brothers."¹¹⁹ Over times, the details of the Carter's story would grow, with one 1898 article reporting "the confederate, a member of Company E, Forty-second Georgia, is wounded and lies

¹¹⁹ "Right at Home: The "Battle of Atlanta" Being Reenacted Here," *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), Feb 23, 1892.

on the ground with his bosom bare, showing his wound. His brother, fighting in that hand-to-hand conflict, has just recognized the dying confederate...”¹²⁰ The lore of these brothers expanded and developed over time.



Figure 4.1. Carol M. Highsmith, Atlanta Cyclorama, Atlanta, Georgia. United States Atlanta Georgia, None. [Between 1980 and 2006] Photograph
Viewed at: <https://www.loc.gov/resource/highsm.12904/?r=-0.463,-0.049,1.925,0.894,0>

While the two figures represent a very real experience of families during the Civil War, in which family fought for different causes, the artists themselves never identified them as real people, even though they labeled several figures in the painting. One has to assume that if the artists intended for these figures to represent real, specific people, they would've labeled them accordingly as they did the others. Somewhere along the way, the Carter brothers were no more,

¹²⁰ “Story of Cyclorama Now at Grant Park.”

and the figures were identified by lecturers as the Martin Brothers of Tennessee. By the time the official narration for the Cyclorama was written in 1938, visitors only heard a short synopsis of the brothers' story:

“Notice – just behind the fence – is a fallen Confederate soldier whose cry for water got the attention of a charging Federal who pauses to give the wounded lad a drink – only to discover that he was his brother! – they, the Martin Brothers of Tennessee!”¹²¹

Potentially, this iteration would have been more believable, as Tennessee is not as deeply south as Georgia. Families in Tennessee were much more likely to have members serve for different sides, while it would have been quite unlikely in the deep South. In 1959, the new script gave more detail to the Martin Brothers and their story:

“Notice the fallen Confederate soldier behind the fence! His cry for water to wash the pain of a searing mortal wound is heard...by the Enemy...a Federal soldier. As the Yankee steps forward to give the fallen Rebel lad a drink, we see the full impact of the tragedy of this War. Soldier both!...fighting Men of Principle...one dying, the other easing his pain...one Confederate, one Federal. They had thought they would never meet again...these men. But this gesture to a fellow man was the last human act between the Martin Brothers...from Tennessee!”¹²²

In comparison, the 1982 narration, delivered over a sound system by Shepperd Strudwick, says of the Martin Brothers:

“Beside the broken picket fence reclines the broken body of a young soldier. Answering his cry for water, another young soldier bends over him. Mortal enemies and blood brothers. The fallen Confederate and the ministering Federal are the Martin Brothers of Tennessee.”¹²³

¹²¹ “Text of Proposed Lecture for the Cyclorama of the Battle of Atlanta at Grant Park,” Kenan Research Center: (Atlanta, GA), May 1938, 3.

¹²² James S. Robinson, “The Story of the Battle of Atlanta as Depicted in the Atlanta Cyclorama Painting, July 22, 1864,” Kenan Research Center: (Atlanta, GA), 1959, 6.

¹²³ “The Battle of Atlanta Cyclorama Narration Script,” Kenan Research Center: (Atlanta, GA), 1982, 1.

While the story of the Martin Brothers evolved into a less vivid image, the fabricated story lived on in 1982. This narrative undoubtedly encouraged sympathetic notions about the Confederacy, serving as a unifying story, one that conveys a lack of difference and highlights connection. The audience of the Cyclorama would have the idea that the two sides weren't so different after all, the epitome of a reconciliationist narrative. The story of the Martin/Carter brothers is harmless outside of the Cyclorama's context but its fabrication on the platform wove further inaccuracies, pulling at the heartstrings of audience members.

One final story told of the brothers was that of Andrew Epting Shealy. Lois Shealy Grady wrote to the *Atlanta Journal* and the *Atlanta Constitution* saying "I want to point out the error, in the name of the soldier who gave the drink of water to a dying U.S. soldier, as it is used in the narration at the Cyclorama. He was not a blood brother but a 'brother' in the sight of God and in the thoughts of Andrew Epting Shealy, the dying soldier. The story was told [to] me by my father, the son of Andrew Epting Shealy, the soldier who like Jesus wanted to share his 'cup of water' with one in need...No sooner had he done this, he was fired upon by a Yankee and the life blood of Andrew E. Shealy oozed out at the same time as did the soldier in blue whom he had befriended."¹²⁴ When the Cyclorama had just gone through content revisions in the 1980s, one staffer, Pam Apple, pointed out that "names are conjectural and units aren't known. Only long-standing oral tradition supports the claim that the two who were ready to spill one another's blood share that blood by birth."¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Lois Shealy Grady, "A Cup of Water," *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), Oct 5, 1969.

