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## Asking for Forgiveness: Negotiating the Creation of Memory through Public Memorialization

Alyssa Castronuovo  
*William & Mary*

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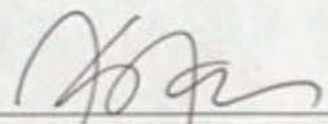
Asking for Forgiveness:  
Negotiating the Creation of Memory through Public Memorialization

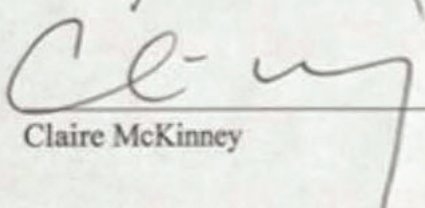
A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement  
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology from  
The College of William & Mary

by  
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Accepted for Highest Honors  
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## Table of Contents

Preface	2
Introduction	3
I.    Historical Context	7
A Look at the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers	
I.    The Landscape as a Historical Text	15
II.   The Concern of Location	20
III.  Blurring the Past, Present, and Future	25
IV.   Ensuring “Correct” Interpretation of the Memorial	29
Parallels to William & Mary’s Hearth: Memorial to the Enslaved	36
Progress	
I.    “A Step in the Right Direction”	39
II.   A Different Approach	44
Conclusion	46
Acknowledgements	49
Bibliography	51

## Preface

Throughout this paper, I will be referring to two of the dominant racial categories within American culture today: white and Black. The capitalization, or lack thereof, of these two terms is not arbitrary, but rather a notion of respect toward the marginalized communities this project often addresses. To many, the capitalization of Black recognizes a distinct culture with a shared history of oppression in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Historically, white has been capitalized primarily by white supremacist groups who aim to discredit Black experiences. However, this capitalization scheme is still heavily debated. The National Association of Black Journalists chose to use the term White as well as Black in 2020 as a recognition of the truth that all racial categories are cultural constructions.<sup>2</sup> The capitalization choices reflected in this paper were ultimately made at my discretion with the aim of respectfully representing current conversations around oppression within the United States.

Also present in this project is the study of histories and experiences that are ultimately not my own. I am a white woman and have appeared unquestioningly so throughout my life. I have done my best to recognize the privilege that inherently shadows my work as an anthropologist and make those moments clear when they arise in this paper. My goal is not to judge the value these memorials have on an interpersonal level, or how spaces that memorialize slavery *should* be used. I only hope to introduce new perspectives informed by knowledge born from being both an observer of the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers and an undergraduate

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<sup>1</sup> Mike Laws, “Why We Capitalize ‘Black’ (and Not ‘White’),” *Columbia Journalism Review*, June 16, 2020, <https://www.cjr.org/analysis/capital-b-black-styleguide.php>; Nancy Coleman, “Why We’re Capitalizing Black,” *The New York Times*, July 5, 2020, sec. Times Insider, 56 <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/05/insider/capitalized-black.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Kenya Stewart, “NABJ Statement on Capitalizing Black and Other Racial Identifiers,” *National Association of Black Journalists*, June 11, 2020, <http://www.nabj.org/>.

student. I have tried to be consistently conscious throughout this project of the privileged position that has allowed me to have those experiences in the first place.

## **Introduction**

When William & Mary unveiled the design for Hearth: Memorial to the Enslaved the summer after my sophomore year, in the midst of an early wave of the COVID-19 pandemic and nationwide protests against law enforcement's disproportionate use of violent force against Black Americans, I felt compelled to critically engage with how my university's landscape would be transformed. After spending about six months abruptly removed from my daily routine, only connected via social media and classes on Zoom from my bedroom in Southern California, I wondered how (or if) campus life would be different when we returned. What would it mean to continue to walk the same brick pathways, and learn in the same outdated lecture halls that, aesthetically, remained unchanged while many other aspects of our lives had? As an anthropology student, I wanted to investigate the college environment as "the dimension of multiple trajectories, a simultaneity of stories-so-far" to use the words of Doreen Massey, whose work has inspired much of this project.<sup>3</sup> This thesis uses a comparative model of analysis to better understand how people move throughout memorial spaces in their everyday lives as students and visitors of American universities, and what these interactions can tell us about Western narratives of progress. Hearth is still under construction so instead I turned my attention to the recently completed Memorial to Enslaved Laborers at our peer institution, the University of Virginia (UVA) in Charlottesville, a mere two-hour drive from Williamsburg.

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<sup>3</sup> Doreen B. Massey, *For Space*, 1st edition (London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2005), 24.

