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## **(Re)Traumatization on Display: Balancing History, Trauma, & African American Visitor Experiences at Atlanta's Museums**

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(Re)Traumatization on Display: Balancing History, Trauma, & African American Visitor  
Experiences at Atlanta's Museums

by

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Under the Direction of Lia T. Bascomb, PhD

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## ABSTRACT

Exhibiting historical atrocities within museums has become commonplace. While scholarship does exist on the memorialization of trauma, current research does not explore how the lived experiences of African American visitors in combination with historical and racial trauma may impact their perceptions of exhibition content, and to a greater extent, their overall museum experience. The purpose of this study was to investigate if visits to museums that interpret slavery and the U.S. Civil Rights Movement trigger emotional reactions and/or traumatic memories in African American visitors. Utilizing interviews and surveys from museum staff and visitors, this collective case study of three Atlanta-area museums sought to better understand the interpretative approaches selected by each site, and the differences, if any, amongst African American visitor experiences at traditional, contemporary, and Afrocentric museums in Georgia.

INDEX WORDS: African American history, tourism, historical trauma, museums, memory, Atlanta

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## **DEDICATION**

For my God, who is and always will be right on time. For my family, who has supported me in every hill I wished to climb and every valley I wanted to cross. I will forever love and appreciate you.

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To say I embarked on this journey alone would be a misstatement. Rather, I have been encouraged, pushed, supported, and loved by all of my villages. This work could not have been done without you.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

*Staged in the far left of the gallery, you see a 1960s style lunch counter raised on a platform with four barstools – the seat cushions alternating in color from red to blue. You're still at the entrance of the "Rolls Down Like Water" exhibition, in full view of the partitioning walls that seem to float in midair, showcasing a print of Norman Rockwell's painting of Ruby Bridges and a Times article about the Montgomery Bus Boycott. You walk past them, catching a glimpse of a smiling Emmett and Mamie Till in the corner of your left eye as you continue ahead to the counter. The gallery attendant, an older Black woman, stands close by – directing you toward the third stool. You step up, take a seat, and notice the electronic timers facing each stool. One has stopped at forty-five seconds, another at fifteen. The timer in front of you, however, is zeroed out. Directing your attention back down, you grab a pair of black headphones and place your hands down on the counter. Taking a moment to steady your breath, you close your eyes and the simulation begins.*

Enlisting the use of audio and visual interactives in galleries across the country, museums often use sensory experiences, like the one described above at the National Center for Civil and Human Rights in Atlanta, to provide "living" interpretations of history to visitors. By relying on interactive elements to enhance exhibition material and fully engage visitors' senses, museums act as reparative institutions, using technology to design spaces of empathy and foster understanding by placing visitors into the roles of Others. However, when pairing auditory and tactile stimuli with an equally traumatic narrative, museums run the risk of negatively impacting visitors by exposing contemporary audiences to recreated scenes of historical trauma. While sensory-based museum interactives are intended to elicit emotional responses, special care must

be taken in representing and interpreting difficult histories – many of which have direct connections to our present-day identities and affiliations (Rose, 2016).

As museums begin interrogating their own curatorial and exhibition design practices for remnants of colonization, it becomes important to question how and if interpretations of African American history are presently contributing to trauma experienced by African Americans. Ron Eyerman (2004) argues that African American identity is built upon a collective memory of slavery. Slavery, like other forms of racial violence perpetrated against Black bodies, unifies African Americans across the nation in the form of cultural trauma. As this trauma is passed from generation to generation, African Americans are uniquely positioned to carry its weight within their bodies (Caruth, 1995; DeGruy, 2005; Sharpe, 2016). That is, the legacy of trauma is reinforced in African American communities in the United States not only through collective memories of 20<sup>th</sup> century discrimination as a form of what Leigh Raiford (2009) calls “critical black memory,” but also in the ways in which Black children are socialized and parented to survive in a society that perceives Blackness as a threat (DeGruy, 2005; Eyerman, 2004). How that trauma manifests in African Americans, their communities, and their relationships with others has been the object of recent studies over the years (Awkward, 2009; Cross, 1998; DeGruy, 2005; Eyerman, 2004).

Likewise, it is important to study any potentially traumatic effects interpretative elements utilized in exhibitions may have on African American visitors when they visit public history sites. As Derrick Brooms (2011) contends, museum visitors do not leave their identities at home. Similarly, African Americans are not exempt from bringing their own worldviews into gallery spaces – however stained they may be by historic and/or present-day racial trauma. As

racial tensions in the United States rise, it is necessary to reevaluate the ways in which African American history is interpreted as not to retraumatize Black patrons and cause further injury.

Interpretations of African American history at public history sites are often based upon narratives of violence, resilience, and achievement (Brooms, 2011). However, such narratives are not a deterrent to African American visitors. Studies show that African Americans have an interest in engaging with the history of slavery both nationally and internationally (Butler, Carter, and Dwyer, 2008; Clark, Williams, Legg, and Darville, 2011). While interest in engaging with public history is high in African American communities, more research needs to be done on the emotional toll such interpretations can have on visitors. Studies about visitor experiences at plantations and slave castles reveal that many African Americans feel emotionally impacted on such visits (Clark, et al., 2011; Abaidoo and Takyiakwaa, 2019; Mowatt and Chancellor, 2011; Boateng, Okoe, and Hinson, 2018). Research within the field also suggests that items on display trigger emotional reactions (Tang, Shi, Huang, Sheng, Weaver, and Burns 2018), and visits to dark tourist sites can arouse both firsthand and secondhand memories of traumatic events (Qian, Zhang, Zhang, and Zheng, 2017).

### **1.1 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate if visits to museums that interpret African American history trigger emotional reactions and/or traumatic memories in African American visitors. Furthermore, this study seeks to understand if there are any differences in African American visitor experiences as it relates to a museum's typology, be that the use of traditional, contemporary, or Afrocentric approaches. Utilizing a mixed methodological design, this collective case study incorporates interviews and survey data from museum staff and visitors from three metro Atlanta museums: the Atlanta History Center (ATL History Center), the

National Center for Civil and Human Rights (NCCHR), the African American Panoramic Experience Museum (APEX). To better inform the study, two theoretical frameworks have been employed: Christina Sharpe's theory of "wake work" and Angela Onwuachi-Willig's theory of trauma that analyzes routine harm. As such, this study seeks to fill a gap in the literature that does not account for the effects of intergenerational racial trauma on African American visitors. Furthermore, it addresses the potentiality of museum interpretations of Black history to re(traumatize) via display.

## **1.2 Significance of the Research**

A need exists within the literature to holistically understand the consequences of exhibiting traumatic events in African American history. While tourism scholarship on visitor experience does exist, most research does not consider the historical and cultural trauma that audiences may have upon arriving and the impact of such trauma on their findings. As Brooms (2011) and Roy Rosenzweig, et al. (1998) have found in their respective studies, African Americans in particular connect their personal experiences to a larger communal story of African American history, enacting what Raiford (2009) defines as "critical black memory." It is for this reason that the study will utilize "wake work" theory and routine harm as a theoretical and interpretative framework. Furthermore, as museums are becoming more community-oriented with social justice-based missions, it is important to investigate how current interpretative strategies (traditional, contemporary, or Afrocentric) are impacting visitors during this current moment of racial reckoning.

This study primarily seeks to fill a gap in the literature that does not account for the intergenerational racial trauma that African American visitors carry with them on visits to public history sites. Additionally, this study will explore the potentiality of such interpretations of

African American history to pull Black visitors deeper into the wake of slavery, even if only momentarily. Unlike most tourism scholarship that focuses on a broad range of topics related to visitor experience, this study will delve deeper into the emotional reactions of African American visitors. The findings of this study exist at the intersection of African American Studies, tourism, and trauma. As such, the contributions of this work will not only benefit academic professionals and scholars within these fields, but also public historians and museum staff who are tasked with the job of responsibly and respectfully interpreting difficult histories for society.

### **1.3 Theoretical Frameworks**

#### ***1.3.1 Wake Work Theory***

Extending W.E.B. Du Bois's "double consciousness" and Saidiya Hartman's "afterlife of slavery", Sharpe's "wake work" theory is an analytical tool formulated to investigate the ways in which African Americans have resisted and survived the throes of slavery's vestiges. Utilizing the literal and symbolic interpretations of the wake, Sharpe (2016) theorizes a phenomenological experience in which African Americans are "living the history and present of terror" (p. 15). While Hartman makes more literal connections of slavery's past to modern day injustices, Sharpe positions the wake within the artistic and cultural productions of African Americans. Bringing her analysis within the scope of public history and museology, Sharpe (2016) questions the ability of organizations to memorialize what is not yet past. That is, how can the trauma and memory left in the wake of United States chattel slavery be memorialized when the "public discourse about terror" has relegated African American people as "terror's embodiment" (p. 15). While Sharpe does apply "wake work" to particular pieces of visual and cinematic art, her analysis of Temple University Hospital's program, *Cradle to Grave*, is of particular importance to the present study. Utilizing multiple interactive experiences, similar to a museum exhibition,

Cradle to the Grave exposes children to photos and reenactments of violence in order to dissuade them from participating in violent acts in the future. This particular exposure, which is arguably unethical, is troubled by the wake. Firstly, Sharpe (2016) notes that the reality of what it means to be Black in the United States requires no imagination for African Americans since the vestiges of slavery still remain. Secondly, this reenactment of violence and other experiences like it, initiate the wake as funerary process, which are “rituals...(of) grief and memory” (Sharpe, 2016. p. 21). Comparably, if we expand the wake beyond its association with recent death, it can also occur after traumatic events. Often left with a jumble of emotions, individuals create their own wakes, both personal and collective, to process their grief and reflect upon memories. As a theoretical framework, “wake work” theory is useful in addressing the “afterlife of slavery” in terms of cultural production, particularly the ways in which trauma and memory are interpreted and received by African Americans.

### ***1.3.2 Routine Harm***

Building upon pre-existing theoretical frameworks of cultural trauma, Onwuachi-Willig (2016) suggests that trauma occurs not only when routines are disrupted, but when the “disruption” or harmful event is routine itself. As a precursor to cultural trauma theory, routine harm has the potential to evolve into cultural trauma if three conditions are met: a history of consistent harm for a subjugated group, continuous media coverage about the aforementioned harm, and public forums designed to discuss the impact of the harm (Onwuachi-Willig, 2016). Routine harm is also dependent upon societal infrastructure and tendencies. For African Americans residing in the United States, routine harm, i.e., racial discrimination and injustice, has been the result of a society built upon the systemic oppression of Black and Brown bodies. Therefore, in a society like the United States where anti-Blackness is enmeshed within the

historical foundations of the nation, the norm or routine for African Americans is less reassuring and more stressful (Onwuachi-Willig, 2016). While Onwuachi-Willig (2016) utilized routine harm in examining the acquittal of Emmett Till's murderers, further applications can be made to current occurrences of police brutality against African Americans. As a theoretical framework, routine harm provides insight into the normalization of violence against Black bodies and the ensuing trauma that may develop as a result. This study will examine how local Atlanta museum exhibitions on slavery and the Civil Rights Movement may be unintentional contributors to the routine harm experienced by African American communities.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

As such, this study seeks to answer two research questions:

1. How do African Americans emotionally experience Atlanta area museums that exhibit slavery and the United States Civil Rights Movement?
2. Are there any differences in African American visitor experiences at local Atlanta area museums using traditional, contemporary, or Afrocentric approaches when interpreting slavery and the United States Civil Rights Movement?

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Defining Trauma

Originally used to describe physical injury to the body, the term trauma has been adopted both clinically and colloquially to describe a variety of human experiences – from stress to cultural upheaval. Because of its varied usage and multidisciplinary application, trauma can be characterized in numerous ways. However, for the purposes of this study, trauma is defined as physical and/or psychological injury that occurs as a result of experiencing, witnessing, or learning of a harmful or threatening event (Anderson, 2012; Briere and Scott, 2006; DeGruy, 2005; Gerber and Gerber, 2019; SAMHSA, 2014; Zepf and Zepf, 2008).

While trauma initially signified physical distress as the result of an external event, the publishing of *Studies on Hysteria* in 1893 represented a shift in the way academics and clinicians thought about trauma (Brandell, 2012). Building upon the research of Jean-Martin Charcot, Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer's text concluded that psychological trauma along with physical trauma caused female hysteria (Ringel, 2019). Because Freud and Breuer's work on trauma was entangled with female hysteria, psychological trauma in the late nineteenth century and well into the early twentieth century was gendered as a female experience (Anderson, 2012). As a result, soldiers returning home from World War I, who were experiencing symptoms of psychological trauma, were simply blamed for their lack of character and efforts were made by physicians to get them back to the frontlines as soon as possible (Ringel, 2019).

The categorization of trauma underwent another pivotal moment in 1980 when the American Psychiatric Association defined post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) within the third edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) (Anderson, 2012; Gerber, et al., 2019; Ringel, 2019). This effort was largely influenced by veterans of the Vietnam

War who struggled to transition back to civilian life, as well as female survivors of domestic abuse (Anderson, 2012; Gerber et al., 2019). While the movements of the 1970s brought trauma to the forefront of the nation's conscience and made trauma easily diagnosable, the publication of the third edition of the DSM had unintended consequences. By defining trauma along a certain criterion, only certain human experiences can be defined as traumatic, and therefore treatable, while other forms of trauma are effectively ignored clinically.

### *2.1.1 Towards a Multidisciplinary Theory of Trauma*

As research on trauma gained traction outside the field of psychology in the 1990s, academics proposed trauma theory in order to study the cultural effects of trauma (Anderson, 2012). Following an interdisciplinary approach, trauma theory is enhanced by literary and sociological perspectives. Cathy Caruth (1995), a literary theorist, argues that trauma is often a belated experience in which an individual is at first numb to the reality of their suffering but later “possessed by the (traumatic) image or event;” secondly, she contends that responses to trauma are unique and that studying trauma requires a multidisciplinary strategy to better understand its cause (p. 5). Comparable to Caruth, Jeffrey C. Alexander (2004) argues that trauma must be understood as a socially mediated process and not inherent to events or the human experience. Furthermore, he argues that trauma is informed not only by the historical event itself, but by the imagination of an individual or a collective (Alexander, 2004). Trauma theorists like Caruth and Alexander refute simplistic and fatalistic definitions of trauma, as popularized by early nineteenth century thinkers. Rather, multidisciplinary theories of trauma have challenged these original beliefs, and have sought to create a trauma theory that encompasses a myriad of human experiences (Anderson, 2012). From their work comes two related, but separate forms of trauma – historical trauma and cultural trauma.

### ***2.1.1.1 Historical Trauma***

As defined by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2020), historical trauma is intergenerational trauma that is experienced by a specific cultural, racial, or ethnic group (para. 1). Unlike individual traumatization, historical trauma is framed around a larger event that has negatively impacted a large subset, if not all members of a particular community. Originally conceptualized in response to Holocaust survivors and their descendants, historical trauma focuses on transposition or the transference of traumatic experience from one generation to the next (Gerber et al., 2019; SAMHSA, 2014; Wiechelt and Gryczynski, 2012). While transposition and historical trauma are often studied in regards to the Holocaust, other racial and ethnic groups have also benefited from its application – including African Americans (Williams-Washington and Mills, 2018; Williams, Printz, and DeLapp, 2018; Nadal, Erazo, and King, 2019; Carter, et al., 2013).

### ***2.1.1.2 Cultural Trauma***

Unlike historical trauma, cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity are subjected to an unexpected disruption that not only impacts individuals but the identity formation of the culture itself (Alexander, 2004; Lehrner et al., 2018; Wiechelt et al., 2012). Shelley Wiechelt et al. (2012) contends that as early as 1925 ideas about cultural trauma abounded as theorists like Sorokin suggested that dramatic societal changes could negatively impact communities. However, cultural trauma should not be mistaken as simultaneous pain felt by members of a group. Rather, cultural trauma creates “cultural disorientation” that leaves “indelible marks on group consciousness” and group identity (Alexander, 2004; Lehrner et al., 2018; Wiechelt et al., 2012, pp. 195-196). The severity of cultural trauma is largely dependent upon the culture itself. If the culture of a community is strong enough to withstand the disrupting

event, then cultural trauma is perceived to be low. On the other hand, if the traumatic event is too severe for a culture to resume its normal functions then cultural trauma is high. Oftentimes, Native American groups are the subject of cultural trauma studies due to their encounters with European colonization that led to the deaths of millions and the destruction of hundreds of distinct Native American cultures (Wiechelt et al., 2012). However, recent advancements in cultural trauma studies have resulted in theorists like Eyerman (2004) applying trauma theory to African Americans, in which the impacts of slavery are being studied in relation to the formation of African American identity.

### ***2.1.2 Theorizing Trauma Experienced by African Americans***

African American historical and cultural trauma is defined by the collective experiences and intergenerational memories African Americans have of chattel slavery, discrimination, segregation, and systemic racism. While these experiences and memories are transferred from one generation to the next through biological and socially mediated mechanisms, African Americans often encounter their first instance of racialized trauma on their own. Du Bois (1903/1965) identifies this moment of trauma in his own life, invoking the symbolism of a “veil” to represent African Americans’ double consciousness. In Du Bois’s theory of double consciousness, African Americans are able to see themselves through their own cultural lens of understanding, while simultaneously being able to view Blackness through the White gaze as signified by the “veil.” By theorizing a trauma of twoness, as Michael Awkward (2009) argues, Du Bois puts into words a common origin of Black trauma in which an individual becomes acutely aware of their Blackness and what that Blackness represents to others.