¹²⁵ Webb Garrison, "Kin took opposite sides in war," *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), Mar 18, 1984.

The Martin Brothers are a key aside to the overarching story of the *Battle of Atlanta* Cyclorama as a narrative of reconciliation. These brothers, fictional yet told to be real, evoked a unity that transcended all conflict. The story of the Carter Brothers of Georgia or the Martin Brothers of Tennessee is best summed up by Blight, “that clean narrative of a Civil War between two foes struggling nobly for equally honorable notions of liberty...of soldiers’ devotion to epic proportions to causes that mattered not.”¹²⁶ The emphasis on the glory of both the victors and the losers of the Civil War muddied the interpretation of its effects and consequences. Blight writes that “one of the ideas the reconciliationist Lost Cause instilled deeply into the national culture is that even when Americans lose, they win.”¹²⁷ Even as the Confederacy lost the Battle of Atlanta and the Civil War, they fought to win in its interpretation. Georgians and Southerners clung to stories that painted their men as sympathetic and heroic. The story of the two brothers, in every iteration, made space for reconciliation by highlighting a merciful United States soldier but concurrently emphasizing the mercy and grace that was, and should be, given to Confederates. The dying brother played the part of a martyr for the Confederate cause. Such a narrative subverted attention from the prevalence of white supremacy and Old South nostalgia following the Civil War, never emphasizing exactly what the Confederacy was fighting for. Newspapers reported the story of these two brothers for decades and even today, audiences are looking to hear the ultimate story of unity and understanding in a time of conflict and pain. But while the story of the Carter/Martin brothers expressed reconciliation, other aspects of the painting highlighted the weaknesses of the United States and the might of the Confederate forces.

¹²⁶ Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 391.

¹²⁷ Blight, 283-284.

4.2 Thinning Ranks: Confederate Messaging in the Cyclorama

While some aspects of the painting favored a reconciliationist narrative, some areas, primarily influenced by the changes of Paul Atkinson, honed the power, heroism, and even victory of the Confederacy. On the Southern portion of the painting, facing Bald Hill, a group of imprisoned Confederates were originally depicted being led away from the battle by United States soldiers. To reframe this depiction, Paul Atkinson had artists paint over the Confederate uniforms with blue paint to make the figures look like United States soldiers fleeing from the battle in fear.¹²⁸ Additionally, towards the right of these figures, several Confederate flags laid on the ground, crumpled in defeat. Atkinson had those images removed with grass painted over them. With these changes, a story of “several brigades of federals in hopeless confusion...running away from the impetuous charge of Hardee’s men”¹²⁹ became a point of pride, proof of Confederate might despite the power of the U.S. forces. The way these now fearful United States soldiers were interpreted, however, was unstable and changing throughout the 20th century.

For some narrations, the Cyclorama simply depicted a strong Confederate attack, despite their demise. While the painting actually depicts a U.S. counterattack that ultimately won the day for the United States, the 1959 narration claimed that the Cyclorama shows “the high moment of the day for the Confederate Forces; we will notice as we proceed, that the entire picture is built around this episode.”¹³⁰ Other narrations, however, simply praise the valor of the Confederate forces as they faced incredible odds. In 1982, the experience highlighted the Confederate troops

¹²⁸ Judt, “Cyclorama: An Atlanta Monument,” 31.

¹²⁹ “Right At Home: The “Battle of Atlanta” Being Reenacted Here,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), Feb 23, 1892.