The practice of spatializing culture, or “examining space through theories of embodiment, discourse translocality, and effect,” localizes the global and separates hegemonic narratives of space from how it is actually utilized by the people who interact with it.<sup>4</sup> Setha Low argues that this perspective is especially useful to the anthropologist committed to challenging the discipline’s historically eurocentric approach to studying culture. She writes that a spatial focus “[draws] on the strengths of studying people in situ, producing rich and nuanced sociospatial understandings.”<sup>5</sup> This project began with an interest in theorists such as Edward Soja, Michel de Certeau, and Henri Lefebvre, among others to whom I was introduced during my undergraduate career in anthropology. These writers have given the ideas of “space” and “place” new meanings and have transformed my awareness of how our surrounding environment influences lived, embodied experience and our culture’s shared perception of time. Putting this anthropological framework into conversation with feminist theories of progress has allowed me to analyze memorialization from a unique perspective, one that centers the visitor and their access to a memorial’s influential capacity. Ultimately, I hope to, as Saidiya Hartman describes, “shake our confidence in commemoration” for the sake of creating more meaningful memorials in the future.<sup>6</sup>

The bulk of my research consisted of interviews with approximately thirty individuals with varying degrees of relation to the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers. During the summer of 2021, I spent three days at the Memorial in Charlottesville engaging in participant observation and interviewing any passerby that would be willing to answer my questions. My visit was in the

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<sup>4</sup> Setha Low, “Introduction,” in *Spatializing Culture: The Ethnography of Space and Place* (London, UNITED KINGDOM: Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 4, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oxford/detail.action?docID=4644268>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>6</sup> Saidiya Hartman, “The Time of Slavery,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, no. 4 (2002): 773 <https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-101-4-757>.



midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, at a time where it felt safe to travel locally and speak to people masked and outside. That being said, students and locals during my fieldwork mentioned how the pandemic had affected visitation to the memorial, and I noticed that people seemed more wary to approach a stranger. I spoke to locals, parents of prospective students, faculty members, current students, alumni, tourists, and local business owners. About half of the visitors interviewed had previous knowledge of the Memorial and specifically sought it out on their visit, while the other half had stumbled upon it accidentally or after recommendation from a campus tour guide. With the permission of my interview subjects, I took audio recordings of our conversations which were then transcribed via Descript and analyzed for discussion of relevant themes and topics. The interviews consisted of pre-determined questions including:

1. “How did you hear about the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers?”
2. “What part of the memorial’s design do you believe is the most impactful?” and
3. “From your own understanding, what do you think is the purpose of this memorial?”

After my return from the University of Virginia, I contacted a member of the Descendant of Enslaved Communities group at the University to answer my remaining questions regarding the University’s intended use of the memorial. After compiling the interview data, I conducted a social media analysis for insight into both William & Mary and the University of Virginia’s advertisement of their memorials to the public. This social media analysis played a larger role in my project than I initially intended; the presentations of these memorials to the public were severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, making social media an essential outlet for the universities to communicate with their students, alumni, and stakeholders. I primarily looked at each university’s public Facebook pages and Instagram feeds, as well as relevant Reddit threads relating to their memorials. The Lemon Project at William & Mary and the Memorial to

Enslaved Laborers also have their own Instagram pages that were included in my research. These ethnographic approaches were supplemented with a comprehensive review of relevant literature relating to the relationship between slavery and American universities, current debates surrounding public memory and the politics of history-making, and both feminist and anthropological commentaries on what it means to ask forgiveness for past actions, among other topics.

This ethnographic engagement with the memorial site and application of these theories reveals how memorials become entangled within the larger power structures of American universities and the political narratives of their wider communities every time somebody walks through the space. An integrative analysis pulling from theoretical concentrations within both anthropology and feminist theory allows us to investigate the simultaneous possibilities that are present within memorial spaces: hope, sadness, guilt, anger, or the conviction that more work is still to be done. This paper begins with an overview of the history of slavery memorialization in the United States, followed by analysis of the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers at the University of Virginia informed by an anthropological analysis rooted in theories regarding the primacy of space. First, I explore the University of Virginia landscape as having pedagogical agency, and how this aspect of campus affects students' lived experiences. The second section builds upon these previous observations and investigates memorials as spaces that disrupt the boundaries between past, present, and future. It concerns how a fear of forgetting informs interaction with the Memorial. Next comes an overview of the debate amongst the UVA community surrounding the Memorial's location informed by my ethnographic observations of the site. Finally contained in the chapter regarding the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers is an examination of how the University administration and Charlottesville community members alike define their own ideals



regarding specific usage or interpretation of the site, and how these are imposed upon visitors. The next section of this paper addresses the construction of Hearth: Memorial to the Enslaved at William & Mary. It investigates parallel observations between the two memorials and how this research can inform William & Mary's advertisement and oversight of the space. Finally comes an exploration of what these two memorials say about cultural perceptions of progress, and how redefining these ideas can lead to more impactful memorial projects in the future. These sections, taken together, represent a nuanced understanding of the function of memorial spaces enriched by the observation of ordinary encounters.