While most academics agree that African Americans do have a legacy of trauma caused by past and current racism, how that trauma exists and functions within African Americans and

their lived experiences is decidedly more ambiguous. William E. Cross Jr. (1998) argues that the legacy of slavery model often emphasized by other academics focuses too much on “victimization and pathology” without adequately taking into account coping strategies and the agency of the enslaved (p. 394). Similar to his argument against the legacy of slavery model, Cross Jr. (1998) finds issue with the collective/group trauma model and the trauma-transcendence-legacy models for two specific reasons: first, slavery cannot be described as a singular event when it was a four-hundred-year institution; second, it is difficult to mark a period in which African American trauma has ended. To that end, Cross Jr. (1998) defines African American trauma around a legacy of Black coping strategies in which a “fully developed Black identity” allows an African American individual the opportunity to defend against the stress of racism, provide a sense of purpose and affiliation, and make productive interactions with non-Black people (p. 396). Conversely, Eyerman (2004) identifies slavery as the collective memory that unites African Americans regardless of any direct experience with slavery or knowledge of Africa. That is, the legacy of slavery is what grounds African American identity and not a history of coping. While one focuses on cultural victimization and the other cultural agency, each argument accepts that the institution of slavery is a point of origin, not only for African American culture, but for African American historical trauma.

### ***2.1.3 Manifestations of African American Historical and Cultural Trauma***

Trauma experienced by enslaved African Americans in the United States did not end with their emancipation. Rather, U.S. chattel slavery marked the beginning of a four centuries-long campaign of racial animosity and discrimination meted out against African Americans. From the Black Codes introduced across the South during Reconstruction to present-day police brutality, the historical and cultural trauma experienced by African Americans continues to evolve and

manifest itself in ways that impact life post-enslavement. Defining these manifestations, Hartman (2007) coins the phrase the “afterlife of slavery” (p. 6). Hartman’s “afterlife of slavery” puts into words the modern-day injustices African Americans experience that have direct ties to slavery. Hartman’s (2007) initial definition cites disproportionate life chances and limited access to health and education services. Sharpe’s elucidation of the “afterlife of slavery” involves “living in/the wake of slavery,” in which African Americans are entangled with a past that is not yet past with repercussions that extend to the present (2016, p. 15). *The New York Times’ 1619 Project* led by Nikole Hannah-Jones (2019) extends Hartman’s characterization by utilizing a methodological approach that employs enslaved African Americans as actors in the larger story of the United States and the nation’s history of slavery. Bringing together academics, journalists, and artists, the 1619 Project illustrates ways in which slavery’s remnants can still be found in the twenty-first century – from medical exploitation to racial wealth gaps to mass incarceration.

#### ***2.1.4 Measuring Historical and Cultural Trauma in African Americans***

Besides obvious implications for therapeutic and health services, measuring the effects of historical trauma and racial micro/macroaggressions can be especially helpful across a variety of fields and disciplines. Currently, researchers are in the process of creating measures and scales to determine the actual impacts of historical trauma on African Americans. A recent study by Kristin Williams-Washington and Chmaika Mills (2018) investigated connections among personal experiences with discrimination, memories of discrimination experienced by previous generations, and current levels of historical trauma. The researchers of this study created a 42-item questionnaire to analyze four thematic factors– negative affect and resentment, concern for group integrity, in-group identification, and perception of discrimination. While the measure is

relatively new and not largely replicated, it does have a high reliability rating (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .91$ ). Other studies have broadly focused on the effects of racial discrimination on African Americans. A study conducted by Kevin Nadal, Tanya Erazo, and Rukiya King (2019) suggests that the more that members of minority groups perceive discrimination results, the more traumatic symptoms they feel. Another study found that African Americans, in particular, may experience traumatization from any type of racial discrimination (Williams, et al., 2018). Utilizing such measures can help public-facing institutions like museums determine if exhibitions or displays have the potential to revictimize African American visitors.

## **2.2 Defining Museums**

Museums are complex institutions that are difficult to define due to their varied content, interpretative strategies and collection practices (Alexander and Alexander 2008). However, for the purposes of this study, a museum will be defined as:

A non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates, and exhibits the tangible, and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study, and enjoyment. (International Council of Museums Statutes, 2007, para. 1)

Beginning as early as the third century A.D., museums have existed as part of the cultural landscape (Alexander et al., 2008). With some of earliest known prototypes designed to complement Roman and Greek universities of the classical period, museums were originally associated with advanced study and often patronized by scholars and members of the elite classes. As such, museums were highly exclusive institutions, limited only to those who could afford entrance fees or who were deemed worthy as determined by their elevated social status.

While museums remained a private affair well until the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, advancements within the museology field brought forth two, new exhibitionary concepts – the gallery and cabinet of curiosities (Alexander et al., 2008). Early depictions of galleries included descriptions of long hallways that showcased art and sculpture. Although some contemporary museums still utilize hallways as gallery space, it is more common for galleries to represent larger rooms, spacious enough to fit a variety of vitrines and benches, along with space for large interactives. Unlike 17<sup>th</sup> century galleries, cabinets of curiosities were often rooms that were filled with artistic and scientific oddities. Although patterned after the *Wunderkammern* (or wonder cabinets) of the Renaissance, Celeste Olalquiaga (2005) argues that 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century curiosity cabinets did not share the same display privileges as its predecessor. Rather than existing within the walls of royal palaces, curiosity cabinets were found in the homes of nobles. As colonization and intercultural exchange made objects less foreign, items from curiosity cabinet collections became scattered, ending up in 19<sup>th</sup> century salons and finally museums (Olalquiaga, 2005).

### ***2.2.1 Museum Culture in the United States***

Similar to their European counterparts, museums in the United States began as private institutions that required memberships. Departing quickly from this model to one more firmly rooted in the public sphere, American museums in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century sought not only new patrons, but other sources of financial support. Following a more entrepreneurial path, museums that once began as private collections, like that of Charles Willson Peale, eventually moved outside of the home and into dedicated buildings (Alexander et al., 2008). As the nation's museums increased in number during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the United States entered into the global conversation on museums and their role within the international cultural landscape.

While museums enjoyed relative success in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, most preservation efforts in the years before the Civil War fell upon deaf ears, resulting in the demolition of some historic sites. As attitudes about history changed following the war, the 1880s and 1890s saw an influx of historical organizations dedicated to preserving a particular reimagining of America that upheld white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant ideals. Coinciding with the terrorization of Black communities following the end of Reconstruction, this strategic move towards institutionalizing preservation strategies cemented a particular narrative of history that benefited and was controlled by the White upper class. Furthermore, museums took advantage of the authority and trust placed upon them by the public and validated these narratives by feigning objectivity and veracity.

As the American population grew in size and ethnic diversity, early museums sought to assist in “Americanizing” the nation (Wallace, 1996, p. 8). Relying upon tactics similar to those used by Napoleon when opening the Palace of Louvre in 1793, early American museums sought to use their collections as instruments to tout American values (Alexander et al., 2008). Michael Wallace (1996) posits that this “Americanizing” campaign, which specifically targeted the immigrant working class with displays of Americana, was largely ineffective. However, Patricia Davis (2016) argues that by displaying one set of memories over another, museums are effective in trivializing alternative narratives and making culturally authoritative statements about a community or ethnic group. As such, traditional whitewashed narratives went largely uncontested until the 1930s when local communities began preserving their own histories. Decades later, current museum culture supports education and the practice of using objects to explain cultural relationships within society rather than objectifying racial and ethnic differences (Alexander et al., 2008; Wallace, 1996; Weil, 2002). However, as Coco Fusco (2003) notes in the exhibition catalogue for *Only Skin Deep*, complicated relationships continue to exist between

images and the social realities they convey. That is, photography is performance rather than documented truth, in which artifacts and bodies are removed from their contexts to pursue a particular narrative sought by the artist and in time a museum curator (Fusco, 2003).

### ***2.2.2 Typologies of Museums***

Museums are often classified into types. From history to natural science, these broad characterizations are associated with the material items on display and held within a particular institution's collections. Reimagining this definition, this current study considers typology in relation to a museum's culture and personality. According to Mark Walhimer (2015), a museum's personality combines the mission and vision of an institution along with its collection to offer visitors a clearer understanding of what they are to see and how they are to see it. Utilizing the integrated museum approach of Walhimer (2015), three museum typologies have been identified by the researcher for the purposes of this study – traditional, contemporary, and Afrocentric.

#### ***2.2.2.1 Traditional Museums***

Rooted in the what Tony Bennett (1988) describes as the exhibitionary complex, traditional museums are marked by their ability to establish order – not only in the ways objects are organized, but how people act in relation what is on display. Through the use of memberships, fees, and instructive booklets that described proper museum etiquette, early traditional museums were instruments of gatekeeping (Bennett, 1988). Seeking not only to control the type of audience they received, these museums were also interested in molding their visitors. As was typical, traditional museums spoke to the public through labels that described the items under their care, offering little opportunity to question or argue (Walhimer, 2015). Incorporating similar strategies, traditional museums of today are not always beholden to the

visitor, but are focused on selling on what they have to offer – be it prestige, collections, or popularity (Walhimer, 2015; Weil, 2002).

Following its transition from a private institution to a public space, early traditional museums served a general public sphere. Similar to the definition provided by Jürgen Habermas (1974), this public sphere encapsulated a collection of individuals that had shared interests, many of which aligned with the nationalist tendencies of 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century institutions. These nationalist tendencies often left behind those that had been Othered, creating multiple counterpublics defined by race, gender, ethnicity, class, religion, etc. (Fraser, 1990). While current traditional museums are making strides in becoming relevant to multiple groups of people or publics, other institutions have already embraced these counterpublics and new ways of relaying knowledge.

### ***2.2.2.2 Contemporary Museums***

As the museology field entered the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there began an ideological shift towards education, knowledge, and shared authority (Walhimer, 2015). Self-serving traditional museums of the past, dedicated to “gathering, preserving, and studying,” gradually became less viable (Weil, 2002, p. 28). Instead, a new iteration of museum in the 1980s and 1990s– the contemporary museum – focused on understanding what the local community needed and sought to provide services in the forms of exhibitions, programming, and outreach. Incorporating the use of shared inquiry and shared authority, these types of museums attempted to break away from the exhibitionary complex by intentionally engaging the community in the process of exhibition design and narrative construction.

However, shared authority does not automatically equate to seating authority. That is, community stakeholders are not always afforded the same power as museum staff in affecting

interpretation or exhibition development. As revealed in *Museums and Communities: Curators, Collections, and Collaboration*, Golding, Modest, and contributors (2013) describe discrepancies that exist amongst museum staff and community groups when community consultation methods are utilized. In their analysis of the 2007 bicentenary of Britain's abolition of the slave trade, Kalliopi Fouseki and Laurajane Smith (2013) found that many community representatives were frustrated as they saw the exhibitions as opportunities to recognize the exploitation and enslavement of Africa by the British, along with the excluded legacies of African-Caribbean communities. However, British museums sought to celebrate the act of abolition itself, appeasing their funders and sponsors. By not considering the wider social and political ramifications of these exhibitions, some British museums were unable to adequately serve the needs of their public in a way that was meaningful to them. To create this meaning, community representatives may venture off on their own, building institutions that seek to fill a perceived gap.

### **2.2.2.3 Afrocentric Museums**

While some traditional and contemporary museums are struggling against the Eurocentrism embedded within them, Afrocentric museums seek to posture African ways of knowing and interpretation as normal. Molefi Asante (1998) describes Afrocentricity as the placement of "African ideals at the center of any analysis that involves African culture and behavior" (p. 2). For Afrocentric museums in the United States, that often means stretching the historiography of African American history to a life before enslavement. Shifting perspective in this way destabilizes Europe as the physical, intellectual, and economic center of the world, and situates it within the African continent instead (Ngũgĩ, 1993).

Although Afrocentric museums in the U.S. reposition history from the perspective of African descended people, it would be inaccurate to assume that these institutions do not fall

victim to the silences of the past. As Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2015) argues, “silences are inherent in history” with no historical event entering the record with all of its parts (p. 54).

Afrocentric museums attempt to work within these silences by constructing historical narratives that are not overwhelmed by trauma, providing an alternate narrative, i.e., “usable past”, to what has defined and been accepted as African Americana history.

### ***2.2.3 Decolonizing the Museum***

In *Discourse on Colonialism*, Aimé Césaire (1972) writes that colonization equals “thingification” (p. 42). Using dehumanizing tactics such as forced labor, rape, etc., colonizing nations force indigenous populations into submission, often through the confiscation of ancestral lands and the illegalization of certain cultural practices (Césaire, 1972). Referencing Césaire’s definition of colonization, decolonization is a process of empowerment for formerly colonized people, in which power relations are equal and civilizations are able to exist without interference. Seeking to address the unique characteristics of settler colonialism, scholars and theorists of United States-based Indigenous cultures extended decolonization theory to include the repatriation of land. While Indigenous-based decolonization theory is committed to the interests and concerns of Indigenous communities, many contemporary adaptations of decolonization are not. Rather, decolonization has become synonymous with any effort seeking to decentralize Whiteness. Within the last two decades, countless institutions and industries have adopted decolonization-based strategies to further promote diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives in their organizations. Ironically, Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2012) argue that positioning decolonization outside of Indigenous-based theory, as many contemporary adaptations are apt to do, has the opposite intended effect and recenters Whiteness amidst calls for inclusive representation.

While many organizations adopting decolonization-based strategies have no direct ties to European colonization, museums do. As physical manifestations of settler colonialism, museums located in European colonial outfits around the world acted as culturally authoritative institutions. Whereas colonial museums often exhibited the best cultural artifacts and traditions that Europe had to offer, they denigrated the cultures of those they colonized by displaying their objects of their heritage in direct opposition to European fare (Wintle, 2016). Doing so remained the status quo of exhibitionary design until the late nineteenth century when anthropologist Franz Boas argued for the use of cultural relativism when displaying material culture (Wintle, 2016). With cultural relativism, Boas sought to promote interpretation based on Indigenous perspective of social meaning rather than a scientific categorization of objects based upon a racial hierarchy (Wintle, 2016). Although cultural relativism did not revolutionize interpretative strategy overnight, it foretold a shift in museology – in which decolonialization would play an active role. Timothy Neale and Emma Kowal (2020) define two separate approaches to decolonization – epistemic and reparative. Similar to the position of Tuck et al. (2012), the author’s description of reparative decolonization fully supports the repatriation of land to Indigenous communities, as well as the returning of resources and power to the people. In the context of museums, Neale and Kowal (2020) also track the modes by which objects are first collected and then displayed – first, from a colonial mode, next to a postcolonial mode, and lastly to a decolonial shift. Using their terminology and definitions, many contemporary museums and public history sites that have adapted decolonization-based strategies exist somewhere along the spectrum – oftentimes between postcolonial mode (i.e. the presentation of numerous perspectives while leaving room for visitor reinterpretation) and decolonial shift (i.e. invoking the use of shared authority in

which representatives of Indigenous populations are given a say in what objects and what narratives are told about their culture) (Neale et al., 2020).

#### ***2.2.4 Interpreting Difficult Histories for the Public***

Around the same time that museums assisted in “Americanizing” the nation, history as a disciplinary field was used to create a cohesive national past for 19<sup>th</sup> century U.S. citizens (Wallace, 1996; Gross and Terra, 2018). Known as a “usable past,” early history lessons taught formally and informally relied upon narratives that explicitly promoted “American” ideals of manifest destiny and individualism at the expense of any references to conflict and controversy that would cast a negative light over the United States (Du Bois, 1935; Stupp, 2011). Less of a science and more a tool of propaganda, W.E.B. Du Bois explains in his examination of education in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century that the omissions and misinformation present in history textbooks were considered acts of patriotism, in which “loyalty to a lost cause” became more important than the humanity of African Americans (p. 649). While current history curricula functions quite similarly to the past, the incorporation of difficult histories into the American historical canon has brought about new challenges in pedagogical practice and interpretative strategy.

Defined as periods of oppression, violence, and trauma, difficult histories threaten the balance of a cohesive past (Rose, 2016). Challenging the patriotism espoused in classic tales of American expansion and capitalism, difficult American histories illuminate the stories of those who have been historically Othered and marginalized. While the inclusion of difficult histories brings silenced voices to the forefront, it also remains a challenge. Julia Rose (2016) and Magdalena Gross and Luke Terra (2018) contend that difficult histories are challenging not only because past oppression is recalled in the present, but because the same oppression is still negatively impacting our present day lives. As such, Rose (2016) promotes Commemorative

Museum Pedagogy which builds upon the work of memorial museums that encourage visitor reinterpretations and emotional connections with the oppressed, and create space for learners to work through their own internal tensions.

For African American history, in particular, Commemorative Museum Pedagogy must confront the “usable past” of slavery in the United States. Just as Fouseki and Smith (2013) described the way in which British museums framed the country’s entanglement with slavery around the resolution of abolition and not the continued legacies of racial discrimination facing African-Caribbean communities, so do many interpretations of slavery in the United States rely upon similar bouts of erasure. It is the reliance upon a technicality – that African Americans are no longer held as property –which allows slavery to rest comfortably in the minds of the American public. It is this version of history that does not “disturb their [white Americans] understanding of themselves” (Stupp, 2011, p. 82).

In disrupting that “usable past” of U.S. slavery with Commemorative Museum Pedagogy, Rose (2016) describes an effort by the Magnolia Mound Plantation in Louisiana to incorporate the stories of the enslaved alongside that of the planter’s family in 2005. Although this case study was largely concerned with the experiences of the history workers as they worked to expand interpretation of enslaved life at the plantation, the findings have direct implications for visitors as well. Like the visitors to Magnolia Mound Plantation, the history workers had a very generalized knowledge of how the enslaved lived – with little to no knowledge about those that lived at the site. Once research uncovered the buried truths of the Magnolia Mound Plantation’s enslaved, including not only their names but family histories and fates, some history workers actively resisted including this new information as part of the tour. Rose (2016) conjectures that these resistances were likely to avoid the pain of actively bearing witness to what had only been

alluded to rather than explicitly explained. Additionally, this confrontation with the truth had an emotional impact on history workers with direct ancestral ties to French Louisiana. Causing an internal disturbance within themselves – in which they sought to maintain respect for their ancestors while empathizing with the enslaved – this particular finding reveals the harmful nature of our current iteration of slavery’s “usable past,” for both employees and visitors alike.