¹³⁰ Robinson, “The Story of the Battle of Atlanta as Depicted in the Atlanta Cyclorama Painting, July 22, 1864,” 1959, 5.

were “courageously flinging themselves from entrenched lines...bullets flying from their thinning ranks.”¹³¹ Similar messaging is sprinkled throughout, including praise for the Confederates’ ability to fend off Sherman’s troops at Kennesaw Mountain, as well as the idea that the Battle of Atlanta was not the deciding fate for the Atlanta Campaign.”¹³² The pinnacle of Lost Cause narratives in the Cyclorama was the inclusion of a quotation attributed to Robert E. Lee¹³³:

“On this bare hilltop, under their banner of pure white stars and royal blue bars on a field of blood red, the lads of Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina and Tennessee are pressing toward the edge of the wood, as if to demonstrate what their leader, General Robert E. Lee, once said of these troops: ‘They were asked for more than should have been expected of them.’ Three confederate divisions are striving against overwhelming odds to regain this high hill, now known as Leggett’s hill.”¹³⁴

The Cyclorama was a place for veterans and defenders of the Lost Cause to build a new narrative in which, whether or not the Confederacy won the Battle of Atlanta, it was a larger-than-life example of Rebel courage.

The Cyclorama was not just a Confederate mecca, a place to mourn the Lost Cause, but a place to actively construct pro-Confederate narratives. The perceived historical nature of the painting was bent to the will of lecturers and narrators and any audiences who yearned for the Old South. For a century, audiences heard both explicit and implicit messaging about

¹³¹ The Battle of Atlanta Cyclorama Narration Script,” Kenan Research Center: (Atlanta, GA), 1982, 4.

¹³² Ibid, 5.

¹³³ In my own personal experience, working as a speaker on the Cyclorama platform for over a year at the Atlanta History Center, one of the most common questions I received from visitors who had experienced the Cyclorama before was about where Robert E. Lee was in the painting. Many were convinced that the History Center had removed his depiction and felt that political correctness had won over historical accuracy. Others assumed that Lee was part of the campaign. While this is not evidence I can point to in primary records, it is a ubiquitous perspective of audiences who experienced the Cyclorama in the 20th century that I encountered daily on the platform.

¹³⁴ The Battle of Atlanta Cyclorama Narration Script,” 1982, 4.

Confederate victory, strength, and courage in the face of unbeatable odds, including how U.S.s troops ran from their forces. As Cecchini writes, “*the Battle of Atlanta* manifests a didactic narrative representation of the crucial engagement indicative of expanding public sentiment toward the Civil War.”¹³⁵ Later on, Dixon furthers Cecchini’s argument, saying that the narrators on the Cyclorama platform were actively utilizing the didactic narrative of the experience to shape the message of the battle.¹³⁶ Entire generations were taught a Cyclorama story that was slanted towards the Lost Cause which undoubtedly has affected how the Cyclorama’s visitors have understood the events and consequences of the Civil War. In the Cyclorama, the failure of the Confederacy was put into question, seeds of doubt were sewn about the motives behind the war. The true struggle of the Civil War was over the history of the bloodshed in the physical landscape of the United States and in classrooms. And in the Cyclorama, as new elements were added or changed to its presentation, new opportunities to further a Lost Cause narrative were crafted.

4.3 A Dead Yankee!

The Cyclorama has been rightly assessed as a vehicle for Lost Cause ideology. Judt pinpoints a particular revitalization of the Lost Cause around the time when *Gone with the Wind* premiered in Atlanta and when Wilbur Kurtz and Mayor William B. Hartsfield were diligently working to reignite a passion for the Cyclorama. The Cyclorama underwent restorations in preparation for the film but some worried that the changes were Mayor Hartsfield’s plan to “make the Cyclorama something between a Hollywood movietone and a Coney Island sideshow by taking from it all the solemnity, dignity and beauty which it now possesses and transforming

¹³⁵ Bridget T. Cecchini, “The Battle of Atlanta Cyclorama (1885-1886) as Narrative Indicator of a National Perspective on the Civil War (Rice University, 1998), 4.

¹³⁶ Dixon, 14.

it into a Kleig light exhibition.”¹³⁷ New lights were installed and music was introduced to heighten the entertainment value of the experience. In preparation for the premiere of *Gone with the Wind*, local newspapers published souvenir editions which included “grave instructions to the populace on how to give the ‘Rebel’ yell.”¹³⁸ The premiere itself was a Confederate spectacle, with “Many of the male guests [wearing] pre-war costumes, too. There was a fair sprinkling of young men in Confederate uniforms which had belonged to their grandfathers. Most of them wore their grandfather’s swords.”¹³⁹ When the audience was viewing the movie, they cheered when war with the North was announced, raved when the Old South was mentioned, and clapped when they heard ‘Dixie.’¹⁴⁰

Following the premiere, the stars of *Gone with the Wind* visited the Cyclorama. Images of the Hollywood stars’ visit to the Confederate landmark were widespread, as well as a conversation Gable had with Hartsfield. Apparently, Clark Gable noticed that the only thing wrong with the painting was that he was not in it.¹⁴¹ It is unknown when it occurred, but the likeness of one of the plaster figures was replaced with that of Clark Gable, laying in the Southern section of the diorama, depicted as a dead United States soldier. Audiences flocked to see the famous actor ironically lying dead in the diorama. The intended effect of depicting Gable,

¹³⁷ “From Cyclorama to Mother-in-Law...First Worries of ‘Chief Worrier,’” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), Jan 8, 1938.