### *I. Historical Context*

The history of slavery in the United States is inextricably tied to the formation of some of the country's preeminent institutions of higher education. Universities as far west as the University of Chicago owe their early wealth and success to the from the labor of enslaved people and the land on which they once worked.<sup>7</sup> Schools such as William & Mary and the University of Virginia have direct ties to the slave trade and the fight for its persistence. From the very beginning, "the charter funded the College of William & Mary from the profits of slave labor."<sup>8</sup> William & Mary purchased their first enslaved individuals in 1713, whom they continued to either rent or own until at least 1854. Many renowned faculty and students remained vocal supporters of the slave trade for years afterward.<sup>9</sup> At the University of Virginia, an

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<sup>7</sup> Caine Jordan, Guy Emerson Mount, and Kai Perry Parker, "'A Disgrace to All Slave-Holders': The University of Chicago's Founding Ties to Slavery and the Path to Reparations," *The Journal of African American History* 103, no. 1–2 (March 2018): 163–78, <https://doi.org/10.1086/696362>.

<sup>8</sup> Craig Steven Wilder, *Ebony & Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities*, First U.S. edition. (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013), 42.

<sup>9</sup> Terry L. Meyers, *A First Look at the Worst: Slavery and Race Relations at the College of William & Mary* (Williamsburg, VA: Marshall Wythe School of Law, 2008).

estimated 4,000 known and unknown enslaved laborers began building the Academical Village in 1817 and continued to work at the University as cooks, masons, personal servants, and in other vocations until 1865.<sup>10</sup> Across the colonies, “European nations founded academies to secure their colonial interests, and they supported these schools by exploiting the decline of Indian nations and the rise of African slavery.”<sup>11</sup> Colleges were foundational to colonial strategies to establish economic ties and political influence in the surrounding area, thus bolstering the integration of European interests into the daily lives of Americans. The success of institutions of higher education today cannot be separated from the exploitation of people whose labor facilitated their inception. Much of this history was recorded in archives, but not acknowledged until very recently. Quoted in Joy Degruy’s *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*, Randall Robinson writes that “the worst thing you could take from a people is ‘their memory of themselves.’”<sup>12</sup> More and more institutions of higher education are beginning to investigate their relationship to the memory of slavery through a variety of means. The University of Virginia has mobilized a Universities Studying Slavery consortium of over 90 schools internationally, many of which have renamed buildings once named after slaveholders, rewritten plaques, and begun symposiums on the topic.<sup>13</sup> Memorialization is one way in which universities have decided to answer to increasing pressure from students and communities of color, and this project focuses on two of those memorials: the University of Virginia’s Memorial to Enslaved Laborers and William & Mary’s Hearth: Memorial to the Enslaved.

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<sup>10</sup> President’s Commission on Slavery and the University, “Report to Teresa A. Sullivan” (the University of Virginia, 2018).

<sup>11</sup> Craig Steven Wilder, *Ebony & Ivy*, 6.

<sup>12</sup> Joy DeGruy Leary, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America’s Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing* (Portland, Oregon: Joy DeGruy Publications, 2005), 140.

<sup>13</sup> “Universities Studying Slavery,” President’s Commission on Slavery and the University, March 18, 2016, <https://slavery.virginia.edu/universities-studying-slavery/>.

The majority of public rhetoric surrounding memorialization concerns the debate over taking down monuments, specifically those to Confederate leaders. Images of monuments covered in signs advocating for their removal, or being carried off by cranes, have ignited a conversation about the cultural importance we extend to these statues. In response, some cities have decided to remove certain monuments. Others have answered critics by erecting new structures exhibiting more progressive ideals in hopes of better contextualizing the older, more problematic structures that continue to stand. This study is in part a response to the deluge of literature examining the removal of monuments, and the lack of literature surrounding the structures that are built to offer a more contemporary counter-narrative to the monuments that continue to stand.

For the purposes of this study of memorials to the enslaved on college campuses, it is important to offer a working definition. The distinction between these memorials and other memorials or monuments lies in how a memorial that addresses slavery or other traumatic events attempts to interact with our perception of the future. This future is one in which we are supposed to have made a moral judgment about whatever event is enshrined within the memorial: “A monument says: I am truth. I am history. Full stop. A memorial says, or can say: I turn grief for the past into change for the present.”<sup>14</sup> While the line between these memorials and other structures is often blurred, the institutions that have constructed the spaces that are the topic of this research have explicitly named them as memorials, so that terminology will be used throughout this project.

As with any architectural form, certain trends and movements have developed within the world of memorialization and create the aesthetic context within which the University of

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<sup>14</sup> Holland Cotter, “Turning Grief for a Hidden Past Into a Healing Space,” *The New York Times*, August 16, 2020, sec. Arts, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/16/arts/design/university-of-virginia-enslaved-laborers-memorial.html>.