#### ***2.2.4.1 Difficult Histories in Practice***

Museums play a significant role in interpreting difficult histories for the public. While museums confront numerous challenges when interpreting difficult histories, like social forgetting and ethical representation, they are further restricted by a scarcity of objects, especially those belonging to marginalized communities (Rose, 2016). To combat this loss, efforts have been made by museum curators to embrace interpretative mimicry – reconstructing disastrous events through the use of a “highly immersive emotional atmosphere” (Siyi, 2020, p. 58). As noted by W. Siyi (2020) in evaluating Chinese “comfort women” exhibitions in East Asia, trauma is nearly impossible to replicate. However, memorial exhibitions, like those based upon Chinese “comfort women” and the Holocaust, rely upon images, objects, and dioramas to transport visitors back in time to a re-presentation of trauma that feels “real” enough to elicit empathy and compassion. However, as Brenda Trofanenko (2011) and Gross et al. (2018) contend, difficult histories aren’t always difficult for everyone, and even so what is presently difficult for an individual now may not be later on and vice versa. With this in mind, museology interpretative strategy must presently acknowledge the link between emotions and knowledge, as suggested by Trofanenko (2011). In recognizing the importance of emotional responses as an outcome of learning, future visitor experience studies surveying museums should consider

visitors' emotional responses as not a secondary outcome of visitation, but a complementary outcome when knowledge is acquired by visitors.

Interpreting difficult histories can have unintended consequences. Recognized as the quintessential American public history disaster of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum's *Enola Gay* exhibition was cancelled in January 1995 due to political pressure and societal criticism. Its interpretation of World War II and the atomic bombing of Japan coincided with the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the war. Rather than continue the celebratory exhibitions of American achievement notable in past exhibitions at the NASM, the original script of the *Enola Gay* exhibition explored the repercussions of war, particularly the atomic bombing of Japan. Perceived as dishonoring veterans and sympathizing too much with the Japanese cause, Richard Kohn (1995) suggests that the NASM surrendered its scholarly autonomy to accommodate politics. However, the replacement exhibition, which displayed the *Enola Gay* fuselage without any historical context, was a similar interpretative failure. Rather than embrace and engage with the difficult history of World War II, NASM decided to forego any controversy by propping the fuselage up as an object of American military prowess. In avoiding the intellectual and political risks involved with the original 1995 exhibition, NASM avoided interpreting difficult history, acknowledging the "aching relationship the knowledge has to the present and future" (Rose, 2016, para. 2). Doing so not only reaffirmed the "bloodless display of military power" that Americans have been accustomed to, but also erased the reality of Japanese and Japanese American trauma resulting from mass civilian casualties (Fenrich, 1995, p. 27).

### ***2.2.5 Interpreting African American History***

Prior to the rise of American museum culture in the twentieth century, world fairs and expositions dominated the United States' cultural scene – showcasing national achievements

alongside international spectacles. Devised predominantly by committees of White men, world fairs and expositions hosted by American cities upheld notions of racial (i.e., White), and cultural (i.e., Western) superiority. From recreated African villages to “enslaved mammies” hawking pancakes to hungry visitors, world fairs and expositions in the U.S. utilized Black bodies to justify racist beliefs and make the inferiority associated with Blackness tangible for a wider, Whiter audience (Wilson, 2012). While most American world fairs were dependent upon stereotypical representations of African Americans, the Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition of 1895 set a new precedent. Amidst exhibits dedicated to White supremacy and Western superiority stood the Negro Building, an exhibition hall for African Americans to curate and exhibit their own history (Wilson, 2012).

Organized by members of the burgeoning Black middle class, many of whom called Atlanta home, the Negro Building represented one of the first opportunities African Americans had to interpret their own history for a majority White audience. Relying upon the generosity of Black-run businesses, churches, and educational institutions across the nation, Black committee members gathered the necessary materials and artifacts that would inevitably fill the Negro Building. Influenced by “Bookerite ideology,” the committee created a narrative for the exhibit that exalted Black achievement within industrial work – particularly that of agriculture (Wilson, 2012). Complementing the now infamous “Atlanta Compromise” speech given by Booker T. Washington at the opening of the 1895 Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition, the Negro Building walked an interpretative tight rope. Faced with the realities of anti-Blackness and antebellum era nostalgia that Southern states were experiencing, the interpretative strategy utilized by the Negro Building celebrated Blackness arguably within the constraints that racial stereotypes allowed– i.e., through Black physical labor and industrial work. Mabel Wilson

(2012) notes that while many saw this interpretation of Black history and culture as a success, for others the Negro Building failed to provide a more holistic view of African Americans' contributions to society.

With the announcement of the 1900 Exposition Universelle in France, Thomas Calloway, a D.C. resident and Fisk graduate sought out the assistance of W.E.B. Du Bois to propose an ambitious exhibit – one that showcased the New Negro on the international stage (Wilson, 2012). Shifting curatorial perspectives from the 1895 Atlanta Exposition, Calloway and Du Bois chose to craft a narrative that acknowledged the propensity of African Americans to be successful in all aspects of life. Doing so meant not only the inclusion of technical education, like curriculum from the Tuskegee Institute, but the creative works of artists and the intellectual research of academics. Notably, Du Bois used the 1900 Exposition Universelle as an opportunity for public scholarship. Wilson (2012) describes Du Bois's "Georgia Negro" display as a collection of charts and graphs that numerically illustrated the African diaspora for attendees and the disparities existing between Black and White Americans. Enhancing his quantitative data sets with visual documentation, Du Bois also included an array of photographs of African Americans. These photographs were later used in an ethnographic study illustrating the various phenotypic expressions of African American skin color as a result of miscegenation and rape (Wilson, 2012). Lastly, to provide historical context for the data showcased in the display, W.E.B. Du Bois included a hand-written copy of Georgia's Black Codes. Wanting to remind the international audience of the obstacles that African Americans faced since the American colonial period, the "Georgia Negro" display along with the larger "American Negro" exhibit were used to progress a narrative of Blackness that promoted resilience and survival above all else. While this message was intended for an international audience, it made an impact on African

Americans back home. As a result, the “American Negro” exhibit became a travelling spectacle, exhibited from New York to South Carolina. However, as Wilson (2012) points out the exhibit countered the accommodationist strategies of many Southern leaders organizing exhibits for world fairs and expositions. Building upon the foundations of the Negro Building, the “American Negro” exhibit was the precursor to permanent repositories of Black history and culture that later thrived within 1960s Black counterpublics.

Evidenced as early as the late 1800s, Black counterpublics provided space for African descended people to safely critique their conditions in America. Relying on the experiences of African Americans, Catherine Squires (2002) identifies two different typologies of Black counterpublics – the enclave and the satellite. Enclaves are spaces in which African Americans gather to develop and promote their own cultural ideas for the consumption of their own communities. One could apply this definition to the Black press and the Black church (Dawson, 1995). On the other hand, satellites actively seek out their own separate group identity, while engaging with other publics. Squires (2002) gives the Nation of Islam as an example of a satellite. Differing from modern day Black counterpublics which Michael Dawson (1995) and Squires (2002) would agree to disagree exists, the 1960s provided a singular political issue for the Black counterpublics to resolve themselves around – that of Jim Crow and the harmful representations of African Americans in the United States.

#### ***2.2.5.1 Grassroots Black Museums***

As world fairs and international expositions faded from the United States cultural scene in the early 1960s, African Americans sought to permanently preserve collections and artifacts of Black history. Using the American Civil Rights and Black Power movements as impetus, new museums dedicated to the proliferation and conservation of African American history sprung up

around the nation (Autry, 2013; Rosenberg, 2011; Wilson, 2012). As Wilson notes, these grassroots Black museums were not founded by museum professionals, but by Black communities in response to historical exclusion and inaccurate portrayals in mainstream museums. Rooted in Northern cities like Detroit and Chicago, early Afrocentric museums like the International Afro American Museum (IAM) were intentionally activist-based institutions. Relying on what Nina Simon (2016) later defined as community-first program design, museum workers at the IAM structured all aspects of the museum around its Black audience.

From a mobile museum to an exhibition built around attic artifacts, the IAM's efforts did not go unnoticed by the federal government. While U.S. Representative James Scheur's 1965 bill focused primarily on the federal authorization of Carter G. Woodson's Negro History Week, an addendum to the bill sought to establish a national museum of African American history and culture (Wilson, 2012). Although the IAM had its own reasons for objecting to such a proposal due to the institution's own international dreams, the federalization of Black American history was a viable threat to all early Afrocentric institutions. Playing a major role in the Black counterpublic sphere, grassroots Black museums often doubled as community archives, acting as collectors of memories untainted by racist ethnographic methods or curatorial practice. Unlike federal institutions that are beholden to the people as much as the government itself, grassroots Black museums of the 1960s were simply responsible to their individual communities.

Furthermore, the creation of a national museum of African American history and culture would also entail the crafting of an official history of African Americans – which during the time of its initial conception, the 1960s, would more than likely result in a biased interpretation that replicated the inaccurate portrayals of African Americans already present in more traditional museums at the time. While the addendum of Scheur's 1965 bill did not pass and the completion

of the National Museum of African American History and Culture did not come to fruition until 2016, grassroots Black museums continue to appear across the American cultural landscape, as interpretations of Black history remain missing from traditionally acclaimed institutions.

### ***2.2.5.2 Contemporary Interpretations of African American History at Black Museums***

Brooms (2011) argues that public history sites that center the lives of African Americans serve to rectify the misrepresentations of African American history prevalent in public history institutions that invoke a traditional, Euro-centric narrative. To actualize that mission, Black-centered museums often exhibit atrocities that are central to African American history, using physical interactives and sensory experiences. These exhibitions are further complemented by narratives of resilience, survival, and achievement (Autry, 2013 and Brooms, 2011). To interpret slavery, many museums have curated exhibitions that feature reconstructed slave ships. Brooms (2011) suggests that the physical representation of a slave ship helps visitors to visualize and psychologically experience the trauma perpetrated against enslaved Africans during the Middle Passage. The National Great Blacks in Wax Museum takes this experience a step further through an auditory stimulus – pre-recorded audio of an actor portraying a slave trader (Woolfork, 2009).

Similarly, exhibitions on the Civil Rights Movement also rely on interactive experiences that engage the public. As depicted in the introductory vignette, the lunch counter experience at the National Center for Civil and Human Rights in Atlanta is a popular interactive heavily featured in a variety of ways at other exhibitions on the American Civil Rights Movement. African American centered museums also focus on other notable Civil Rights era experiences – like Freedom Rides and the Montgomery Bus Boycott. At the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis in the 1990s, visitors could “board a 1950s era segregated bus and get told by a driver-

mannequin to ‘Go to the back’” or visit a replica of the Birmingham cell in which Dr. Martin Luther King was imprisoned (Wallace, 1996, p. 119).

### ***2.2.5.3 African American Visitors’ Trust of Museums and Their Historical Interpretations***

Often relying upon curators and subject matter expertise, exhibition material rarely undergoes a communal history making process. Rosenzweig and Thelen (1998) define history making as how individuals build personal narratives using the past. History making can and should also be applied to museum interpretation. Arguably, how curators and historians choose to interpret the historical record has more of an impact on visitors than history alone. It is the interpretative narrative and how it is designed for viewing that is ultimately consumed by the public and influences their history making processes. Davis (2016) agrees with this notion, stating that an exhibition’s design, heavily influenced by the creator, can impact a visitor’s interpretation.

As argued by Brooms (2011), visitors contextualize what is on display through their own life experiences, and ascribe personal meanings to the artifacts as a result. In their study, Rosenzweig et al. (1998) found that Black museum visitors engage even more personally with exhibitions than many white visitors. He writes, “Black respondents tended to directly connect their personal and family narratives to the specific public historical narratives that these sites presented” (p. 155). This connection is even more explicit as African Americans participate in Civil War reenactments. Davis (2016) suggests that the act of reenacting for Black participants constructs a form of agency that affirms “contemporary notions of black masculinity through the production of an idealized historic subjectivity” (p. 34).

Believed to be pillars of objectivity, a study conducted throughout the 1990s by Rosenzweig et al. (1998) found that museums are considered to be the most trustworthy sources

of information by Americans. For African American museum-goers, museum trustworthiness, especially the credibility of history museums, is based upon how that institution is perceived, and its relationship to African American communities. Lisa Woolfork (2009) suggests that the success of the National Great Blacks in Wax Museum in Baltimore is largely due to African American visitors ascribing more “authority and credibility” to the wax museum to accurately present Black American history than a traditional, white privileged institution like Colonial Williamsburg (p. 110). To that point, Wallace (1996) notes that Colonial Williamsburg did not begin to include slavery within its interpretative efforts until the 1970s (nearly 50 years after its restoration), and even then, was less than willing to address slavery’s legacies— sharecropping, Jim Crow, Black nationalism, police brutality, etc.— in its standard tours and programming.

While Colonial Williamsburg avoids interpreting slavery’s vestiges, the living museum dared to reenact a slave auction for visitors in October 1994. In front of hundreds of visitors and protestors alike, the auction featured four Black staffers from Colonial Williamsburg Foundation’s African American Research Department posing as the enslaved. Seeking to reinvigorate past interpretations of African American history, Christy Coleman, the Director of the Foundation’s African American Department in 1994 and organizer of the auction, described the project as an exercise in humanization (Jones, 1994). However, Jason Stupp (2011) questions the intention behind the performance asking, “How does exhibiting the trauma of slavery lead to a greater understanding of the culture that sanctioned and profited from enslavement?” (p. 80). That is, whose gaze does the museum staff presuppose and whose gaze is the visitor expected to embrace – that of the auctioneer, the enslaved, or the eager public, many of whom took part in the spectacle to increase their own wealth? Adequately described as an act of historical voyeurism by Stupp (2011), this “selective interpretation and sanitized representation” of a slave

auction at Colonial Williamsburg did little to further visitors' understandings of white supremacy, but rather caused notable emotional anguish to Black actors and staffers alike (p. 81). Leaving one to ask, to what extent should African Americans retraumatize themselves as part of interpretative strategy in order to elicit some form of empathy from non-white patrons?

### **2.3 Dark Tourism, Emotional Experiences, and Latent Memories**

Humans have always had a fascination with death. While the term dark tourism was coined in the mid 1990s to describe mass visitation to sites of death, suffering, and the macabre, scholars have made connections between modern day dark tourism and the gladiators of ancient Rome as well as the public executions of the medieval period (Stone, 2006; Hartmann, Lennon, Reynolds, Rice, Rosenbaum, and Stone, 2018). Similarly, within African American history, one can draw connections from dark tourism to the antebellum enslavement markets, which housed enslaved men, women, and children, as well as spectacle lynchings of the Post Reconstruction Era. In what can be described as postmodern dark tourism, spectacle lynchings often took advantage of the widespread reach of newspapers to carry word of impending violence. Referencing the case of Sam Hose in Georgia, trains from Atlanta carrying four thousand spectators arrived in Newnan prior to his grisly murder at the hands of persons unknown (Dray, 2002). Without the sensationalism of his perceived crime by the media, Hose's lynching arguably would not have been the tourist attraction it came to be. Also, when considering spectacle lynching as a form of dark tourism, Black bodies were often commodified in their death through the selling of postcards that depicted the murders (Dray, 2002). Drawing upon Raiford's (2009) theory of critical black memory, lynching photography has been reclaimed by African American activists during the twentieth century and modern-day civil rights movements

in the United States to reconceive “black savagery as...black vulnerability; white victimization as...white terrorism” (p. 117).

Currently, dark tourism has been split into a number of theme-based tourisms, including one pertaining to slavery heritage. Slavery heritage tourism, while a form of dark tourism, faces unique challenges. As Rudi Hartmann et al. (2018) describes, plantation houses “are examples of historically important architectural structures...[that] are the product of the excesses of slavery” (p. 272). While sites associated with slavery heritage tourism effectively showcase an appreciation for antebellum society and lavish architecture, many often struggle with the topic of slavery. Stephen Small (2019) notes in his examination of Louisiana plantation museums that sites are likely to use one of three narrative styles – symbolic annihilation, marginalization, and relative incorporation. With the exception of relative incorporation, the two other styles of interpretation, i.e., symbolic annihilation and marginalization, diminish the role of slavery in the United States and are less likely to incorporate specific stories of the enslaved. Rather than fully incorporate the story of U.S. chattel slavery, many of these same sites have adopted novelty interpretative strategies. Building upon the “ghost fancy” phenomenon put forth by scholar Tiya Miles (2015), ghost stories as historical narrative “call to mind disturbing historical knowledge that we feel compelled to face, but they also contain the threat of that knowledge by marking it as unbelievable” (p. 15). Such an interpretative strategy not only recommodifies the violence perpetrated against historical Black bodies for entertainment, but paints slavery as myth.

At the other end of the interpretative spectrum lies full incorporation – a term Stephen Small has most recently applied to the Whitney Plantation in an interview with UC Berkeley (2020). Prioritizing the lives of the enslaved and positioning them as subjects within their own stories, the Whitney Plantation shows the brutality of the slavery system. With the artistic

installation *The Children of Whitney* by Woodrow Nash, guests come face to face with sculptures of enslaved children scattered throughout the property. Utilizing the archival evidence from the Louisiana WPA Slave Narratives, the “recollections of those who endured and who shared the stories of their lives as children in slavery” come to life in the most vivid of ways (Whitney Plantation, n.d.).

Dark tourist sites hold immense power as spaces associated with death or of death (Stone, 2006). As such, dark tourist sites are known to emotionally impact visitors. In examining the impact of tourists’ perception of dark tourism on emotional experiences, Li-Hiu Chang (2007) suggests that visitors are more empathic and are capable of developing positive emotions and a strong geopolitical knowledge after visiting museums of war conflict. Focusing again on geopolitical context, another study reported that visitors to a Chinese prison had strong emotional reactions and elevated patriotism (Tang, et al., 2018). More so, the displays at this prison museum triggered negative attitudes towards Japan and its people, who were perceived to be perpetrators of the violence (Tang, et al., 2018). Extending dark tourism to memory, Lili Qian et al. (2017) contends that first- and second-hand memories of an event can be triggered as a result of visiting a site associated with said event. This study, in particular, has implication for slavery heritage sites. As survivors of historical trauma, that Dr. Joy DeGruy argues is multigenerational, then slavery-heritage sites can arouse second-hand memories and possibly bring to the forefront of one’s stories of racial violence and prejudice perpetrated against one’s family. Explicit African American dark tourism scholarship is wanting in comparison to war and Holocaust tourism. However, a recent study conceptualizing the arrest site of Freddie Gray in Baltimore as a dark tourist site found that African American tourists left feeling a greater connection to a

larger Black community, a desire to be vigilant in the face of racial prejudice, and a better understanding of our current reality that made the death of Gray possible (Surjeet, 2017).