¹³⁸ Meyer Berger, “Atlanta is Won by Film of South,” *New York Times* (New York, NY), Dec 16, 1939.

¹³⁹ Berger, “Atlanta is Won by Film of South.”

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Jack Hitt, “Atlanta’s Famed Cyclorama Mural Will Tell the Truth About the Civil War Once Again,” <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/atlanta-famed-cyclorama-tell-truth-civil-war-once-again-180970715/>.



Figure 4.2. Hartsfield escorts Vivien Leigh, Clark Gable, and Olivia de Havilland around the Cyclorama, Kenan Research Center at the Atlanta History Center
<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/03/how-atlanta-cyclorama-lost-its-confederate-overtone/584938/>

who played a Confederate soldier in the film, as a U.S. soldier is unknown. However, it became a sight of amusement, a figure fixed in an experience that highlighted Confederate heroism, a joke shared between Southerners and an interesting attraction for Northern visitors. By including Gable in the diorama, a relationship between *The Battle of Atlanta* Cyclorama and *Gone with the Wind* was enshrined into the experience. So much so, that when Margaret Mitchell died in 1949,

flags flew at half-mast at the Cyclorama¹⁴² A film known for romanticizing the Antebellum South and the Confederate cause, was now a point of attraction in the Cyclorama. The Cyclorama was not trying to convince audiences of a specific story or fact about The Battle of Atlanta, Gable's likeness opened up opportunities for new, heavier Confederate associations, unhindered by the walls of the Cyclorama building. And along with these inclusions to the experience, the Cyclorama also contained intended omissions.

4.4 Omissions and Deletions: Black Figures in the Cyclorama

One detail neglected in the formal Cyclorama narrations of the 20th century is that of the sole black figure. The figure, atop a horse, is not dressed in uniform. Today, historians wonder if he is depicted as serving as a scout for the United States army. When the stories of the Cyclorama were going through revision in the 1980s, the Atlanta Constitution mentioned the figure for the first time, saying "Not far from the gray house, the painters found a black man astride one horse, leading a second and looking down at a fallen soldier. Ferguson said it is probably a slave gazing at his dead master. The crew shot photographs of the poignant scene and sent them to City hall, and at one point it was under consideration as the cover illustration for the new Cyclorama booklet."¹⁴³ Interestingly, the black figure was placed in the context of slavery, despite his clothing suggesting otherwise. Furthermore, this figure was indeed used in Cyclorama advertisements and materials, despite his explicit inclusion from the narrative of the painting. Little is known about his specific purpose in the painting, as it had to be intentional due to the fact that he is the only figure of color included, however his inclusion opens up an important

¹⁴² "Margaret Mitchell Dies After Gallant Struggle," *Atlanta Daily World* (Atlanta, GA), Aug 17, 1949.

¹⁴³ Mike Christensen, "Many Cyclorama Tales Going Through Revision," *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), Mar 8, 1983.

discussion of black and indigenous men serving in the Civil War. The lack of inclusion of black soldiers in the painting is significant, as black soldiers made up 10% of the United States army during the Civil War.¹⁴⁴ Black men served not just as soldiers in artillery and infantry but as “carpenters, chaplains, cooks, guards, laborers, nurses, scouts, spies, steamboat pilots, surgeons, and teamsters...”¹⁴⁵ Many of these men serving had been enslaved and promised freedom for their service with the formation of the Bureau of Colored Troops.



Figure 4.3. Lauren Booker, Sole black figure in the Cyclorama. February 25, 2019. Viewed at: <https://www.wabe.org/cyclorama-exhibit-seeks-to-tell-the-paintings-whole-story-photos/>

¹⁴⁴ *Black Soldiers in the US Military During the Civil War*. National Archives, 2017. <https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/blacks-civil-war>.

¹⁴⁵ *Black Soldiers in the US Military During the Civil War*. National Archives, 2017. <https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/blacks-civil-war>.