Virginia's Memorial to Enslaved Laborers and William & Mary's Hearth: Memorial to the Enslaved are constructed. Throughout my thirty interviews, roughly half of the people I talked to mentioned that the design of the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers reminded them of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on the National Mall in Washington, DC [Figure 1]. The Veterans Memorial, completed in 1982, began a new wave within the world of memorial design that focused on abstract architectural symbology and the creation of an enclosed space within which viewers could participate in reflection.<sup>15</sup> The memorial embodied a temporal "impulse to preserve and remember so that atrocity will 'never again' happen," which has "driven memorialization from the second half of the twentieth century through today."<sup>16</sup> The memorial does not speak only for a past event, but also to the present and future values of a society that has



*Figure 1. The Wall, Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Washington DC*  
(Ken Lund, May 12, 2003)

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<sup>15</sup> "Vietnam Veterans Memorial (U.S. National Park Service)," <https://www.nps.gov/vive/learn/historyculture/vvmoverview.htm>.

<sup>16</sup> Susan A. Sci, "(Re)Thinking the Memorial as a Place of Aesthetic Negotiation," *Culture, Theory and Critique* 50, no. 1 (2009): 3.

progressed far enough to no longer repeat past horrors. This attitude is especially salient amongst memorials concerning the enslaved and will be explored further in following chapters. Architects have realized that three elements are key to generating this intended emotional response “due to their ability to contemplatively and/or critically engage visitors: the use of reflective black granite; individually naming the deceased; and the inclusion of a contemplative wall.”<sup>17</sup> All of these features are on display at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and have become more prominent throughout the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The architecture of the two structures featured in this thesis further showcase how formulaic the design of memorials has become. The Memorial to Enslaved Laborers embodies these characteristics faithfully, and I argue that while William & Mary’s Hearth trades black granite for red brick, it still fits into this mold. Thus, the following commentary on the designs of these two memorials speaks to the increasing universalization of memorialization architecture and its consequences on the experience of its visitors.

The Memorial to Enslaved Laborers at the University of Virginia [Figure 2] began when students voiced criticism that the University was not doing enough to address their history of slavery. In 2007, the University unveiled a plaque on the Rotunda which states “In honor of the several hundred women and men, both free and enslaved, whose labor between 1817 and 1826 helped to realize Thomas Jefferson’s design for the University of Virginia.” Many saw the plaque as insufficient, and worried that students would walk right by it without even realizing that it was there.<sup>18</sup> This prompted Ishraga Eltahir and others to form the student group “Memorial for Enslaved Laborers” in 2009. Soon after, a design competition began for what is now the memorial. While the design has changed since the student-run contest, the name “Memorial to Enslaved Laborers” has remained the same since its inception, originally intended to emphasize

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 44-45.

<sup>18</sup> Brendan Wolfe, “Unearthing Slavery at the University of Virginia.”





*Figure 2. Memorial to Enslaved Laborers*  
(Author, August 9, 2021)

that the status of “slave” was not an inherent characteristic of these persons, but rather a circumstance that was forced upon them. The University’s administration got involved in the project, forming the President’s Commission on Slavery and the University in 2013. One of their main goals has been to help conduct the research necessary to construct a memorial, such as searching through archives to compile the names of the enslaved that would eventually be inscribed on the granite wall. The University estimated the Memorial to cost \$6 million, raised primarily through private donations matched by the Board of Visitors.<sup>19</sup> In 2016, the University chose the architectural team of Meejin Yoon and Eric Höweler and began a series of community feedback forums that, over the course of a year, formed the basis of the memorial’s design. Many who worked on the Memorial have cited these discussions as integral to the final conception of the memorial. Speaking of the insights gained from these forums in 2020, Meejin Yoon described how the Memorial was meant to create a “meeting ground” for students both for

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<sup>19</sup> “Memorial to Enslaved Laborers,” Give to UVA, accessed April 7, 2022, <https://giving.virginia.edu/where-to-give/jeffersonian-grounds-initiative/memorial-to-enslaved-laborers>.

activism and education.<sup>20</sup> After nearly two years of construction, the Memorial was finished in the spring of 2020 and dedicated during a virtual ceremony in April of 2021. In the dedication address, a member of the President's Commission said "our goal has been to reinscribe that history [of slavery] back onto the landscape."<sup>21</sup> The UVA Office of the Architect's official statement regarding the Memorial reads: "[The Memorial to Enslaved Laborers] should create a physical place of remembrance and a symbolic acknowledgement of a difficult past... a place of learning as well as a place of healing."<sup>22</sup> Around the same time, William & Mary began their process for constructing a memorial.

In 2007, the Student Assembly at William & Mary passed a resolution entitled "The Apology for William & Mary's role in Slavery Act" asking the Board of Visitors to build a memorial honoring the enslaved and to do more research regarding the College's role in perpetuating slavery.<sup>23</sup> In 2009, the Lemon Project: A Journey of Reconciliation was established by the Board of Visitors as a group of faculty, professors, and students dedicated to historical research and advising the College in regards to properly acknowledging its past. A few years later, in 2015, the Lemon Project Committee on Memorialization was established consisting of "undergraduates, faculty, staff, alumni and members of the Greater Williamsburg community" which began the memorialization process by receiving "feedback via sessions at the annual Lemon Project Symposium" and conducting "town hall meetings on campus and in the

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<sup>20</sup> AIA Virginia, "The Memorial to Enslaved Laborers at the University of Virginia Panel Discussion" (Youtube, August 13, 2020), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=388\\_x4oYmq8&t=3620s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=388_x4oYmq8&t=3620s).