### *2.3.1 Visitor Experiences at American Slavery-Heritage Sites*

African Americans have very unique experiences with travel. Charis Tucker and Cynthia Deale (2018) found that a lack of financial resources, a minimal knowledge of African American history, and certain hesitations affect African American travel experiences. The authors of the study suggest that the aforementioned hesitations may be a result of oral histories passed down in African American families. These stories often dissuade visits to certain locations that are historically known for racial prejudice. Additionally, Stephanie Benjamin, et al. (2016) found that focus group participants, all of whom were racial and ethnic minorities, were less likely to visit dark tourist sites. When considering slavery heritage tourism, research has shown that there is an overrepresentation of White visitors in comparison to Black tourists (Butler, et al., 2008; Clark, et al., 2011). David Butler et al (2008) had only a 3.5% response rate from Black participants at a Louisiana plantation and Carol Clark et al. (2011) had a 21% response rate from Black participants. While one could argue that the aforementioned hesitations play a role in these discrepancies, one should also consider the narratives at play within these historic sites. Until very recently, plantation tourism rarely tackled the difficult history of slavery. Rather, many historic sites have a focus on architecture, the Civil War, interior design, the landscape. White visitors by and large prefer these narratives over the histories of the enslaved (Butler, et al., 2008; Clark, et al., 2011). Because White visitors represent the majority of visitors to plantations, the histories of the enslaved remain unpopular topics of conversation at these locations (Butler, et al., 2008; Clark, et al., 2011).

In evaluating visitor experience, researchers often use a survey instrument that is distributed to guests directly following a visit. Clark, et al.. (2011) utilized a survey at Kingsley Plantation to ascertain the characteristics of park visitors, their expectations, as well as any intellectual and emotional connections to the site. About 70% of visitors (of all racial and ethnic categories) participating in the study had an emotional reaction at the plantation, and Black visitors in particular were most likely to feel sadness (Clark, et al., 2011). The study conducted by Butler, et al.. (2008) at the Laura Plantation found that Black visitors preferred narratives of the enslaved over the Civil War. While studies on plantation tourism abound, the focus of the research rarely seems to be the emotional experiences of visitors. The few studies that do acknowledge visitors' emotional experiences show an underrepresentation of Black tourists (since Black tourists are less likely to visit and even more less likely to return for a second visit), which makes it hard to generalize findings across the larger African American community (Clark, et al., 2011).

### ***2.3.2 Visitor Experiences at African Slavery-Heritage Sites***

Unlike plantation tourism and other forms of slavery heritage tourism in the United States, tourism of African slave castles is often marketed as roots tourism. Roots tourism describes any trip taken to the continent by members of the African diaspora seeking to reconnect with the ancestral homeland. In *Lose Your Mother*, Saidiya Hartman (2007) tracks her own journey to Ghana in a fruitless attempt at belonging. The statelessness that she describes, in which she feels like an alien in America and an *obruni* (stranger) in Elmina, is one of the many vestiges of the afterlife of slavery, and one that many countries' tourism industries, particularly in West Africa, have taken advantage of. Aaron Yankholmes and Bob McKercher (2015) identified four types of visitors that visit TAST (Transatlantic Slave Trade) sites in Ghana –

“connected slavery heritage visitor”; “connected vacationer”; “not connected bicultural visitor”; and the “not connected Caucasian” (p. 26). While both the “connected slavery heritage visitor” and the “connected vacationer” had strong personal connections to slavery, their findings suggest that the “connected slavery heritage visitor” was normally from the U.S. and hoping to form an ancestral connection (Yankholmes et al., 2015). Similarly, studies suggest that African Americans personally identify with the African slave castles they come into contact with, adopting them within their own identities (Boateng, et al., 2018; Amuquandoh et al., 2008; Yankholmes and Timothy, 2017; Adam and Amuquandoh, 2018).

While American slavery heritage sites still popularize non-controversial narratives over slavery, interpretation of slave castles in West Africa embrace the brutality of the international slave trade. As sites of violence, slave castles in Africa are often very emotional experiences for all visitors, but particularly so for those of African descent. As was previously mentioned, displays at museums and other historical sites have the ability to trigger negative emotions and attitudes, as well as bring about first- and second-hand memories that the visitor might have of the event (Tang, et al., 2018; Qian et al. 2017). Similarly, in the case of slave castles, studies have found that a wide spectrum of emotions are felt by visitors (Abaidoo et al., 2019; Amuquandoh et al., 2008; Mowatt, et al., 2011; Boateng et al., 2018). Visitors to slave castles express feelings of shock, sadness, fear, and anger. In a 2011 study by Rasul Mowatt et al., African Americans felt that the rooms within the Elmina and Cape Coast Castles in Ghana still “hold sensations of smell, sound, and appearance of the brutality that occurred within their walls” (p. 1428).

Along with emotional attachments, studies suggest that African Americans can feel a sense of ownership when it comes to slave castles. Aaron Yankholmes and Dallen Timothy

(2017) interviewed twelve expatriate African Americans living in Ghana. Using semi-structured interviews, their findings suggest that because slavery is so embedded in African American identity, and African American proximity to a collective slavery memory is more recent, African Americans believe that there are certain rights afforded to them over their African counterparts. Their claim to ownership rests largely upon the idea that Africans are more likely to forget slavery heritage. This fear of “African forgetfulness” can also be traced to some cases of tourist dissatisfaction when visiting slave castles. In a study by Sam Abaidoo and Dorothy Takyiakwa (2010-2015), visitors to Cape Coast Castle felt that inaccurate information was presented to the public. Similarly, Eric Amuquandoh and Desmond Brown (2008) found that African Americans were dissatisfied with how the castles were interpreted.

Like tourism research focused on slavery heritage sites in the United States, studies on slave castles also rely upon survey instruments distributed onsite or over the phone. However, because slave castles are located outside of the U.S and therefore are not easily reached without international travel, researchers have had to use other forms of data to ascertain visitors’ experiences. Henry Boateng et al. (2018) employed the use of reviews from TripAdvisor to study tourist experiences at the Cape Coast Castle in Ghana. Another study utilized comments from visitor books located in slave castles for similar purposes (Amuquandoh, et al., 2008). Both studies offer remote analyzing strategies that are especially relevant as COVID-19 cases continue to surge globally.

### 3 METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Design

Utilizing a mixed methodological design, this study investigated how African Americans emotionally experience Atlanta area museums that exhibit content related to U.S. chattel slavery and the Civil Rights Movement. Using photo-elicitation and online surveys, participants selected via purposive sampling encountered exhibition slide decks from three museums: the Atlanta History Center (ATL History Center), the National Center for Civil and Human Rights (NCCHR), the African American Panoramic Experience Museum (APEX). The use of photo-elicitation in this study is supported by Douglas Harper (2002) who suggests this particular method evokes “information, feelings, and memories” (p. 13). Following each set of exhibition photos, participants completed an online survey to self-report any emotional reactions they experienced while viewing the images. Particular attention was given to any type of emotion participants found difficult to cope with and/or any traumatic memories brought to mind. Data received was coded and then analyzed for any emerging themes to address Research Question 1 holistically, i.e., for all museums being studied rather than individual sites. To frame Research Question 2, interviews were conducted with select exhibition and education staff at the Atlanta History Center, the National Center for Civil and Human Rights, and the African American Panoramic Experience Museum. These interviews were utilized to better understand each museum’s curatorial and interpretative approach to African American history. Data from these interviews were coded and used to create “institution-specific” curatorial and interpretative approaches. Using the “institution-specific” approaches as a backdrop for the survey data provided from participants during the photo-elicitation interventions, this study sought to uncover any emerging themes as it relates to African American visitor experiences at the Atlanta

History Center, the National Center for Civil and Human Rights, the African American Panoramic Experience Museum. Furthermore, in pairing the data collected from both museum staff and visitors, this study illuminated any tensions that existed between an institution's curative and interpretative efforts of African American history and its reinterpretation by African American visitors.

### **3.2 Setting**

Although the museums chosen for this study have reopened to the public, they were not operating at full capacity, i.e., requiring timed visits and online ticket purchases. Because the COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact everyday life, the study was conducted remotely in order to maintain social distancing protocols and allow all participants a level of comfort, regardless of any pre-existing condition(s) that made them more susceptible to catching the virus than others. Various online platforms were utilized during data collection, to include: Qualtrics, an online survey analysis platform, and WebEx, a video-conferencing technology. Interviews of select exhibition and education staff of the Atlanta History Center (ATL History Center), the National Center for Civil and Human Rights (NCCHR), and the African American Panoramic Experience Museum (APEX) were conducted using WebEx and interviewees had the option of turning their web camera on or off. Each interview was recorded for audio to aid the transcription process. Recordings were saved and secured in locked folders within the researcher's personal Dropbox.

### **3.3 Sample**

While data on visitor demographics specific to history museums is lacking on a national scale, the National Endowment for the Arts found that 24% of Americans over the age of eighteen had visited an art museum or gallery in 2017 (NEA, 2019). Data from the study also

shows a steady increase in visitation from 2012 across most age groups, including those aged: 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 65-74, and 75+ (NEA, 2019). Similarly, data from the same survey administered by the NEA found that there was a statistically significant increase in historic site visitation for those in age groups 35-44 and 45-54 (NEA, 2019). Although this data is specific to both art museums and historic sites, the current study relied upon these findings as justification for the following sampling criteria.

The theoretical sample for this study consisted of twenty-five, self-identified African Americans between the ages of 18 and 54 in total. For the purposes of this study, African Americans were defined as descendants of Africans held captive in the United States of America. If Black/African American was self-selected as at least one of the ways they identify, participants were asked if their ancestors were enslaved prior to the abolition of slavery in the United States. This ethnic identifier was used as a variable – i.e., to potentially see if the responses of those that identify as descendants of enslaved persons in the U.S. varied from that of those that were not. Other eligibility requirements included the participant having visited one of three Atlanta area museums (Atlanta History Center, African American Panoramic Experience, or the National Center for Civil and Human Rights) in person within the last three years. The researcher chose this particular length of time to accommodate for the COVID-19 pandemic. While travel restrictions have lifted dramatically since March 2020, unnecessary travel continues to be discouraged. As a result, many public institutions like museums have resorted to requiring online ticket purchases and timed visits. Because of the limitations to onsite visitation, many public history sites provided exhibition content online for public use, some of which was used in the current study via photo elicitation. By extending the visitation criteria to

three years, the population sample was diversified enough to include participants who were at one point capable of travel, regardless of their current financial or health constraints.

Along with the twenty-five African American participants recruited for the sample, the study sought out six museum professionals working at the three Atlanta area museums sites of interest. Eligible museum professionals had to work within either the exhibitions or education departments and could speak to the interpretative strategies utilized in the formation of exhibits or public programming. Data collected from these interviews informed and provided the necessary background for each museum's case study.

Primary recruitment took place at three metro Atlanta colleges and universities – Georgia State University, Spelman College, and Clark Atlanta University. Schools were chosen due to their proximity to the city of Atlanta, as well as their high enrollment and retention of African American students, faculty, and staff. Prior to actively recruiting possible participants, the researcher reached out to the administrative teams of each school's respective history and African American/Africana Studies departments in order to inform them of the study. The researcher provided each school's departments with a digital recruitment flyer to be shared with students, faculty, and staff within the program. The researcher also planned to connect with the counseling centers at each of the aforementioned institutions to inform them of the study and to acquire any contact information and pamphlets that could be shared with respective participants. Secondary recruitment took place through the researcher's own personal network. Using the snowball sampling method, the digital recruitment flyer was shared with colleagues and through social media to further diversify the population sample.

Prior to participating in the study, all interested parties submitted a screening form to verify their eligibility. Once recruitment ended, the researcher distributed an informed consent

document via email. The informed consent document included the contact information for on campus and off campus counseling services for the participant's use, if necessary.

### 3.4 Measures

This study measured the emotional responses African Americans have at local Atlanta area museums that exhibit slavery and the United States Civil Rights Movement using one of three interpretative strategies: traditional, contemporary, and Afrocentric.

*Demographic Survey.* Participants were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire inquiring about gender identity, race, age, college/university, undergraduate/graduate standing, income level, employment, occupation, and interest in African American history museums.

*Racially Related Trauma.* Using an open-ended questionnaire, participants identified any memories of discrimination or racial trauma triggered by the photo elicitation. Memories were coded thematically using both emotion and descriptive coding and later analyzed for any similar or disparate themes. Participants also identified the frequency that they felt anger, fear, sadness, and discomfort when viewing the images using a 5-point Likert scale (1= never and 5 = always).

*Interview Protocol.* Interviews were conducted with six museum professionals. Each interview was electronically recorded with permission from the participant. After transcription, the data was imported and analyzed within NVivo. Questions in the protocol were designed to better understand the actualization of the respective museum's mission and vision, as well as the strategies used when curating exhibits and designing public programming. Relying upon descriptive coding, the data was categorized thematically and used to inform and clearly define the interpretative strategy utilized by each museum.

### 3.5 Procedures

Participants were recruited from three metro Atlanta colleges and universities using recruitment flyers. Recruitment also took place using the researcher's personal networks, i.e., work and social media. All interested parties were advised to contact the researcher. To determine eligibility, a screening form was distributed to all participants that contacted the researcher with interest. If eligibility was verified, the participant was added to the sample pool and an informed consent form was sent to them via email. Once participants had been verified and all signed consent forms had been received, the study began. The study lasted for three weeks in which three interventions were conducted, i.e., one museum-specific intervention per week. Due to the length of the study, the researcher expected an attrition rate of around 20% (or 5 participants). Prior to the start of the study, participants completed a demographic survey. As part of the demographic survey, participants were given a unique identifier created by a random number generator in Qualtrics. If participants forgot their unique identifier by the time surveys were distributed, they were asked to create their own unique identifier using their first initial, last initial, month and day of birth (e.g., BB0919).

During week one, the researcher distributed the first photo elicitation intervention using a Qualtrics survey via email. The survey was composed of three images from an African American Panoramic Experience (APEX) exhibition, as well as the *Racially Related Trauma* questionnaire. Viewing the intervention and completing the survey was targeted to take fifteen to twenty minutes for participants to finish. Weeks two and three followed a similar format to week one with the exception that the survey featured exhibition specific images from the ATL History Center and National Center for Civil and Human Rights, respectively. Results were compiled within the online platform. Each response to the open-ended items on the questionnaires was

coded in NVivo. Because of the nature of the study and the items present in the questionnaire, participants relayed highly emotional events, steeped in specificity and detail. Descriptive coding was useful in coding what participants were describing, whether it was a family memory, racial discrimination, or injustice. Furthermore, the use of emotion coding allowed the researcher to classify what participants were actually feeling in relation to the memories they shared.

As primary recruitment occurred for the survey participants, six museum professionals were recruited from the Atlanta History Center, the National Center for Civil and Human Rights, and the African American Panoramic Experience. The researcher utilized her own professional networks as a former museum educator to assist with recruitment. Recruitment sought two museum workers per organization working within the exhibition and/or education departments. Once eligible museum professionals were verified and their consent obtained, individual interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the interviewee. Interviews lasted for forty-five minutes to an hour and were primarily conducted virtually via WebEx, a video conferencing technology. For this study, the interview protocol consisted of both organizational and job-oriented questions. To protect the identity of each interviewee, the researcher decided not to include any personal identifying information as part of the results for this study. Rather, each person was identified in the order they were interviewed (i.e., Employee Interviewee 1, Employee Interviewee 2, etc.). To aid in transcription, each interview was recorded. Once transcription was complete, the interviews were uploaded and coded using NVivo. At the completion of the study, each participant received notes of appreciation for their participation. Furthermore, data compiled from this study was secured in locked folders within the researcher's personal Dropbox and will be retained for five years for forthcoming studies.

### 3.6 Analysis

To quantify the types of participants being studied, the researcher analyzed the demographic surveys of those participating in the photo elicitation intervention. Because the *Racially Related Trauma* measure included both quantitative and qualitative items, the researcher coded the open-ended responses into emerging themes. Similarly, the researcher coded the responses from the six interviews conducted with museum professionals to better inform the case studies on each institution. To analyze how the interpretative strategy of the museum impacted the frequency of emotion experienced in the quantitative portion of the *Racially Related Trauma* measure, descriptive statistics at the ordinal level was utilized.

#### 4 FINDINGS

Utilizing interviews and surveys from museum staff and visitors, this collective case study investigated if visits to museums that interpret slavery and/or the U.S. Civil Rights Movement trigger emotional reactions and/or traumatic memories in African American visitors. Additionally, this study sought to understand if there were any differences in African American visitor experiences as it relates to a museum's interpretative approach, be that traditional, contemporary or Afrocentric. As a result of these initial inquiries, two research questions were posed:

1. How do African Americans emotionally experience Atlanta area museums that exhibit slavery and the United States Civil Rights Movement?
2. Are there any differences in African American visitor experiences at local Atlanta area museums using traditional, contemporary, or Afrocentric approaches when interpreting slavery and the United States Civil Rights Movement?

Beginning in September 2021, recruitment flyers and emails were sent to various collegiate academic departments and museum professionals in metro Atlanta. Two separate samples were sought concurrently – African Americans who had visited either the Atlanta History Center, National Center for Civil and Human Rights, or the African American Panoramic Experience Museum (APEX) in person within the last three years and museum professionals currently working at one of the three aforementioned sites. Recruitment for Sample 1 or the African American museum visitor group concluded in October 2021. Ultimately, six individuals consented to participate and comprised Sample 1. Over the course of three weeks in November 2021, three unique online surveys were distributed via email for participants in

Sample 1 to complete. Participation varied with some attrition each week with an average response rate of 4 persons or around 67%.