While there is truly only one black figure depicted in the Cyclorama, a tale of another black character was crafted in the mid 20th century. In the eastern portion of the painting, near the figure on a horse, is a house along the Georgia railroad. That house most likely represents field hospitals, a place for recovery separate from the battle. Near the house is a flash of red. Informally introduced in the mid-20th century, the blob of red was identified as a black “mammy” nursing a wounded Union soldier.¹⁴⁶ One lecturer, Mrs. Sara Boleman, reported that her and her colleagues always “included the woman’s figure in their ‘background’ lecture, which followed the ‘historical’ lecture on the actual events of the July 22, 1864, Battle of Atlanta. It was the tidbits of background that many visitors have clung to most dearly.”¹⁴⁷ So while the story was not formally in the recorded narration, audiences came to expect hearing the story in the Cyclorama experience.

The story of the black “mammy” was debunked during restorations in the 1980s. Drew Norberry, an artist who spent three years on the restoration of the Cyclorama, had personally investigated the red blob and determined that no one can be certain about exactly what is being depicted. ‘It could be a woman with a red dress. It could be a soldier with a red blanket over him... It is like taking a Rorschach test, drawing personality from ink blots.’¹⁴⁸ Because the story of the woman could not be corroborated, it was removed from the presentation. However, audiences were keenly aware of the stories omission, and some felt that the interpretation they had always known was taken from them. One woman, Mrs. Mary Ann Mitchell of Jackson, Tennessee, told the Atlanta Constitution that her family would visit the painting every year. However, she realized that “the black woman in the chimney corner was not mentioned. Mrs.

¹⁴⁶ Christensen, “Many Cyclorama Tales Going Through Revision.”

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

Mitchell was perplexed. She thought perhaps the ‘mammy’ had been removed.”¹⁴⁹ This would not be the first time, or the last time, that audiences questioned the removal of stories from the Cyclorama experience.

The Cyclorama is full of silences. The introduction of a black “mammy” figure, a caricature used to prove the legitimacy of the enslavement of black women because of their loyal servitude towards white people, is by no means “representation” for black people in the Cyclorama. The black “mammy” story shared in the Cyclorama only further romanticized enslavement in a space that was so vehemently defending the Confederacy. Furthermore, the virtual exclusion of black figures from the painting further points to its historical inaccuracy. As historians work towards a more holistic Cyclorama narrative, the burden of black representation is laid upon one single figure. It was not until the Cyclorama was moved to the Atlanta History Center that the black figure was explicitly addressed as part of the experience, and the participation of black soldiers in the Civil War was addressed in that space. With the Cyclorama serving as a place where “Southern” identity was constructed, the omission of black representation and voices is particularly interesting. In 1880, Black people made up 48% of Atlanta’s population.¹⁵⁰ Over a century later in 1990, Black people made up 67% of Atlanta’s population.¹⁵¹ In the omission of black voices and representation in the history of the battle, the experience also served to divorce “Blackness” from “Southernness;” the South was constructed as a white space by white voices. These omissions and deletions are certainly not unique in the realm of Southern heritage and identity and further highlights that it was white veterans, white

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Hillyer, 145.

¹⁵¹ 1990 Census of Population, General Population Characteristics, Georgia. U.S. Department of Commerce, 1992.
<https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1990/cp-1/cp-1-12.pdf>.

narrators, and white audiences that predominantly guided the trajectory of the paintings interpretation.

4.5 Strains of Dixie: Music and Presentation on the Platform

The language used to talk about the Cyclorama developed over time to favor Confederate soldiers and their cause. Each narration of the 20th century does not explicitly claim a Confederate victory. However, each narration does make space to highlight that “this was the highest moment of the day for the Confederate forces; we will notice as we proceed, that the entire picture is built around this episode.”¹⁵² Newspaper articles about the Cyclorama almost always mentioned how “Dixie” was played, or how the Confederates got the best of things. It was not just in the words spoken by the lecturers or the narrators where the audiences were informed of the great Confederate cause but also in the music, the sounds, the lights and the objects around the painting. One person remembers the theatrics fondly and how “the strains of ‘Dixie’ come up softly at first and then grow louder and louder. Recorded musket fire bristles in the background. There is a vague human cry from somewhere in the distance. Perhaps it is a Rebel yell, or perhaps it is some mother’s child catching a bullet 114 years ago.”¹⁵³ Even today, the sounds of musket fire are played during the short film in the Cyclorama, audibly evoking war and bringing the experience to life.