<sup>21</sup> Duda, Erik, *The Dedication to the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers at UVA*, (UVA Today, 2021).

<sup>22</sup> Office of the Architect, "Memorial to Enslaved Laborers," UVA: Office of the Architect, n.d., <https://officearchitect.virginia.edu/memorial-enslaved-laborers>.

<sup>23</sup> Tiseme Zegeye, "The Apology for William & Mary's Role in Slavery Act," No. 315-052 (2007), 314th Student Assembly of the College of William & Mary, [https://www.wm.edu/sites/lemonproject/\\_documents/315\\_052\\_apologyforwmsroleinslaveryact.pdf](https://www.wm.edu/sites/lemonproject/_documents/315_052_apologyforwmsroleinslaveryact.pdf).



community, and an online survey.”<sup>24</sup> In 2018, a design contest began for the memorial, and in 2020 a design by W&M alumnus William Sendor ‘11 was unveiled.<sup>25</sup> *Hearth: Memorial to the Enslaved* [Figure 3] takes the shape of a large rectangular structure with an asymmetrical opening through the brick, and a hearth positioned in the middle of the arch. Inscribed into the bricks will be the known names of people enslaved at the College. The project, funded by roughly \$2.3 million consisting equally of private gifts and funding from the Board of Visitors, will be dedicated on May 7th, 2022, and is set to open by the end of spring semester 2022.<sup>26</sup> A post marking the dedication of *Hearth* in June of 2021 on the William & Mary Instagram account states that the memorial “will serve as a gathering place for the community and as a reimagined



*Figure 3. Hearth: Memorial to the Enslaved*  
(Digital rendering used with permission from Baskervill Architectural Firm)

<sup>24</sup> “About the Memorial,” William & Mary, <https://www.wm.edu/sites/enslavedmemorial/about/index.php>.

<sup>25</sup> Erin Zagursky, “Design for W&M’s Memorial to the Enslaved Unveiled,” *William & Mary* (blog), August 25, 2020, <https://www.wm.edu/news/stories/2020/design-for-wms-memorial-to-the-enslaved-unveiled.php?fbclid=IwAR3hxyKFwGT08hMIAWd6v3kXigY3by4-56HjJwPiQuziVciQm5RXk1TGfjE>.

<sup>26</sup> Em Holter, “Work from the Lemon Project at William & Mary Leads to Groundbreaking on Memorial to the Enslaved,” *Daily Press*, June 21, 2021, <https://www.dailypress.com/virginiagazette/va-vg-wm-enslaved-memorial-0604-20210621-v5d4uz5tajfilnb4wwtj5r2nq-story.html>.

entrance to the university's Historic Campus.”<sup>27</sup> Going into this research I wondered: do peoples' everyday experiences of these memorials actualize the goals stated by the universities and their design teams? What does being a “gathering place” or “reimagined entrance” really look like? In essence: How do visitors, administrators, students, and other communities create and negotiate their own meanings and interpretations of the space with each other?

## **A Look at the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers**

### *I. The Landscape as a Historical Text*

Simply walking through a college campus entwines one in the legacies of exclusion, oppression, and dominance upon which that university was built. For students at William & Mary, the University of Virginia, and other institutions with histories of slavery or racial tension, their daily landscape is crowded with buildings built by and graveyards of enslaved people, statues of slave owners, or other less-explicit markers of the past. Richard Handler describes how race has become a spatialized phenomenon on UVA grounds in recent decades, exacerbated by the university's attempts to impose diversity rhetoric upon its student body. Instead of engaging with the racial tensions still present on campus, they approach multiculturalism in a way that is “sanitized for selected audiences” (i.e., prospective students and the post-grad job market).<sup>28</sup> Certain spaces have become coded as belonging to members of one race or another, and students navigate campus by moving between “comfort zones,” whether they be specific dorm buildings or the meeting places of different multicultural organizations. In some way, “the mainstream institution has always depended upon a minority presence whether as slave labor or as embodied

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<sup>27</sup> William & Mary, “Beginning of Construction Ceremony,” Instagram, *william\_and\_mary*, June 10, 2021, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CP80GH0J4Qx/>.

<sup>28</sup> Richard Handler, Courtney Childs, and Huong Nguyen, “The Temporal and Spatial Politics of Student 'Diversity at an American University,” *Timely Assets: The Politics of Resources and Their Temporalities*, 2008, 173.

diversity, both to build the place and to bear witness to its tolerance and humanity.”<sup>29</sup> No matter what each institution does to address their fraught histories with progressive policymaking, the university campus remains a space that remembers violence and hostility for many students caught in the midst of contemporary diversity-centered rhetoric. For students of color and other marginalized identities, the college environment remains inherently unwelcoming and precarious. How do newly constructed reflective spaces such as memorials interact with these hostile landscapes? Do they negate the antagonistic relics of racist pasts that are still present, or further complicate the experience of moving through the space?