Recruitment for Sample 2 or the museum professional group concluded in March 2022. Due to a lack of response to initial cold emails in September 2021, the researcher relied upon the professional networks of her committee members to help create the necessary connections. By the end of March of 2022, four interviews were conducted with representatives from the Atlanta History Center, National Center for Civil and Human Rights, and the African American Panoramic Experience Museum (APEX). Three interviews were conducted virtually and lasted no longer than 45 minutes. One interview was conducted on site and also lasted around 45 minutes. With the consent of each participant, each interview was recorded and the audio later transcribed by the researcher.

#### **4.1 Characterizing Museums in Atlanta**

While the Atlanta History Center, National Center for Civil and Human Rights, and the African American Panoramic Experience Museum all display content related to African American history, each site can be characterized as having a different institutional perspective – traditional, creative-forward, and Afrocentric. While this perspective often informs an institution’s mission and work, it doesn’t always correlate to the interpretative approach being used to tell the story of African Americans. Each of the museums studied as part of this research rely on traditional forms of interpretative strategy. All are object-based, in that what is on display often drives the narrative. A few others are externally-developed, either by individuals contracted professionally to develop exhibitions or other institutions lending out their shows in the case of traveling exhibitions. To gain a better understanding of each museum’s perspective, as well as

the techniques employed to interpret African American history, the researcher interviewed four museum professionals currently working at one of the aforementioned sites.

#### ***4.1.1 The African American Panoramic Experience Museum (APEX)***

Founded in 1978 by Dan Moore Sr., the African American Panoramic Experience Museum (APEX) is the oldest Black history museum in the city. Located in the Sweet Auburn district, the museum was conceived after Moore Sr. attended a banquet for Dr. Benjamin E. Mays, former president of Morehouse College (Bland, 2019). Inspired by the words of Dr. Asa Hilliard III – “Don’t believe that Black history starts with slavery” – the APEX seeks to “interpret and present history from an African American perspective to help all Americans and international visitors better understand and appreciate the contributions of African Americans to America and the world” (APEX, 2022). Boasting both online and onsite exhibitions, the APEX features exhibits consisting of both local and international content like “Africa the Untold Story,” “Women in STEM” and “Sweet Auburn Street Pride.”

Founded out of a perceived need to provide the city of Atlanta with a museum dedicated to African American history, the APEX seeks to “change the narrative across society” of how African American history has been taught and how the African diaspora is viewed. As Employee Interviewee 4 relayed, the APEX sought to go beyond what most Black history museums display – that is content related to local history and the Civil Rights Movement. Although the founder’s vision for the museum started with a recreation of Auburn Avenue in the 1960s, a nod to both local and civil rights history, guests to the APEX first encounter the exhibition *Africa: The Untold Story* when they enter. Rather than start with slavery in North America, the APEX situates its visitors within a story of Africa that is not fraught with all the calamities Western society has been accustomed to hearing about the continent. Instead, it describes the riches and

intellectual prowess of its many ethnic groups, with Egypt heavily emphasized. From the story of Africa, guests also briefly engage with the history of American slavery and the agentic acts of the enslaved, before being thrust forward in time to mid twentieth century Atlanta and Sweet Auburn. Moving forward once again, guests walk through a hallway showcasing African American inventors before heading into a side gallery highlighting Women in STEM.

Currently, the APEX utilizes an unapologetically Afrocentric perspective, with the stories of African Americans firmly at the center of the narratives constructed for each exhibition. However, the museum is largely devoid of objects and artifacts. Instead of being object-led, the APEX is narrative or subject driven. Interrelated with the founder's occupation as a filmmaker, one can approach the APEX as a film studio with each gallery space acting as its own set. That is, the museum was not designed to be a "static museum with statues." Rather, it sets out to mimic EPCOT at Walt Disney World – a sort of walkthrough history. In the coming years, the APEX seeks to expand its footprint to achieve this type of immersive experience where guests will be able to walk amongst the pyramids in Egypt, experience the Middle Passage, and following other historical moments throughout African American history to the election of President Obama.

The images utilized as part of the APEX exhibition slide deck features the following: a mannequin whose back carries the scars of a whipping alongside an enlarged record of enslaved persons held as property, a reimagining of Henry "Box" Brown complete with box and mannequin, and a restaging of Sweet Auburn's Yates and Milton Drugstore.

#### ***4.1.2 The Atlanta History Center***

Located in the Buckhead neighborhood of Atlanta, the Atlanta History Center grew out of the Atlanta Historical Society founded in 1926. For years, the Society collected and preserved

artifacts of Atlanta history before officially becoming the Atlanta History Center in 1990. Comprised of thirty-three acres, the ATL History Center boasts two Atlanta area campuses in Buckhead and Midtown, which house the Goizueta Gardens, four historic houses, the Kenan Research Center, and the brick and mortar building for the Atlanta History Museum constructed in 1993. The mission of the institution is to “connect people, culture, and history to cultivate understanding of our shared history” (ATL History Center, 2021, p. 13-14). Currently, the Atlanta History Center is building upon the 2019 Guiding Principles adopted by the Board of Trustees to direct the Center into 2026 – it’s 100 year anniversary. With a new vision of “hold(ing) democracy at the center of our research, scholarship, and storytelling,” the ATL History Center seeks to create a space for visitors to exercise their rights of citizenship by facilitating learning experiences that allow one to think differently and “confront their own blind spots” (ATL History Center, 2021, p. 2). A few of the current methods being used to do so include sharing multiple perspectives and under-told stories, diversifying the Center’s stakeholders and audiences, and working with Atlanta’s racial and cultural communities to preserve their own stories that will inform exhibition and program development in the future (ATL History Center, 16).

As confirmed by both ATL History Center employees interviewed for the study, the Center is actively “trying to tell more under-told stories of Atlanta” while “present(ing) the facts, not tapered, not distilled down, not washed over.” These initiatives also pertain to the institution’s interpretative work around African American history. Common to museum practice, the Center often brings in curators on contracts to help develop future exhibitions. As such, some of the exhibitions about African American history aren’t produced internally by museum staff, but by visiting experts. Comparably, the Center also hosts traveling exhibits, like *Black*

*Citizenship in the Age of Jim Crow*, which was created by the NY Historical Society with local content researched and developed internally by the team. From an interpretative and institutional perspective, the Atlanta History Center continues to be traditional in that it relies heavily upon its objects and collections. Employee Interviewee 1 noted that the Center specifically receives funding to broaden its military collection. However, current efforts are attempting to use the funds to acquire objects related to the United States Colored Troops to tell more “human stories...definitely including African American History...and again, history of the USCT, but also the enslaved and then formerly enslaved.”

In considering the future of African American history at the ATL History Center, both employees believed in the importance of community input. Currently, the staff utilizes focus groups to get a better idea around what the community wants and needs. This community involvement not only helps inform future exhibitions, but supports visitors’ abilities to make connections to what they see. Prior to their employment at the ATL History Center, Employee Interviewee 2 remembered that their own visits in the early 2000s were impacted by their inability to see themselves “in the picture when [they] walked the building back then.” While connection building is necessary, Employee Interviewee 2 also conceded that African American history is “very trauma filled.” Though it is a fine line, the Atlanta History Center is trying to portray not just the reality of the trauma meted out against African Americans throughout history, but also the “triumphs of what [has] been accomplished as a people [African Americans] and as a collective group.”

The images utilized as part of the ATL History Center exhibition slide deck features the following: an external view of the Smith Farm Cabin that housed the enslaved, a recreation of a

diner that features the stories of local civil rights activists, and a Colored Entrance Only sign from August 1934.

#### ***4.1.3 The National Center for Civil and Human Rights (NCCHR)***

Opening in the summer of 2014, the National Center for Civil and Human Rights situates the American Civil Rights Movement within the larger story of human rights. Initially beginning as conversations amongst some of Atlanta's greatest Civil Rights heavyweights – former Ambassador Andrew Young, the late representative John Lewis, and the late Mrs. Evelyn Lowery, Mayor Shirley Franklin commissioned a study to determine the necessity of a civil and human rights museum in the U.S. (Working Group, 2006). Using the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, TN, the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute in Birmingham, AL, and the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati, OH as case studies, a list of recommendations was made to Mayor Franklin in December 2006 and the Center was formally established in 2007 (Working Group, 2006). Housed adjacent to the World of Coca Cola and the Georgia Aquarium and compromised of 42,000 square feet, the Center serves to “inspire people to tap their own power to change the world around them” (NCCHR, 2022). Comprised of three floors, the lower level displays the Morehouse College Martin Luther King, Jr. Collection, the second hosts the U.S. Civil Rights exhibition, and the third features the global human rights exhibition.

Differing from most museums, the National Center for Civil and Human Rights is a non-collecting institution with no archival or artifactual collections. Yet, it still holds true to many of the same museum practices utilized by its neighbors –a heavy reliance on objects to inform exhibition content and the use of guest curators. While Employee Interviewee 3 did not agree with the researcher's view that the NCCHR employs a contemporary interpretative strategy, they

did describe the NCCHR's institutional perspective as being a sort of "creative interpretative framework" that trends more in the direction of immersion. One need to look no further of this traditional, yet creative strategy than the *Rolls Down Like Water* permanent exhibition. Curated by George C. Wolfe, *Rolls Down Like Water* depicts the struggles and triumphs of the American Civil Rights Movement. Separated into five major areas, the exhibition begins with an introduction to the 1950s in Southern metropolitan areas, with specific attention is paid to Atlanta's Auburn Avenue – a symbol of African American economic and communal success. The next gallery space houses two impactful interactives – a partial reconstruction of a Greyhound bus plastered with the faces of Freedom Riders and the replication of a lunch counter where African American activists participated in sit-ins. While the bus incorporates oral histories through the use of audio, the lunch counter is a visceral exercise in empathy, in which visitors are transported back in time and engage in a sit-in complete with verbal taunts and the vibration of barstools. As noted by Employee Interviewee 3, "people respond to...opportunities that build empathy" and that the experience itself emphasizes that "museums don't just share the information, they make you feel something about it."

With a five-year \$17 million grant from the Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation, the NCCHR is presently transforming itself from a "museum attraction to an institution." To accomplish that goal, funding from the grant is being allocated towards a new wing that will add an additional 20,000 square feet of gallery space, as well as funding for the Truth and Transformation Initiative. With a current focus on two atrocities in Atlanta's history, the Truth and Transformation Initiative is seeking to recognize and memorialize the 1906 Atlanta Race Massacre and convict leasing brutalities at the Chattahoochee Brick Factory and Bellwood Quarry (National Center for Civil and Human Rights, 2022). As Employee Interviewee 3 notes,

the work being done with the Truth and Transformation Initiative as well as in the new gallery for MLK Jr.'s Papers is founded upon community engagement, "so that we rely on that expertise, and ask(ing) folks what it is that they need."

The images utilized as part of the NCCHR exhibition slide deck features the following: an image of the gallery featuring racial unrest after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., a memorial display dedicated to the four little girls who fell victim to the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church bombing in 1963, and view of both the lunch counter interactive and partial reconstruction of a Greyhound bus.

## **4.2 Surveying African American Visitors to Atlanta Museums**

### ***4.2.1 Sample 1***

Sample 1, also known as the African American visitor group, was comprised of six total participants ranging in age from 21 to 47 years old (see Table 1). While the sample skewed predominantly female (see Table 2), there was educational and employment diversity. Three participants identified as currently enrolled in either an undergraduate or graduate program. Five participants work in traditional (higher education or K-12 schools) or nontraditional (museums and art galleries) sites of education. Income prior to the pandemic ranged widely from less than \$10,000 to more than \$150,000 (see Table 3). With all participants residing within the Metro Atlanta area, each one has visited at least one museum in Atlanta featuring African American history (see Table 4). However, it was more common for them to have visited at least two museums (five participants), with three participants visiting between six and eight museums that highlight African American history. Directly related to their reported museum visitation, three claimed to be very interested in museums that exhibit the history of African American people, while the remaining three were extremely interested.