The Cyclorama would not be a spectacle without the theatrical lights, music, and narrations, as well as the objects that have surrounded it. While the content of the narrations has been ever-changing, so has the presentation style of the Cyclorama experience, increasing in

¹⁵² “Text of Proposed Lecture for the Cyclorama of the Battle of Atlanta at Grant Park,” 1938, 3.

¹⁵³ Lewis Grizzard, “At Cyclorama, It Seems South HAS Forgotten,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), Apr 26, 1978.

entertainment value over time. In the early days of the Cyclorama, the spectacle garnered audiences from the passionate stories of veterans and the sounds of Civil War era music. Along with “Dixie,” “Marching Through Georgia”¹⁵⁴ was also played during the experience. Written in 1865, the song refers to General Sherman’s “March to the Sea.” Because of the focus on a U.S. officer, the addition of the song seemed to give the experience a more balanced point of view. However, some audiences found it to be an inappropriate addition, writing, “It’s hard to believe, but they’re playing ‘Marching Through Georgia’ at the Cyclorama. The Cyclorama is a memorial to the Battle of Atlanta It was created by artists and experts and is correct in detail...it is an historical inaccuracy since the song was not written until 1865 – after the Battle of Atlanta – in commemoration of Sherman’s march to the sea.”¹⁵⁵

Yet another song that was included in the experience for some time was “The Tara Theme” from *Gone With the Wind*, added after the premiere of the film in 1939. With the film bringing new life to the Cyclorama in the late 1930s and early 1940s, and the inclusion of Clark Gable’s likeness in the diorama, an inextricable bond had been created between the painting and the film. The theme almost served as a dog whistle, as the appropriate audiences who coveted the film would recognize the tune. However, the theme was only played for a little over two decades, as the score of the Cyclorama “occasionally caused copyright problems.”¹⁵⁶ The association the painting has with *Gone With the Wind* still lived on, especially with the narration by Victor Jory, who played Jonas Wilkerson, a “Yankee overseer” of Tara. Along with music came battle

¹⁵⁴ R.W. Holloway, “Cyclorama Music Is in Bad Taste,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), April 9, 1965.

¹⁵⁵ R.W. Holloway, “Cyclorama Music Is in Bad Taste.”

¹⁵⁶ Lucy Justus, “The Cyclorama,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), Sep 7, 1969.

sounds, including “Gunfire, booming cannons, yelling soldiers and other sounds of war,”¹⁵⁷ further situating the drama of the Cyclorama.

One of the most drastic changes to the presentation of the Cyclorama occurred during the restorations in the 1980s, in which a rotating platform was introduced to the experience. The platform included 182 theatre seats at a slant. “Instead of standing on a platform and listening to the recorded voice of Victor Jory while a lady with a flashlight points out the spot on the canvas under discussion,”¹⁵⁸ the platform would move along with the narration as theatre lights illuminated the appropriate portions of the canvas. The addition of the rotating platform, a feature that many alive today remember experiencing, was the ultimate authentication of the Cyclorama as spectacle, a means of entertainment. While audiences in the late 19th and early 20th century felt the Cyclorama only deserved the utmost solemnity, the painting had become a theatrical and technical wonder. The rotation almost naturalized the story as historical and true, with minimal interference or interjection from lecturers. The experience no longer required the input of a third-party narrator and, instead, the Cyclorama spoke for itself as the experience moved from one point of the battle to the next.

When the Cyclorama was moved to the Atlanta History Center in 2017, the rotating platform was not readopted for several reasons. First, the experience of rotation was not original to the painting and the museum was concerned with reinstating the original iteration. Additionally, due to the curvature of the canvas, with a slight curve inward towards the audience, the slant of the theatre seats gave different audience members different perspectives. The intended illusion of the Cyclorama, that which gave it a 3D effect, was eliminated when some

¹⁵⁷ Justus, “The Cyclorama.”

¹⁵⁸ Celestine Sibley, “Re-Cyclorama Is Better, and Made Me Cry,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), May 28, 1982.

audience members were too high up or too far down, close to the diorama. When audiences ascended the escalators to the platform at the Atlanta History Center beginning in 2019, some were disappointed by the lack of a rotating platform. Many audiences had come to know the spinning implementation as integral to the experience. Despite the museum's effort to return to the original form, the exclusion of the rotating platform seemed to inauthenticize the 2019 iteration of the Cyclorama for audiences who had previously experienced the painting at Grant Park.