A father and his daughter allowed me to interview them while they were walking their dogs around campus. She had graduated from the School of Medicine, and their family had lived close to UVA grounds for a few decades. They reminisced about their daily walks with their dogs on campus and expressed the belief that the campus is becoming increasingly “readable” as a historical text. They said that during their walks just a few years ago, “it was hard to find any history at all.”<sup>30</sup> They only knew of other sites of enslaved labor on school grounds because of their local intimacy of the campus. Their experience corresponds with the increasing willingness of the University of Virginia to acknowledge their past. Of the primary locations connected to slavery, such as the University Cemetery and the Basement Rooms along the Academical Village, the first explicit mentioning the contributions of slave labor on campus was the plaque erected in 2007 at the Rotunda. University of Virginia architecture professor Frank Dukes has noted, “You could be a student for four years and never have these uncomfortable realities

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 189.

<sup>30</sup> Quotes of interviews conducted during my fieldwork have been edited for clarity.

intrude on your life here.”<sup>31</sup> However, these locals were hopeful that people walking on these routes today would learn more about the history of slavery at the University of Virginia than those who took the same routes twenty years ago, thanks to increased signage and direction at specific sites.

The history of any space is learned by walking through and experiencing that landscape, a concept that Ellen Spears and James Hall call “pedagogy of place.” For example, a student at William & Mary may learn in class that their school was built using forced labor, but it takes walking along the of brick pathways surrounded by academic buildings to fully understand the extent of how heavily their institution relied on exploitation. This approach to history “serves the aim of decolonization; identifying new ways of inhabiting these spaces promotes rehabilitation, justice, and healing” by placing agency upon the traveler to direct their education instead of institutionalized forces, and is the extension of education that is currently missing at these memorial sites.<sup>32</sup> Michel de Certeau also argues for the primacy of the individual in shaping and interpreting history through navigating space, writing: “History begins at ground level, with footsteps... The motions of walking are spatial creations. They link sites to one another.”<sup>33</sup> He writes of space as a text, and the walkers as those who both write new text and read what has been laid out before them; the visitor becomes an agent of their own learning, and the surrounding environment their textbook. Thus, space needs accessible guidance much like a historical text would provide signposts and transitions to readers.

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<sup>31</sup> Brendan Wolfe, “Unearthing Slavery at the University of Virginia: Recent Discoveries Raise New Questions about the Past,” *Virginia Magazine*, 2013, [https://uvamagazine.org/articles/unearthing\\_slavery\\_at\\_the\\_university\\_of\\_virginia](https://uvamagazine.org/articles/unearthing_slavery_at_the_university_of_virginia).

<sup>32</sup> James C. Hall and Ellen Griffith Spears, “Engaging the Racial Landscape at the University of Alabama,” in *Slavery and the University: Histories and Legacies* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2019), 300.

<sup>33</sup> Michel de Certeau, “Practices of Space,” in *On Signs* (Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 129.

A visitor enters the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers at one end of the circle, meant to symbolize a gathering space, the traditional ring shout dance, or perhaps a broken shackle. They find that the wall bordering the outside ring of the circle slowly rises up, until they are overshadowed by the names inscribed upon it. An often missed, yet symbolically poignant element of the Memorial is the “Northern Escape,” a series of steps outside of the granite rings that leads north and eventually disappears at the base of a tree on the grassy hillside. These steps advance in the direction that was synonymous with freedom, but more literally lead the visitor to a stopping point that provides an abrupt end to the narrative of progress this Memorial is supposed to represent. During my visit, I witnessed a small number of people take notice of the pathway, and only one group subsequently followed it. They walked slowly along each step, watching their feet reach each stone in the ground and barely noticed in time to turn their heads upward that they had reached a tree. They stopped in their tracks and began to walk around the circumference of the tree, checking the backside to see if the path continued or if there was some marker of the tree’s significance, until they had reached their original spot. One member of the party shrugged, and the group went off towards their next destination. The path seems to say: time to turn around and head back the way you came, there is no more after this. While there are symbolic elements of the Memorial that link the site to other features of UVA’s landscape, such as the uniformity of the memorial’s circumference to that of the Rotunda, the Memorial exists materially detached and isolated from the other sites of slavery on campus due to a lack of education for the uninitiated walker.