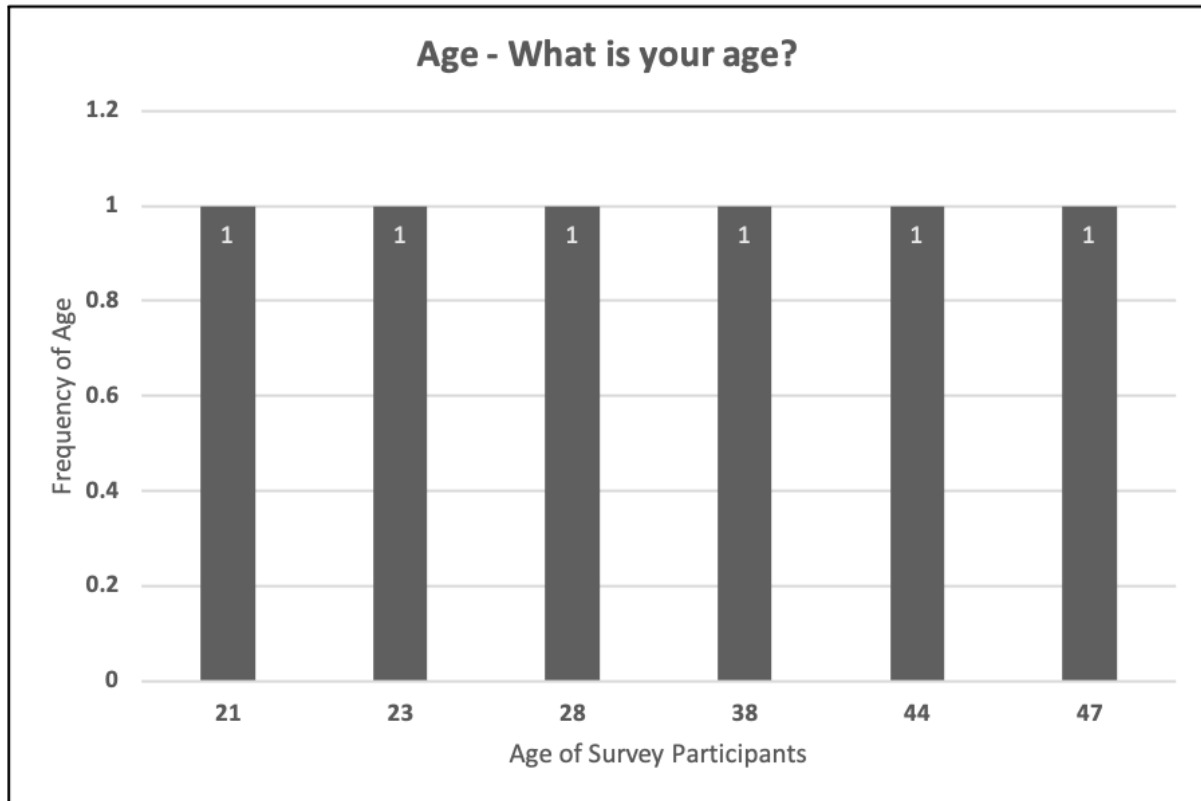


Table 1 - Survey Participant Age Data

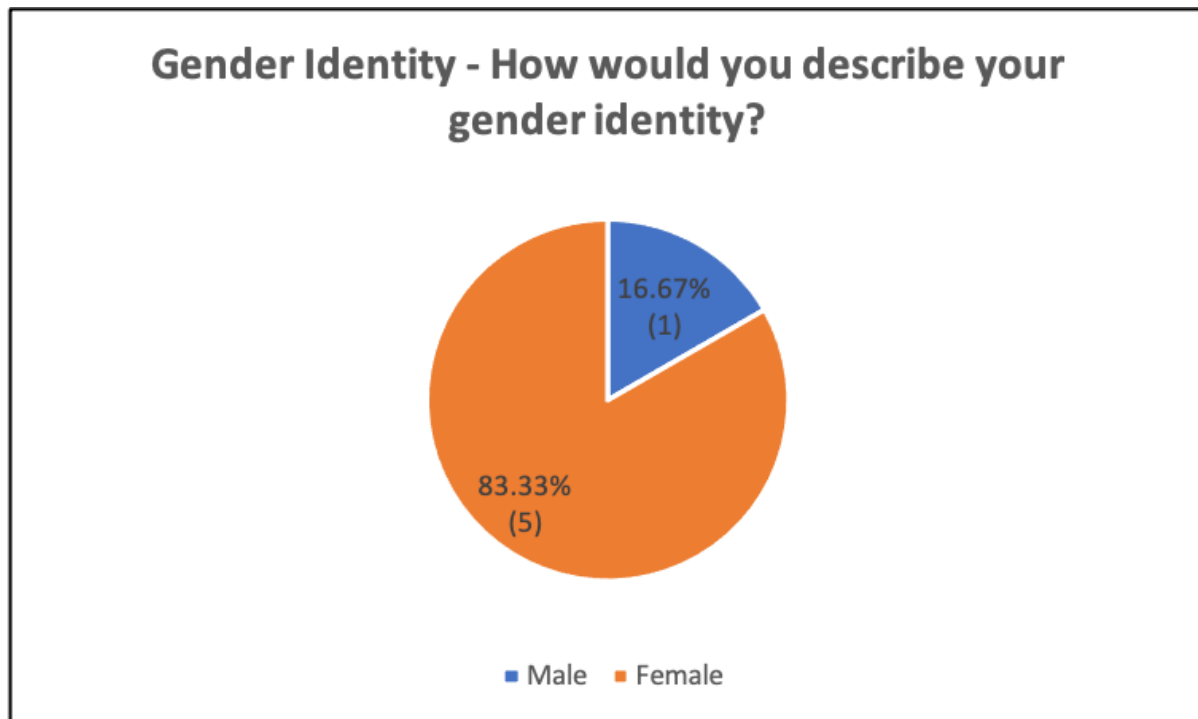


Table 2 - Survey Participant Gender Data

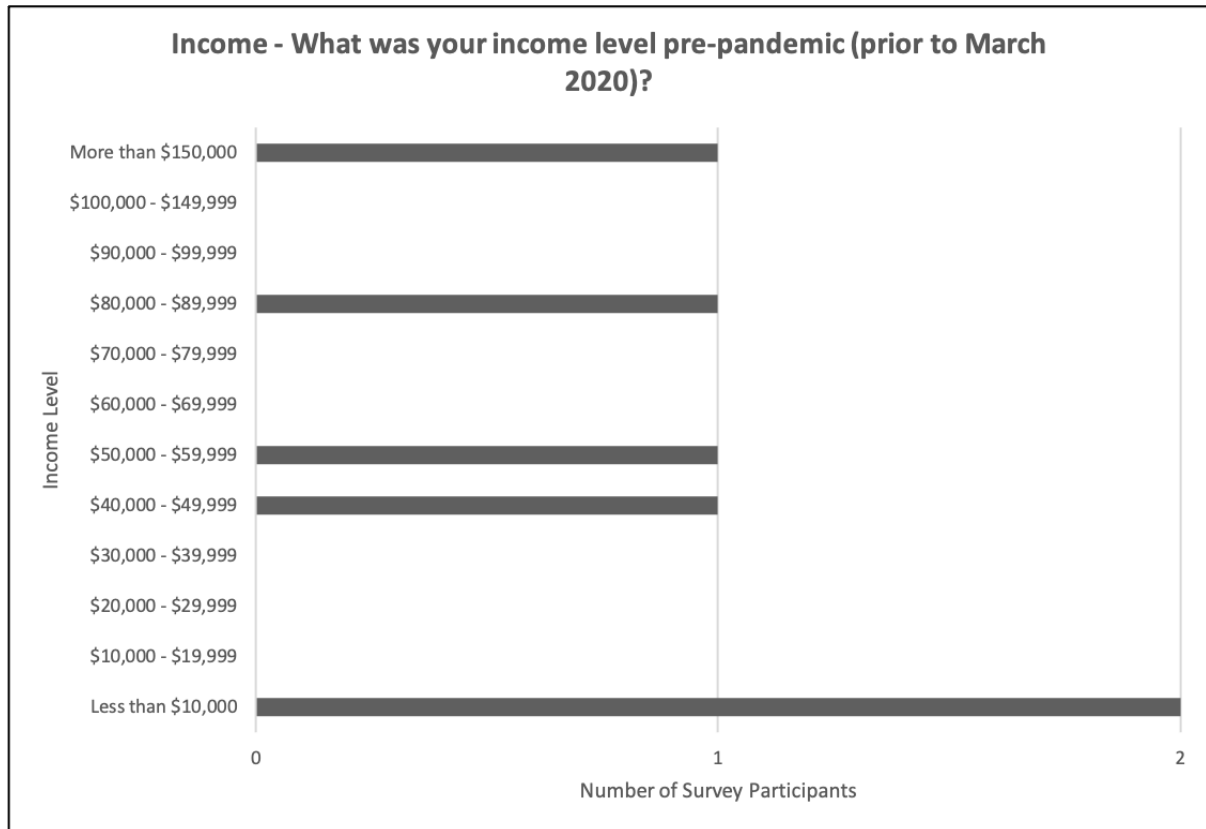


Table 3 - Survey Participant Income Data

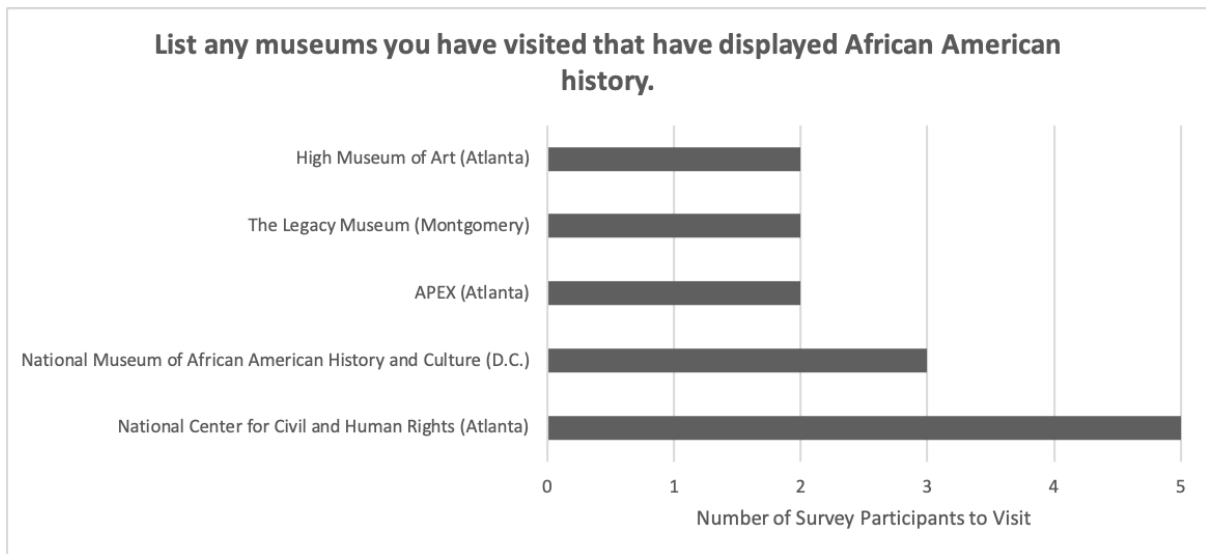


Table 4 - Survey Participant Museum Data

#### ***4.2.2 Survey Intervention***

The Racially Related Trauma Questionnaire was designed to quantify and qualify the emotions and memories triggered by photo elicitation. Prior to completing the questionnaire each week, participants were asked to look at three images specific to either the Atlanta History Center, the African American Panoramic Experience Museum (APEX), or the National Center for Civil and Human Rights. These images were chosen due to their direct relation to African American history and were found through various means – a museum’s online collection database and gallery, a museum’s image search via Google, or a museum’s feature on an architectural web blog. After viewing the images, participants were asked to “ID Your Feelings” then “ID Your Memories.” In the first section of “ID Your Feelings,” individuals were asked to gauge how frequently they felt anger, empowered, sadness, happiness, fear, and discomfort while viewing the images. The section utilized a 5-point Likert scale with 1= never and 5= always. The second section of “ID Your Feelings” asked individuals to describe any other types of emotions not specifically stated and gauge how frequently they felt them using the same 5-point scale. In the first section of “ID Your Memories,” participants were asked to describe any memories that came to mind when they viewed the images and to identify if those memories were racial or discriminatory in nature. The second section asked if the memories were personal or more broadly related to the African American experience. Lastly, participants were asked if their memories were gendered in any way. Results from “ID Your Feelings” were averaged for each emotion across participants per site. Alternatively, results from “ID Your Memories” were coded before being classified into similar categories. These categories were then analyzed against each other, revealing prominent themes.

### 4.2.3 Results from “ID Your Feelings”

During the first week’s questionnaire, participants viewed images from the APEX Museum. As Table 5 reveals, participants almost always felt sadness (4.8) and anger (4.8), but never felt happiness (1.25) or empowered (1.6). Additionally, participants listed four other emotions they felt – frustration (3 or “sometimes”), helplessness (4 or “often”), grief and hope (5 or “always”). What is significant about the results for the APEX Museum is that hope is the only positive emotion felt constantly while viewing the images. However, “hope” was only identified and experienced by a single participant with no explicit explanation as to why.

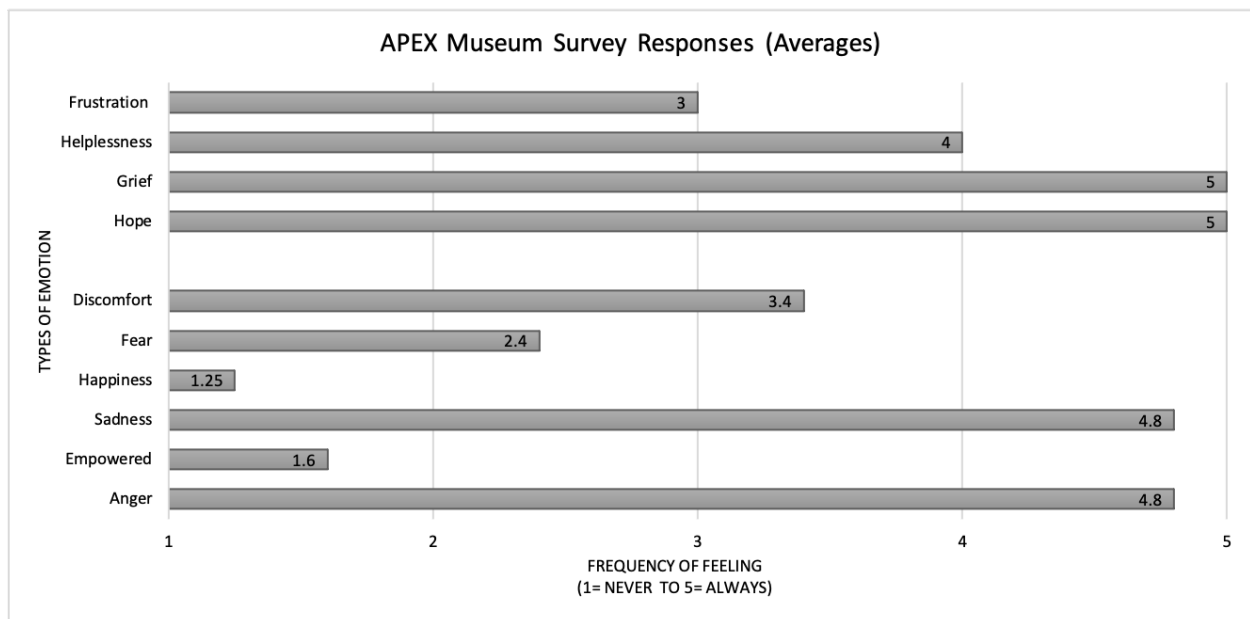


Table 5 - APEX Museum Survey Responses (Averages)

During the second week’s questionnaire, participants viewed images from the ATL History Center. Table 6 shows that participants often felt sadness (4) and sometimes anger (3.5), but rarely experienced happiness (1) or empowerment (1.7) similar to prior week. In addition to these emotions, one participant noted feeling reflective (5) as part of their experience. They defined their “reflectiveness” by their ability to “feel the weight of history in each image” and “imagine others being there” experiencing the same injustices.

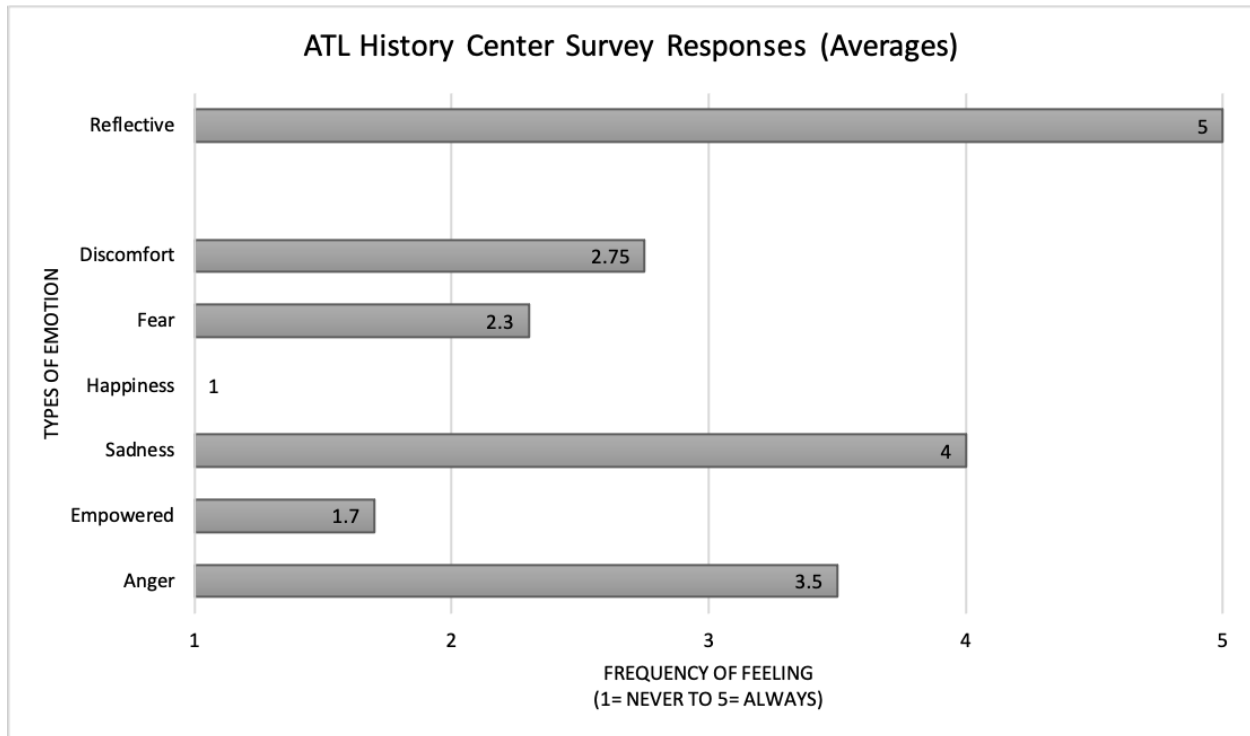


Table 6 - ATL History Center Survey Responses (Averages)

During the last week of the study, participants viewed images from the National Center for Civil and Human Rights. As shown in Table 7, participants often felt anger (4.5), sadness (4.5), and discomfort (4), but never felt happiness (1). The noticeable increase in the frequency participants felt discomfort coincides with the participants' increase in personal memories sparked by their own visitor experiences at the Center itself. Two participants specifically remembered the lunch counter interactive and described both emotional and physical effects. In addition to the emotions listed as part of the survey, one participant also felt vulnerable and anguish at a high frequency (5).

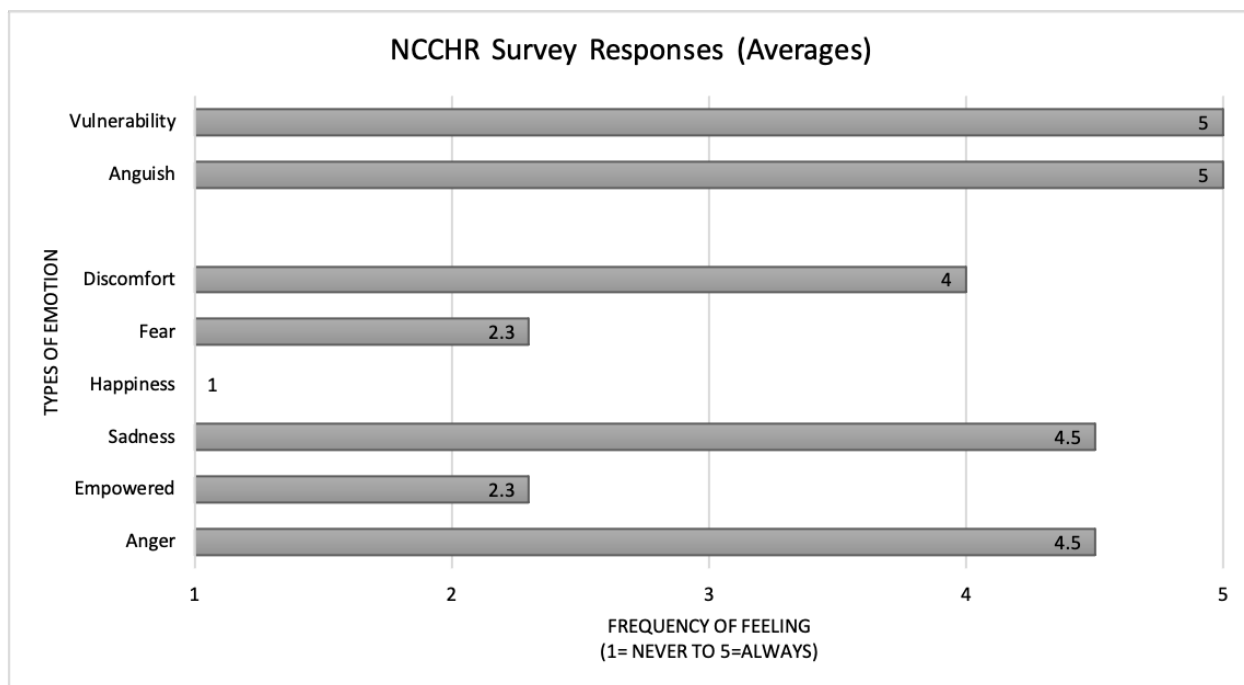


Table 7 - NCCHR Survey Responses (Averages)

#### 4.2.4 Emerging Themes from “ID Your Memories”

##### 4.2.4.1 Remembering Racism

Bringing history to life can be provocative – particularly for those with cultural connections to what is on display. Upon viewing the images from the APEX Museum, the ATL History Center, and the National Center for Civil and Human Rights, many participants described both personal and familial experiences with racism. While one participant described not experiencing racism, another recalled being “threatened to be hung from a tree in my front yard when I was 11 by a group of white boys in Alabama.” Another participant remembered seeing racist memorabilia like the Colored Entrance Only signs as a child. More commonly, participants remembered the first time they were called a racial slur as well as the many instances they’ve been called the “N word by any race” since.

Looking outside of themselves and into their own families, the participants in the study relayed various stories of discrimination that have been passed down from generation to

generation. One such story featured a participant's father who described only being "allowed in the balcony at the theatre." Another story featured the mother of a participant who "had to drink water from a colored only foundation [fountain]." Lastly, a participant remembers their "grandfather telling (me) about his experiences in World War II and how he was called a 'monkey' by some white officers...Here he was trying to be a patriot and he was subjected to taunting and racial discrimination."