Finally, the exhibitions around the Cyclorama have served to situate the painting in certain historical and Confederate contexts. When the Cyclorama first arrived in Atlanta and was housed on Edgewood Avenue, the painting stood alone. However, when the painting was moved to Grant Park, it was not only neighbors to the Grant Park Zoo, now Zoo Atlanta, but the new building gave way for Civil War artifacts. During the WPA restorations and projects, a call for “War Between the States relics, documents, and mementos – restricted to gifts of genuine historical value”¹⁵⁹ was made. – was launched here Tuesday for the Cyclorama museum...’There were two sides to the Battle of Atlanta,’ said Haden, ‘and it is our purpose to make it a permanent lodging place for memorials of both’¹⁶⁰ An artifact that has been paired with the Cyclorama for almost 100 years is *The Texas*, a 4-4-0 steam locomotive. The train was best known for its April 12, 1862 pursuit of *The General*, a Confederate train which had been raided by United States spies. The eight men who captured *The General* were executed as spies by the

¹⁵⁹ “1861-1865 Relics Sought for War Museum Here: Haden, Kurtz, Simons Seeking Gifts for Cyclorama,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), Mar 19, 1942.

¹⁶⁰ “1861-1865 Relics Sought for War Museum Here: Haden, Kurtz, Simons Seeking Gifts for Cyclorama.”

Confederates. *The Texas* was just another manifestation of Confederate glory around the Cyclorama.

5 CONCLUSION

In his 1959 narration, Victor Jory quotes Ecclesiastes: “To everything there is a season and a time to every purpose under heaven; a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant; and a time to pluck up that which is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build.”¹⁶¹ Indeed, the time for the Cyclorama as a myth-wielding spectacle to die has come and gone with its new home at the Atlanta History Center, which has the painting on loan from the city for 75 years. The Atlanta History Center aimed to “end the Cyclorama’s career as a vessel for Civil War myths – to take away its power without erasing its history”¹⁶² with its relocation and restoration. What the museum does today, that has never been done before, is focus on the history of the painting as an artifact as opposed to the history of the battle of July 22, 1864. When visitors ascend the Cyclorama platform today, the experience begins with a short film that traces the history of the painting through the eyes of its many audiences. The film begins with the European artists conceiving the painting. Then, “a grizzled Union veteran, viewing the Cyclorama before it traveled South, warns his son that ‘if the Rebs get their way, they’ll be the heroes we remember.’”¹⁶³ Next, Paul Atkinson arrives on the scene,

¹⁶¹ Hugh Nations, “Cyclorama Gets Negro as Narrator,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), Oct 4, 1970

¹⁶² Daniel Judt, “Atlanta’s Civil War Monument, Minus the Pro-Confederate Bunkum,” *The Atlantic*, March 17, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/03/how-atlanta-cyclorama-lost-its-confederate-overtone/584938/>.

¹⁶³ Judt, “Atlanta’s Civil War Monument, Minus the Pro-Confederate Bunkum,” <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/03/how-atlanta-cyclorama-lost-its-confederate-overtone/584938/>.

determined to paint in U.S. prisoners and eliminate captured Confederate flags, a symbol of weakness in a battle.

One of the most poignant moments in the film is when “a Confederate veteran sees the Cyclorama and waxes nostalgic about the Old South” followed by a black United States veteran who “makes clear that slavery was the true cause of the war.”¹⁶⁴ The film also includes “a young daughter corrects her mother’s Lost Cause mind-set” and Mayor Jackson’s determination to save the Cyclorama, which depicts the right side winning. Finally, the film ends with a mother and daughter talking about the legacy of the Cyclorama, with the daughter saying, “A lot of people have mistaken a historical painting for actual history, and that’s worth talking about.”¹⁶⁵ After the film, lecturers well-versed in the history of the battle and the painting lead audiences around the platform, pointing out areas of interest including the Troup-Hurt House, Sherman looking down on the battle, General Logan, Old Abe, the sole black figure, and the Confederate prisoners of war that were once replaced with fleeing United States soldiers. Below the platform is an exhibit, including interactive screens that allow visitors to zoom in on focal points and get more information about the specifics of the battle. Visitors still ask to see Rhett Butler in the diorama and hear the story of the two brothers. Others wonder why the platform no longer rotates, or why the experience is so different from what they remember. Some even think the painting has succumbed to political correctness and leftist agendas, as made apparent by negative Google reviews. Those who experienced the Cyclorama in Grant Park and have come to know and expect a story about Southern valor and humorous anecdotes about Clark Gable’s visit to the platform. The omission of “Dixie” but the inclusion of analysis about the historical omission of

¹⁶⁴ Judt, “Atlanta’s Civil War Monument.”