Visitors to the University of Virginia are provided few resources to navigate the complex and often contradictory landscape that is campus grounds. Within the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers and immediately surrounding lawn, there is only one instrument that directly connects

the Memorial to other sites of slavery on the University's campus: a printed pamphlet outlining a walking tour of the history of slavery at the school. These pamphlets are poorly marked and stored in a box inconspicuously placed on a lamppost; not once during my visit did I see patrons notice them. Given the lack of direction from the university, students have assumed the role of educating visitors about their environment. During my fieldwork I approached a handful of students who were working on the picnic tables set up around the Memorial and asked them about the site. Each expressed that they often assumed the role of navigating tourists or family through the memorial. One third year student told me, "I give very informal tours to my siblings or my friends and their siblings... and also in the summer... there's a lot of people wandering around. So, I've just been like, do you need help finding something? And then this is always where I take them first." Similarly, all of the parents of prospective students I was able to speak with mentioned that they had included the Memorial in their visit because it was mentioned on their campus tour. Sometimes these students and other visitors would start telling me about the memorial, what side to enter it from, and what symbolic elements to look out for. Alongside these informal educational efforts, a tour guide explained a student-lead initiative called "Heal" to institute historical tours on campus that specifically visit sites of slavery and memorialization. While the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers would be the main attraction, the newly built site would be put into context with other spaces that have been deemed historically important. This tour would greatly enhance the pedagogical potential of the Memorial in connection with the rest of campus and remind visitors that these histories deserve the ability to intrude on our lives. No matter how uncomfortable the experience may be, the alternative is an expression of the privileged ignorance that continues to shelter white Americans. This sentiment was echoed by the member of the Descendants of Enslaved Communities who I was able to speak with. At one

point during our conversation, she said, “students who come to the University of Virginia need to know where they’re coming... we do our students or even our faculty an injustice when they don’t know the real history of the University.” William & Mary and the University of Virginia are first and foremost institutions of learning, as corroborated by their respective mission statements that have been recently revised to reflect current administrative goals.<sup>34</sup> Thus, these schools should strive to be pedagogical in *all* aspects. Pedagogies of place invert the traditional hierarchy of power on college campuses, placing educational agency upon those who move through the space rather than those who currently manage it. Consequently, students deserve the opportunity to educate themselves about their environment and evaluate their schools based on how well they are able to tell the stories of their foundation.

The refusal to acknowledge the potential of pedagogies of place isolates the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers within the University landscape and fails to comprehensive educational environment. Based on my interactions with visitors, it is unclear that the Memorial lies in relation to an entire campus rife with spaces and structures that could tell more of its history. An ethnographic analysis of the path adjacent to the Memorial further illuminates the lack of exploration inspired by the space. We should promote the history ingrained in our landscapes, rather than allow it to hide our past. Until then, the Memorial will be unable to diminish the oppressive nature of the campus as a whole.

## *II. The Concern of Location*

Both William & Mary and the University of Virginia have explicitly stated that they want their memorials to become a space that allows the campus community to be explored by the

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<sup>34</sup> “William & Mary Vision, Mission, Values,” William & Mary, November 22, 2019, <https://www.wm.edu/about/administration/vision-mission-values/>; “University Code of Ethics and Mission Statement,” The University of Virginia, January 14, 2014, <https://www.virginia.edu/statementofpurpose>.