#### ***4.2.4.2 Prosthetic Memory and African American Visitor Experiences***

Beyond the personal and communal memories of anti-Black racism initially sparked by the images curated as part of the study, a few participants remembered their specific, in-person experiences with a popular interactive at the National Center for Civil and Human Rights. Located within the Center's "Rolls Down Like Water" exhibition, the lunch counter interactive simulates the experience of a 1960 sit in. Complete with auditory and physical stimuli, the harassment meted out against "modern day demonstrators" can be heard through noise-canceling headphones and felt as a result of an automated jerking mechanism outfitted to the stools. After viewing the image of the lunch counter interactive within the survey, one participant noted that they could "remember sitting at the lunch counter and reliving the experience of what they (sit-in demonstrators) felt and heard." Another participant agreed that the "simulation definitely puts you in a space where you feel that you are really there in the 50s, at a lunch diner protest." In addition to their transportive encounters, participants noted both emotional and physical reactions to the interactive. One participant claimed that the interactive "can be traumatizing," noting how they witnessed many "become extremely emotional, shaking." Another participant noted that they specifically remembered the audio experience, making clear the impact of not only the interactive, but the power of the auditory stimuli itself.

#### 4.2.4.3 *African American History Then, African American Actuality Now*

Exhibitions can be described as visual interpretations of a sole curator's or curatorial team's narrative framing of a historical or increasingly current moment. While they are often perceived as static, exhibitions and the content they display are constantly being reinterpreted by individuals during their visits to public history sites. For participants in this study, their perceptions of African American history were inextricably linked to the persistence of anti-Black violence today. Upon viewing the images, a participant noted that "so much of the history (and present) of African Americans is rooted in pain (physical and emotional) that is difficult to bear." Another participant acknowledged that their memories were colored by movies they'd seen depicting dramatized versions of African American history like "Amistad, or just any movie that showcases the slave trade or segregation."

In addition to participants articulating how pain is directly tied to the African American experience, they also described the United States Civil Rights Movement as a "generational awakening." Many spoke on the courage of civil rights activists who were "trying to change the world around them." Others acknowledged the greater role the broader African American community served during the Civil Rights Movement, stating "the people/martyrs commemorated here [at the NCCHR] are but a small sample of the African American population."

Viewing images of exhibition content related to African American history also caused a few participants to reflect on current cases of racism. One proclaimed, "We are living in our moment of brutality in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and so many of these images...reminded me of that unfortunate continuity." Similarly, another participant stated, "it affects me because I still feel grief when I see it (injustice) happening to someone because it's still in my community." The

brutality they described was almost always gendered with “injustices occurring more often with Black men.” However, many of the participants agreed that while African American men are targeted and their stories are widely publicized, there is still room to simultaneously mourn African American women like “Sandra Bland and feel that loss.”

## 5 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate if visits to museums that interpret African American history trigger emotional reactions and/or traumatic memories in African American visitors. Furthermore, this study sought to understand if there are any differences in African American visitor experiences as it relates to a museum's typology, be that the use of traditional, contemporary, or Afrocentric approaches. This study pursued two research questions:

1. How do African Americans emotionally experience Atlanta area museums that exhibit slavery and the United States Civil Rights Movement?
2. Are there any differences in African American visitor experiences at local Atlanta area museums using traditional, contemporary, or Afrocentric approaches when interpreting slavery and the United States Civil Rights Movement?

Data suggests that African American visitors often felt anger and sadness in response to exhibition images they viewed that depicted slavery and/or the Civil Rights Movement. Notably, participants felt more discomfort when the image featured a highly memorable experience from a museum (i.e., the lunch counter interactive at the National Center for Civil and Human Rights). Additionally, three themes were ascertained from the participants' survey responses. The first theme "***Remembering Racism***" described participants' personal experiences with racism, including those passed down as part of family lore. The second theme "***Prosthetic Memory and African American Visitor Experiences***" is site specific, detailing the ways in which participants' responded to the NCCHR lunch counter interactive as an extension of prosthetic memory. The third theme "***African American History Then, African American Actuality Now***" reveals the participants' perception that African American historical events are inextricably linked to the persistence of anti-Black violence today. Lastly, the data suggests that there is less of a

difference in visitor response as it relates to a museum's typology. Where the difference is evident is in a museum's use of highly interactive simulations that engage visitors with content.

## **5.1 Discussion**

### ***5.1.1 African American Emotional Experiences at Atlanta Museums***

Just as Clark et al. (2011) found that Black visitors to the Kingsley Plantation were more likely to experience sadness, the present study found that participants almost always felt sadness and anger when viewing exhibition images from the APEX, the ATL History Center, and the NCCHR. However, unlike the case studies on roots tourism and African slave castles, participants did not express shock and rarely experienced fear (Abaidoo et al., 2019; Amuquandoh et al., 2008; Mowatt, et al., 2011; Boateng et al., 2018). One can argue that the virtual nature of the current study, in comparison to the on-site visit at a slave castle would expectedly yield different results. This study's participants were not able to feel the sensations of slavery and the Civil Rights Movement like the African American visitors to the Elmina and Cape Coast Castles as Mowatt et al. (2011) describes. However, there was a noticeable increase in discomfort when an image of the lunch counter interactive was shown as part of the NCCHR survey intervention. Coupled with participants' own memories of their experience at the counter, the study was briefly able to capture the moment in which a participant acknowledged that such an experience "can be traumatizing."

#### ***5.1.1.1 Bearing Witness***

As the participants expressed anger and sadness upon viewing the exhibition images, they also chose to bear witness to their personal experiences with racism. Brooms (2011) and Rosenzweig et al. (1998) both acknowledge this type of personal engagement is more frequent amongst African Americans on visits to museums. However, through Sharpe's (2016) theoretical

interpretations of the wake, one can see the way in which targeted exercises in memory, like the touring of an exhibition related to one's cultural/ethnic heritage, can cause individuals to find themselves not only in bouts of memory, but in the wake itself. Wakes are often associated with recent death and involve a ritualization of grief in which the departed is remembered and their life detailed. Similarly, many of the participants of the study relayed memories of their own experiences with racism. As each participant took part in their own wake, there was a noticeable difference in the way a participant in their early 20s remembered racism and how those in their late 20s and late 40s did so. This difference also fell along generational lines between Generation Z (ages 10 – 25), Millennials (ages 26 – 41), and Generation X (ages 42 – 57). Participant 43662, a 21 year old female, after viewing images from the APEX museum remarked “Although I have not experienced racism or even someone being racist towards me, I mourn those lives that were lost.” Their experience is markedly different from the older participants in the study, aged 28 to 47. Participant 61788, a 28 year old female, recalls “I was threatened to be hung from a tree in my front yard when I was 11 by a group of white boys in Alabama, and the first picture reminds me of how small I felt in that moment.” Participant SB1221, a 38 year old male, noted “Viewing the lunch counter image makes me think of the first time I was called a racial slur by a classmate in grade school.” While the generational difference is notable, experiences in African American communities are not monolithic, with some individuals never experiencing racism at all. However, it is possible that as Nadal, et al. (2019) posited in their study that how one perceives discrimination in the first place – be it no aggression or micro/macroaggression – determines how traumatic or not an experience truly is.

### ***5.1.1.2 Bearing Witness for Others***

More than bearing witness for oneself, the participants shared a penchant for detailing the struggles of their own families' experiences with racism, along with the struggles of racism facing African American communities as a whole. Just as Rosenzweig et al. (1998) found as part of their work, the participants of this study made direct personal connections to the exhibition images they saw by way of familial oral histories. While the transference of this racialized family knowledge from generation to generation speaks to Cross Jr.'s (1998) legacy of Black coping as strategy, it also adds a layer of dimension to Sharpe's conceptualization of the wake. The wake is compounded with each passing generation. Each telling and retelling of family racial trauma reverberates out, increasingly intensified by one's personal experiences with racism and instances of anti-Black violence shared by the media.

Embracing a collective African American identity built upon legacies of slavery and coping (Eyerman, 2004; Cross Jr., 1998), participants in the study bore witness to racial trauma they had not experienced themselves, but yet felt strongly connected to. Referencing Participant 43662's quote from the prior section, she stated that she "mourn[ed] those lives that were lost." The "lives" she's referring to are not ones directly related to her, yet she still is able to feel that loss and vocalize it. She comments in another survey that she "still feel[s] grief when I see it (injustices) happening to someone because it's still in my community." This ownership of a larger African American experience is a common thread reiterated by other participants throughout the findings, particularly as it relates to African American historical trauma.

Participants also bore witness to familial racial trauma. Participant 19202, a 44 year old female, recalled some of the stories her parents shared with her as she was growing up. Viewing

material culture from the Jim Crow South housed in the Atlanta History Center's collections elicited the following response:

The "Colored Entrance Only" sign reminds me of a story my Dad told me. My dad talked about when he would go to the movies they were only allowed in the balcony at the theatre and it just shocked me that my dad and my family had to experience that.

Similarly, Participant 43071, a 47 year old female, had her own personal recollections of the sign:

I remember seeing signs like the "Colored Entrance Only" in my childhood. My grandfather kept some of these as a reminder of how poorly African Americans were treated and he would talk to all of his descendants about what life was like "back then." He also used those stories to make sure that we never forgot where we came from and how much hardship those who had come before us had endured.

Harkening back to early grassroots Black museums that sought to preserve the history of their own communities, Participant 43071's grandfather wanted to preserve an ugly reality about America's past. What is significant about his preservation of a "Colored Only" sign is that unlike photography, which Fusco (2003) argues is performative, the sign is an object – void of any interpretation that a photographic lens inevitably provides. More so, the participant's grandfather's collection of the object actively subverts the "usable past" formulated around segregation in the United States. It is a reminder to his descendants and all others who encounter it that the realities of segregation cannot be glossed over with recollections of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech and the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965. Rather, the preservation of the "Colored Only" sign combats what Trouillot (2015) calls "formulas of erasure" (p. 96).

Furthermore, the aforementioned act of preservation represents a moment of rupture as described in Sharpe's (2016) conceptualization of wake work. That is, the "Colored Only" sign becomes physical evidence not only of the humanity denied the participant's grandfather in segregated American society, but his eventual persistence in the midst of it. That is – the sign becomes representative of a life once imagined in spite of Black dehumanization. Moreso, the grandfather's collection of the sign is agentic for its purpose of informing a new generation of familial pride and survival.

### ***5.1.1.3 Routine Mourning of African American History***

When viewing exhibition images from the APEX, ATL History Center, and the NCCHR, participants made direct links from the legacies of slavery and the U.S. Civil Rights Movement to the persistence of modern day anti-Black violence in the United States. As depicted in Onwuachi-Willig's (2016) theory of routine harm, participants were more frustrated with the continuance and normalization of violence against African Americans in the 21<sup>st</sup> century than the exhibitions' interpretations of slavery. Rather, it seems that slavery, as a historical moment in our nation's history, is situated far enough in the past not to cause immediate frustration – although as was mentioned previously, did elicit anger and sadness in participants. However, in relating more explicitly with the anti-Blackness in the present, Participant 43071, a 47 year old female, remarked:

We are living in our own moment of brutality in the 21st century and so many of these images, especially the first two reminded me of that unfortunate continuity. Things are different, but so much of the history (and present) of African Americans is rooted in pain (physical and emotional) that it is difficult to bear.

Comparably, Participant 43662, a 21 year old female, commented:

It brings me much emotional grief and to see situations where Black people are wrongfully treated or killed, it's like a brother or sister to me. It's also personal to me since you never know who this can happen to.

In discussing how cultural trauma can form from routine harm, Onwuachi-Willig (2016) states that public forums should be created to discuss the harm meted out against subjugated groups. With the ideological shift museums experienced in the 1980s and 1990s, these institutions became spaces that encouraged dialogue with the restructuring of tours and inclusion of public programming (Walhimer, 2015). As revealed by the employees from the ATL History Center and NCCHR, each institution is working towards using exhibitions and programming to better navigate the telling of a holistic truth of African American history that allows people to build empathy while relaying difficult stories. Institutions, like the ATL History Center and the NCCHR, must consider what this study reveals. When interpreting African American history, which constitutes a past that is not yet past, one must acknowledge that African American visitors may take part in a routine act of mourning – a routine wake as it were, and support should be provided in a way that allows visitors multiple ways to grieve and reflect.

### ***5.1.2 African American Visitor Experiences and Museum Typology in Atlanta***

The data suggests that there was little to no difference in visitor response as it relates to a museum's typology. However, if a site incorporated the use of a highly interactive simulation, participants were more likely to recall their experience and how they felt taking part. For two participants in the study, 43662 and JW0804, this memory came from the lunch counter interactive at the NCCHR. When discussing the interactive at the NCCHR, Employee Interviewee 3 stated:

You know, in the Civil Rights exhibition we have that lunch counter experience. That is not new news for anybody who is even cursorily familiar with the Civil Rights Movement. There's nothing new about that. We know that there was a sit-in movement. We've seen the pictures. We know that people were talked to in certain ways, threatened, even experienced violence. To sit there and have that experience is by far the most impactful experience in terms of what visitors report to us.

In describing their experience with the lunch counter interactive, Participant 43662, a 21 year old female, recalled:

I went to the National Center for Civil and Human Rights. Viewing the lunch counter simulation makes me remember the audio experience. The simulation definitely puts you in a space where you feel that you are really there in the 50s, at a lunch diner protest. It can be traumatizing, I've seen many while I was there become extremely emotional, shocking, it's definitely very humbling. To think about how the actual event is much worse than that, it's sickening to think about.

Participant JW0804, a 28 year old female, felt similarly and remarked that on their visit they could "remember sitting at the lunch counter and reliving the experience of what they felt and heard."

#### ***5.1.2.1 Acknowledging the Relationship Between Collective Memory and Prosthetic Memory as Part of African American Visitor Experiences***

The phenomenon described by both participants, in which they "relived the experience," has been described in part by Alison Landsberg as prosthetic memory. According to Landsberg (2004), prosthetic memory encapsulates those memories that are not the result of a person's direct lived experience, but their engagement with cultural products, i.e., movies, museums, etc.

While the participants in the study were not born during the Civil Rights era and therefore could not directly experience a sit-in, their experiences with the lunch counter interactive still had a measurable emotional effect on them – as noted by the slight increase in frequency in which they felt discomfort when viewing the exhibition images for the NCCHR (3 - sometimes and 4 – often, respectively). Other studies and reports have shown that such responses are common (Jones, 1994; Rose, 2016). Jones (1994) reported that two of the African American staffers portraying the enslaved as part of the 1994 Colonial Williamsburg slave auction were left feeling drained and having to manage multiple emotions – pride, anger, and sadness. Likewise, Rose (2016) describes how history workers at the Magnolia Mound Plantation initially struggled with learning about the history of the enslaved population, finding it hard and painful.

Additionally, this study reveals that collective memory complicates the exchangeability of prosthetic memory – that is, it questions the feasibility of African American visitors to fully “take off” or disengage from interactives that simulate events in African American history. Landsburg (2003) argues that prosthetic memory is inauthentic and unnatural, and therefore cannot be the property of any group. However, the lunch counter sit-in interactive at the NCCHR is a significant moment in the Civil Rights Movement that resides in African American collective memory. As researchers have asserted, the legacies and traumas of slavery and its afterlives are important to the construction and conceptualization of African American identity (Caruth, 1995; Davis, 2016; DeGruy, 2005; Eyerman, 2006; Raiford, 2009; Sharpe, 2016). As well, the formation of a collective African American identity in combination with one’s existence in the paradoxical wake encourages a form of consciousness of Black being and unbeing “in and outside the contemporary” moment (Sharpe, 2016, p. 14). As reflected in the study, the

frustration described by participants was tied to this endurance of racial inequality and the constant hold it has on life.

Although African American visitors to the NCCHR can physically “put on” and “take off” the lunch counter sit-in experience, they cannot remove their Blackness. For the participants in the study, a collective memory of racialized discrimination, both in the past and present, resides within the body as shown in their tendencies to bear witness to the memories that are part of themselves. Because of these embodied collective memories, the lunch counter sit-in interactive is not unfamiliar or lacking authenticity for African American visitors. Rather, collective memory renders the interactive historically authentic in that African American visitors have the cultural capacity to induce “an honesty vis-à-vis the present as it represents that past” (Trouillot, p. 148).

## **5.2 Limitations**

Although care was taken to reduce any potential limitations of the study, certain methodological choices should be addressed. As visual and interactive experiences, the study was unable to fully replicate what the Atlanta History Center, the National Center for Civil and Human Rights, and the African American Panoramic Experience Museum affords their visitors on trips to their sites. While the choice to create exhibition slide decks of each museum was determined by the ongoing global health pandemic, it must be acknowledged that images of an exhibition could not replace an in-person visit. Furthermore, care was taken to not gather surface conclusions from the self-reported data by participants. Emotions are not experienced uniformly across the board, and as such, participants may have identified and interpreted certain emotions differently than the researcher. When provided by the participant, explanations of emotional feelings were included within the findings. Lastly, due to its smaller sample size, the conclusions

of the study should not be generalized across a larger population, but should inform further study of African American museum visitors in the metro Atlanta area.

### **5.3 Recommendations for Future Research**

#### ***5.3.1 Conduct Future Interventions On-site***

Due to the severity of the global health pandemic, the study was conducted remotely. For future research, the study would benefit from being conducted on-site with the permission of each respective institution. Conducting the study on-site would not only foster buy-in from museum employees who will be interviewed as part of the work, but also strengthen the collaboration between the researcher and the institution itself. An on-site study would also enhance the current recruitment strategies implemented by the researcher. On-site recruitment could take advantage of high traffic days at each museum, which would inevitably increase participation. Lastly, an on-site study would provide the researcher the chance to better gauge the emotional experiences of African American participants. Utilizing brief in-person interviews, participants could expound upon their feelings outside of the survey. Video recordings could capture these responses along with what is often left unsaid – through facial expressions and body language.

#### ***5.3.2 Conduct Future Studies with Different Age Populations***

As previously described in the findings, the present study only collected data from participants aged 21 to 47 years old. While the existing sample fits squarely within the age demographics that regularly visits museums, there are two other groups that would benefit from study – 6<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> grade students and members of the Baby Boomer generation. Middle and high school students receive instruction on both state and U.S. history in 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades respectively. These courses, particularly as it relates to the Georgia Standards of Excellence in

social studies, often highlight U.S. based slavery and the Civil Rights Movement. A future study could investigate how these students emotionally experience exhibitions on African American history following classroom instruction on these aforementioned moments in history. Similarly, adults of the Baby Boomer generation also learned about slavery while in grade school, however, many also experienced the Civil Rights Movement first-hand. Previous research that the researcher has conducted on her own has revealed that African American Baby Boomers do have visceral memories of the Civil Rights era that is triggered by photo elicitation of exhibition content featuring 1950s and 1960s material culture. A future study could delve deeper into these initial findings by investigating how individuals that lived through the Civil Rights era emotionally experience exhibitions interpreting that same history.