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

Black soldiers have been potentially alarming in a space filled with so much nostalgia for the Old South. The focus of the experience is now about the history of the painting as opposed to the history of the battle, and these changes have confronted visitors with questions of what, exactly, they were looking for at the Cyclorama.

The interpretation of *The Battle of Atlanta* Cyclorama has always been unstable. The Cyclorama serves as an example of the unfixed nature of historical presentation, how exhibitions have to prove credibility while bending to current events and perspectives. The Cyclorama platform has been the space where Southerners have grappled with their own history and how they want to be remembered. Unlike other major Southern cities, such as Richmond, New Orleans, and Charleston, Atlanta did not have a central Confederate monument or memorial. prove their authenticity and credibility of presentation as opposed to encouraging deeper or newer thought. Oakland Cemetery was a place to mourn but the Cyclorama was a place to rejoice, to focus on the success of Confederate soldiers, whether success be measured by winning the battle or perseverance in the face of defeat. The Cyclorama has been a vehicle for Lost Cause ideology, a contender in the fight over collective memory for the cause and results of the Civil War. Now, the Cyclorama can be placed in the context of an artifact, an object itself that depicts history but also had history happen *to* it. Amidst an almost decade long debate over Confederate monuments and memorials, the presentation of the Cyclorama as artifact, and not attraction or monument, is particularly important.

For much of the Cyclorama's lifespan, the painting has given way to fictitious tales of very real experiences, to exaggerated or false narratives cloaked in the illusion of "truth" and "history." However, that experience was *very real* to audiences for decades. The narratives of a courageous South who had their way of life ripped away from them confirmed internal biases

and validated the fears of Southerners during a century of rapid social and political change. The experiences of audiences before 2019 are certainly not invalid, they are a reflection of the power that audiences have in shaping the narrative of artifacts and museum experiences. Just as curators and exhibit designers can intend certain messages, only for audiences to take away something else, the original artists of the Cyclorama never intended it to be a space for Confederate pride. On the other hand, just as museum professionals can use particular language to sway audiences, so did those who had power over the Cyclorama's interpretation. Museums and public spaces are places of power and the transfer of power occurs in tandem with their audiences. The audience experience is central to the history of the Cyclorama and brings meaning to its interpretation, despite the falsehoods that the interpretations have perpetuated.

This paper has its own limits and future research should take into account a more extrapolated analysis. First, the late 20th century was a time in which the Cyclorama was maintained by a primarily black staff, with many of those people still living. Their input and their experiences are valuable to understanding the Cyclorama's more contemporary history, as many people have now experienced the interpretation from the 80s and the interpretation at the Atlanta History Center today. Interviews with those who worked at the Cyclorama in its final few decades at Grant Park would be an invaluable addition to the history of the painting. Additionally, there's much to say about the perceived and engendered relationship between the Cyclorama and Stone Mountain, as many pushed for the painting to be moved out of Grant Park to Stone Mountain. While the Cyclorama has always had an unstable presentation, Stone Mountain has never pretended to be anything less than it is: a naturalized manifestation of the Lost Cause, quite literally carved in stone.

The issue at hand has not been to prove and emphasize the historical inaccuracies of the Cyclorama. Instead, the Cyclorama provides an opportunity to explore intent versus impact, the simultaneous historicization and dehistoricization of an artifact, the effect that physical space has on historically situated objects, and the power that audiences hold to create and perpetuate meaning. A piece of art, created by seventeen Austro-German artists who were certainly not present at the battle, had become an authentic historical experience. The Cyclorama endured decades of rising and falling attendance, with a myriad of events, such as the premiere of *Gone with the Wind* and the Civil Rights Movement, shifting its relevance. With the Cyclorama exhibited in the South for over a century, it has been Southerners who have determined its relevance, and determined its messaging and presentation. The painting has experienced as much failure as it has success, particularly with its preservation, and ultimately the pro-Confederate audience that consumed its changed story saved the Cyclorama.

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