### ***5.3.3 Examine NCCHR Lunch Counter Interactive as Prosthetic Memory***

While the present research study sought to analyze three different museum sites, the findings suggest that analyzing a single interactive located within an exhibition may also yield meaningful data. Building off the theme "Prosthetic Memory and African American Experiences," future research should investigate the NCCHR Lunch Counter interactive as a cultural product of prosthetic memory and how this form of memory contends with the African American experience. That is, how does the continued injustices meted out against and experienced by generations of African Americans influence the ways in which the NCCHR lunch counter interactive is perceived by African American visitors. Future research should investigate if the interactive is merely prosthetic for African American participants, or if historical trauma compounded by modern day atrocities makes it less of an artificial experience and more organic.

#### 5.4 Epilogue

*Sitting in a recreation of the famed D.C. restaurant Ben's Chili Bowl at Georgia Tech's Ferst Center for the Arts, you don an Oculus GO virtual reality headset. The fit is tight around your face, blocking out any and all light in the gallery. As your eyes readjust to the darkness, you listen to the male student worker welcome you and your co-workers to *Traveling While Black*. Featuring multigenerational stories of African Americans' restricted movement in the United States during the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, *Traveling While Black* uses virtual reality to totally immerse participants in tales of discrimination, violence, ingenuity, and hope. As the experience's narrative pulls you toward the present, you see the grainy video of Tamir Rice playing in the park before he is shot by police officers. His mother appears next, seated across from you in the booth. She talks about the unbearable choice she had to make – leaving one child behind with the police officers responsible to be with the other dying on his way to the hospital. As she continues, you can hear the breathing of your co-worker seated beside you change. It's ragged, coming in spurts. She's also a Black mother of a growing Black boy. It's obvious now. She's crying.*

As racial tensions have increased in recent years, there has been an influx of museums and public history sites working to reevaluate their conservation and interpretative practices, as well as memorialize the experiences of racial minorities, and particularly that of African Americans. While many steps have been taken since the 1960s and 1970s to promote historically accurate and inclusive narratives within exhibitions, scholarly research is still lacking in documenting how African American museum visitors emotionally experience exhibitions featuring difficult racial histories with connections to modern day discrimination. Questions for the future abound. Should historical moments only be showcased on a macro level? How often

are these historical issues tied to the present? What narratives get lost when we do not make those connections? By using sensory-driven interactives, are we eliciting empathy or trauma?

As I drove home from *Traveling While Black*, it suddenly dawned on me. Here I was unconsciously taking part in my own research. I walked into the experience, prepared to absorb the heartbreak and pain of what I was going to see. My fellow co-workers did the same – the majority of them Black women. Yet, we all walked away with the same sadness and anger. Talking amongst ourselves in the area designed for reflection, we listened to each other relay our own traumas and that of our families, acknowledging in exasperation that even in the midst of progress there has not been much change. As I think of historians, curators, and other museum professionals designing exhibitions of our most recent historical past as African Americans in this country, may they consider visitor groups like us that live and breathe their Blackness on the daily.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Recruitment

#### *Appendix A.1 – Email (Survey Participants)*

Morning/Afternoon!

My name is Blair Banks and I am a graduate student at Georgia State University in the Department of African American Studies. For my master's thesis, I am conducting a study on African American visitor experiences at museums that exhibit African American history. The purpose of this study is to investigate if visits to these particular types of museums cause any emotional reactions and/or traumatic memories in African American visitors.

Currently, I am looking for the following:

- Self-identifying African Americans
- Between the ages of 18 and 54 years old
- have visited the Atlanta History Center, the APEX, or the National Center for Civil and Human Rights in the last three years

Those interested would participate in a three-week study. Each week, you will view three digital images from one of three Atlanta area museums and complete a short online survey. As part of the survey, you will identify any emotions or memories that surfaced when you looked at the images. This should take between fifteen and twenty minutes for you to complete each week. In total, you will spend up to sixty minutes over the course of three weeks viewing digital images from an Atlanta area museum and completing online surveys.

Please share this opportunity with all interested parties. Any questions should be forwarded to Blair Banks at [bbanks24@student.gsu.edu](mailto:bbanks24@student.gsu.edu).

Thanks again!

Blair

*Appendix A.2 – Email (Interview Participants)*

Morning/Afternoon!

My name is Blair Banks and I am a graduate student at Georgia State University in the Department of African American Studies. For my master's thesis, I am conducting a study on African American visitor experiences at museums that exhibit African American history. The purpose of this study is to investigate if visits to these particular types of museums cause any emotional reactions and/or traumatic memories in African American visitors.

Currently, I am looking for the following:

- Museum professional working at either the Atlanta History Center, the APEX, and the National Center for Civil and Human Rights
- Works within either the exhibitions and/or education department of their respective institution

Those interested would participate in a single, forty-five minute virtual interview. During this interview, you will be asked questions about the curatorial and interpretative approaches your institution (i.e., the museum you work for) uses when creating programming for the public.

Furthermore, you will also be asked questions about your job and the role you play within the museum.

Please share this opportunity with any of your colleagues that might be interested. Any questions should be forwarded to Blair Banks at [bbanks24@student.gsu.edu](mailto:bbanks24@student.gsu.edu).

Thanks again!

Blair

*Appendix A.3 – Recruitment Flyer (Survey Participants)*

# DO YOU ENJOY MUSEUMS?

You may be eligible to participate in a **three-week** study about local Atlanta museums and how they interpret **African American history**.

## Are You Eligible?

**18 to 54** years old

Identify as **African American**

Have visited the

**ATL History Center,**

the **APEX,** or

the **National Center for Civil and Human Rights** in the last **3 years**

## What Will You Do?

View exhibition images from local Atlanta museums

Complete **three** short, online surveys about how you felt viewing the exhibition images.

**Interested?** Contact Blair Banks at [bbanks24@student.gsu.edu](mailto:bbanks24@student.gsu.edu)



*Figure 1*

## **Appendix B: Informed Consent**

### *Appendix B.1 – Survey Participants*

Georgia State University

Informed Consent

Title: (Re)Traumatization on Display: Balancing History, Trauma, & African American Visitor Experiences at Atlanta’s Museums

Principal Investigator: Dr. Lia T. Bascomb

Student Principal Investigator: Blair Banks

#### Purpose

You are being asked to take part in a research study. If you decide to take part, you will look at images from three Atlanta-area museum exhibitions and complete three short, online surveys.

The purpose of this study is to investigate if visits to museums about African American history cause any emotional reactions and/or traumatic memories in African American visitors.

#### Procedures

The research study will take place online and last three weeks. Each week, the Student PI will provide you with three, digital copies of exhibition images from one of the three following museums: the Atlanta History Center, the National Center for Civil and Human Rights, and the African American Panoramic Experience Museum (APEX). After viewing the images, you will be asked to complete a short online survey. As part of the survey, you will identify any emotions you felt or memories that surfaced when you looked at the images. Viewing the images and filling out the online survey will take between fifteen and twenty minutes. In total, you will spend up to sixty minutes over the course of three weeks viewing digital images from an Atlanta area museum and completing online surveys.

### Confidentiality and Data Collection

Before you begin, you will be assigned a random ID. You will use the ID when you fill out each of the online surveys. The student investigator is using random IDs to make sure that your responses remain anonymous and cannot be traced back to you.

Your responses will be stored on a secure cloud storage service for five years once this study comes to an end.

### Risks

Possible risks of this study include revictimization and retraumatization. If this occurs, please refer to the following list of resources:

Georgia Crisis and Access Line (Available 24 hrs., 365 days/year) – 1-800-715-4225

GSU Counseling Center – (404) 413-1640

Spelman College Counseling Center – (404) 270-5249

Clark Atlanta University Counseling and Disability Services – (404) 880-8044

### Benefits

Your participation will further research in African American Studies and Tourism Studies to create responsible, public history programming for other African Americans.

### Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal

You do not have to be in this study. You may skip questions or stop participating at any time.

### Contact Information

Please contact the Student PI if you have any questions about the study or your rights as a participant.

PI - Dr. Lia T. Bascomb at [lbascorb@gsu.edu](mailto:lbascorb@gsu.edu)

Student PI - Blair Banks at [bbanks24@student.gsu.edu](mailto:bbanks24@student.gsu.edu)

Copy of Consent Form

You will provide a copy of this signed consent form to the researcher.

Consent

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

---

Participant Name

---

Date

*Appendix B.2 – Interview Participants*

Georgia State University

Informed Consent

Title: (Re)Traumatization on Display: Balancing History, Trauma, & African American Visitor Experiences at Atlanta's Museums

Principal Investigator: Dr. Lia T. Bascomb

Student Principal Investigator: Blair Banks

Purpose

You are being asked to take part in a research study. If you decide to take part, you will be asked to complete one virtual interview. The purpose of this study is to investigate if visits to museums about African American history cause any emotional reactions and/or traumatic memories in African American visitors.

Procedures

The interview will last for forty-five minutes virtually, using an online video-conferencing technology at a time mutually agreed upon by you and the student principal investigator. During this interview, you will be asked questions about the curatorial and interpretative approaches your institution (i.e., the museum you work for) uses when creating programming for the public. You will also be asked questions about your job and the role you play within the museum. Each interview will be audio recorded with your permission. You will have the option of turning your camera on or off at any time.

Confidentiality and Data Collection

All identifying features of your interview will be removed, with only the name of the museum and department (education or exhibition) remaining. You may provide the student principal

investigator with a pseudonym to use. The student principal investigator will transcribe the audio from your interview, and email a digital copy for you to look over for accuracy. If there are any mistakes, you are encouraged to reply with corrections and/or clarifications. The transcription of the interview will be digitally stored on a secure cloud storage service for upwards of five years for the Student PI's future research endeavors. After the audio has been transcribed and you have approved, the recording will be discarded.

### Benefits

Your participation will further research in African American Studies and Tourism Studies to create responsible, public history programming for other African Americans.

### Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal

You do not have to be in this study. You may skip interview questions or stop participating at any time.

### Contact Information

Please contact the Student PI if you have any questions about the study or your rights as a participant.

PI - Dr. Lia T. Bascomb at [lbascorb@gsu.edu](mailto:lbascorb@gsu.edu)

Student PI - Blair Banks at [bbanks24@student.gsu.edu](mailto:bbanks24@student.gsu.edu)

### Copy of Consent Form

You will provide a copy of this signed consent form to the researcher.

### Consent

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

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Participant Name

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Date

**Appendix C: Survey Tools**

*Appendix C.1 – Screening Form*

(Re)Traumatization on Display: Participant Screening Form

Introduction **Title of Study:**

(Re)Traumatization on Display: Balancing History, Trauma, & African American Visitor

Experiences at Atlanta’s Museums

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to investigate if visits to museums that interpret African American history trigger emotional reactions and/or traumatic memories in African American visitors. This study also seeks to understand if there are any differences in African American visitor experiences at museums that utilize traditional, contemporary, or Afrocentric approaches when interpreting African American history.

Participant Screening Form:

Prior to participation in the study, all interested candidates must submit the following screening form. This screening form will determine whether you are eligible to participate in the study or not.

All interested candidates will be notified if they are **eligible** or **ineligible** to participate in the study. Data collected from this screening form will be used only to determine eligibility and discarded once the study has begun.

Age How old are you?

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Racial and Ethnic ID How do you racially and/or ethnically identify?

\*Select all identifiers that apply.\*

- White/Caucasian (1)
- Black/African American (2)
- Hispanic or Latino or Latinx (3)
- Native American or American Indian (4)
- Asian American or Pacific Islander (5)

*Display This Question:*

*If How do you racially and/or ethnically identify? \*Select all identifiers that apply.\* =  
Black/African American*

Defining AA For the purposes of this study, African Americans are defined as the descendants of enslaved Africans held captive in the United States of America.

To the best of your knowledge, were your ancestors enslaved in the United States prior to the abolition of slavery?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Atlanta Museums Have you visited any of the following museums in-person within the last three years?

\*Select all museums that apply.\*

African American Panoramic Experience Museum (APEX Museum) (1)

Atlanta History Center (2)

National Center for Civil and Human Rights (3)

Email Please provide your email.

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*Appendix C.2 – Demographic Survey*

**(Re)Traumatization on Display: Demographic Survey**

Demographic Survey Prior to the start of the study, participants are asked to complete the following demographic survey. **(Approximate Completion Time: 5 - 10 minutes)**

**Participant ID** Here is your Participant ID Number: `{e://Field/Random%20ID}`

Please copy this number and store it in a familiar place. You will use your Participant ID Number **throughout** the length of the study (i.e. when filling out surveys, etc.)

Age What is your age?

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Gender Identity How would you describe your gender identity?

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Prefer to self describe as (non-binary, gender-fluid, agender, please specify) (3)
- Prefer not to say (4)

College/University Are you currently enrolled in a college or university?

- Yes (21)
- No (22)

College/UniCont. If you are enrolled, what college or university do you attend and are you an undergraduate or graduate level student? (i.e. GSU, Graduate)

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Employment Are you currently employed?

Yes (21)

No (22)

Occupation What is your current occupation?

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Income What was your income level pre-pandemic (prior to March 2020)?

- Less than \$10,000 (27)
- \$10,000 - \$19,999 (28)
- \$20,000 - \$29,999 (29)
- \$30,000 - \$39,999 (30)
- \$40,000 - \$49,999 (31)
- \$50,000 - \$59,999 (32)
- \$60,000 - \$69,999 (33)
- \$70,000 - \$79,999 (34)
- \$80,000 - \$89,999 (35)
- \$90,000 - \$99,999 (36)
- \$100,000 - \$149,999 (37)
- More than \$150,000 (38)

Residence What is your current city of residence (i.e. Atlanta)?

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Museum Visits List any museums you have visited that have displayed African American history.

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Interest Rate your interest in museums that exhibit African American history.

- Extremely interested (88)
- Very interested (89)
- Moderately interested (90)
- Slightly interested (91)
- Not interested at all (92)

*Appendix C.3 – Racially Related Trauma Questionnaire*

(Re)Traumatization on Display: Racially Related Trauma Questionnaire

Introduction Title of Study:

(Re)Traumatization on Display: Balancing History, Trauma, & African American Visitor Experiences at Atlanta’s Museums

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to investigate if visits to museums that interpret African American history trigger emotional reactions and/or traumatic memories in African American visitors. This study also seeks to understand if there are any differences in African American visitor experiences at museums that utilize traditional, contemporary, or Afrocentric approaches when interpreting African American history.

Racially Related Trauma Questionnaire:

Prior to completing this study, you will view three exhibition images from a local metro Atlanta area museum. After viewing the images, you will complete the following questionnaire, identifying any emotions you felt as you looked at the images. You will also identify any memories of discrimination or racial trauma that surfaced in your mind as you looked at the images.

Participant ID

What is your Participant ID Number?

---

ID Your Feelings

Use this sliding scale to rate how **frequently** you felt the emotions listed below when you viewed the three images. The table uses a 5-point scale as described below (1= never and 5 = always).

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
	1	2	3	3	4 5
Anger ()					
Empowered ()					
Sadness ()					
Happiness ()					
Fear ()					
Discomfort ()					

ID Your Feelings

Were there any other emotions you felt when viewing the three images? Describe those emotions below and how frequently you felt them. Be sure to use the five-point scale to note how frequently you felt the emotion(s). **Remember: (1= never and 5 = always).**

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ID Your Memories

Describe any memories that came to mind as you viewed the images. Are they racial or discriminatory in nature?

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ID Your Memories

Are the memories personal to your experience or a broader African American experience?

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ID Your Memories

Are the memories gendered in any way? For example, do they feature mostly African American women or African American men?

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## **Appendix D: Interview Protocol**

### Interview Protocol

Re (Traumatization) on Display: Balancing History, Trauma, & African American Visitor  
Experiences at Atlanta's Museums

Interviewer: Hi! How are you? My name is Blair Banks and I am a graduate student at Georgia State University. I'm here to learn about your experiences as a museum professional working at the ATL History Center/National Center for Civil and Human Rights/APEX. There are no right or wrong answers. I want you to feel comfortable saying what you really think and how you really feel. That being said, if you would like to skip a question or stop the interview, you may do so at any time. If it is okay with you, I will also be recording the audio from our conversation since my attention will be focused on our conversation. If you are uncomfortable being filmed, please feel free to turn off your camera, but leave your mic on.

Everything you say will remain confidential, and care will be taken to remove any identifying features from your interview in the analysis. Last week, I emailed a consent form over to you and I wanted to let you know that I received your signed copy. Do you have any questions about the form or this study before we get started?

### Questions

- I. Interviewee Background
  - a. Tell me a little about yourself.
    - i. Probe: Where did you grow up?

What was your community like?

What is your educational background (college, grad school, certifications)?

b. What is the earliest memory you have of museums?

i. Probe: What memory of museums was most impactful for you?

Is that memory a reference point for your current work?

## II. Museum Background

a. How did you get into museum work?

i. Probe: Were there certain classes that you took that spurred your interest?

Were you a former volunteer?

b. What museum do you work at currently?

i. Probe: What is your current role?

How did you get into your current role?

What are your day-to-day responsibilities?

How often do you collaborate with the education/exhibition departments?

c. What is the mission and/or vision of your institution?

i. Probe: How does the mission or vision impact your work?

d. How does your museum interpret African American history?

i. Probe: Are there certain strategies or techniques you use to tell the story of

African Americans?

In regards to the interpretation of African American history, what reactions or feedback have you received from the audience?

Are reactions and feedback different as it relates to race?

Has the interpretation of African American history changed in your time at your current job? How about over the span of your career?

e. If you could change the way African American history is interpreted, what would you do differently?

i. Probe: Do you feel that the museum field is ready for those changes?

Do you feel that your institution is ready for those changes?