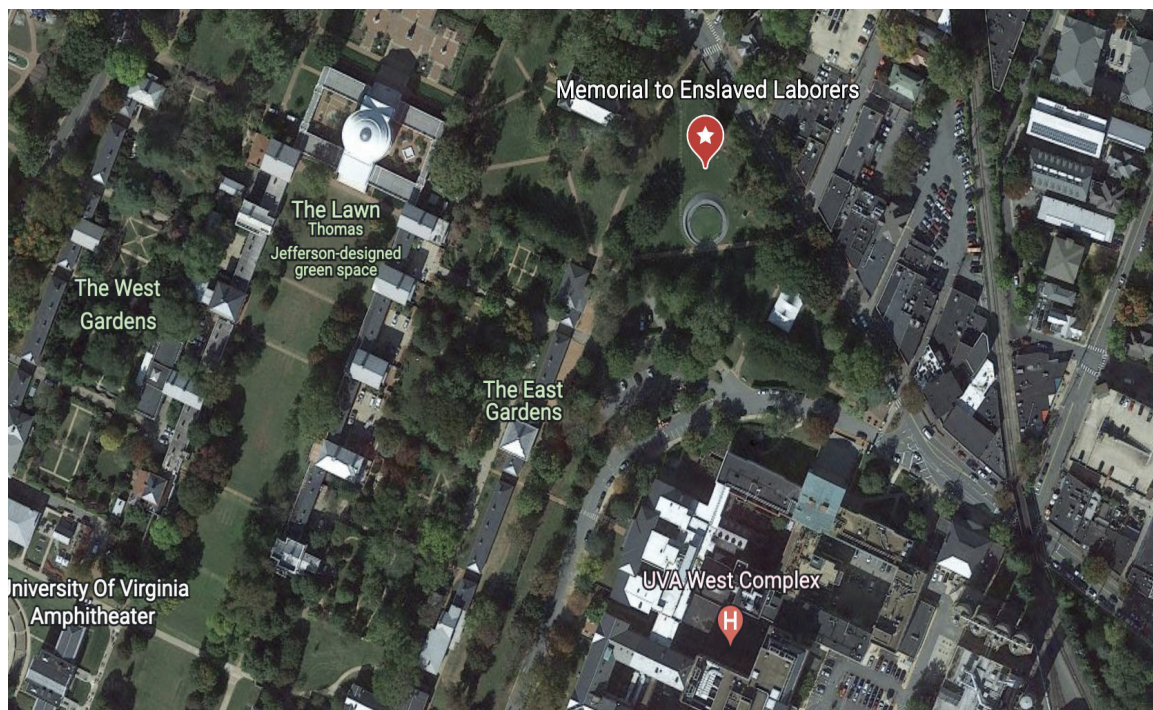
wider world, prompting communication, and thus, healing. This is supposedly exemplified by where these memorials are located on campus: William & Mary positioned Hearth between the Wren building, perhaps the most iconic and touristed building on campus by outsiders, and the Admissions Office, a space where prospective students get their first impression of the school [Figure 4]. UVA, in a similar fashion, has placed their memorial on a grassy lawn east of the Rotunda (though out of its view), directly north of the School of Medicine complex, and on University Ave across the street from The Corner shopping district frequented by locals and students alike [Figure 5]. The member of Descendants of Enslaved Communities at UVA expressed that placing the Memorial in a central location on campus, such as the Academical Village, would have cut the space off from outside visitors. This concern was especially salient to her experience as a Black woman, and she mentioned that up until recently there was an unspoken agreement amongst the Black community to avoid campus grounds after dark. By placing the Memorial on the edges of campus, people who find the University unwelcoming would not be forced to engage too deeply with a landscape that made them feel unsafe. On a panel regarding the Memorial in August of 2020, one of the chief architects stated that “for the Memorial to have both meaning and relevance to multiple publics, it had to... rebuild trust at a local scale.” The vague language of “multiple publics,” or “community” was not clarified in any of the resources I studied regarding these memorials; it was never explicit during my research if the University of Virginia or William & Mary were seeking healing specifically with the current Black populations in their cities, or with the Charlottesville and Williamsburg communities at large. Regardless, it was often repeated that only through balancing these audiences can the wounds between the University and the “community” be healed.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> AIA Virginia, “The Memorial to Enslaved Laborers at the University of Virginia Panel Discussion” (Youtube, August 13, 2020), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=388\\_x4oYmq8&t=3620s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=388_x4oYmq8&t=3620s).



*Figure 4. Future Location of Hearth: Memorial to the Enslaved*  
(Google Earth, Williamsburg, VA)



*Figure 5. Location of the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers*  
(Google Earth, Charlottesville, VA)



In my experience speaking to the visitors of the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers, the location of the memorial reactions to both the Black Lives Matter protests of summer 2019 and the Unite the Right Rally of 2017, have facilitated the Memorial acting as a site of connection. One faculty member at the University of Virginia, who was working nearby during one of the afternoons I was conducting my fieldwork, remarked: “there has been several times last year during the pandemic and some of the George Floyd stuff about this time last year [where the Memorial] served as a place where people came... to meet here for several pictures of... people coming for a particular purpose.” If I remember correctly, he was in the computer science department but had colleagues who were members of the research arm of the President’s Commission that worked on finding names to inscribe on the Memorial wall. One notable example of the Memorial being treated as a gathering space was its use by local activist groups as a starting point in a demonstration walk on Independence Day (March 3rd) that ended in the main downtown area of Charlottesville. The University heavily promotes this type of interaction with the memorial. Multiple social media accounts connected to the University have featured photos from two events in 2020: The “White Coats for Black Lives” gathering and George Floyd memorial gathering.<sup>36</sup> The “White Coats” event used the Memorial as a space to express the dedication of the University of Virginia medical staff to the concerns of people of color in the community that have historically been ignored by their institution. De Certeau places significance on these “perambulatory gestures” that “play with spatial organizations” by imbuing them with cultural importance.<sup>37</sup> By walking from one site to the next, these activists connect the

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<sup>36</sup> The University of Virginia (uva), “At the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers, the UVA Community Demonstrated Their Support of the National ‘White Coats for Black Lives’ Movement...,” Instagram, June 5, 2020, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CBEMMgnFmvq/>; The University of Virginia (uva), “Gathering Unofficially Wednesday Evening as Individuals in Solidarity Pay Tribute to George Floyd...,” Instagram, June 4, 2020, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CBEMMgnFmvq/>.

<sup>37</sup> Michel de Certeau, “Practices of Space,” in *On Signs*, 136.

Memorial to Enslaved Laborers to other sites of historical significance in the Charlottesville area, demonstrating the inclusion of the Memorial into the larger landscape of Charlottesville activists. Through these events and other “perambulatory gestures,” the groundwork is laid for the community-wide healing that the University promised as an outcome of the Memorial.

There is a competing narrative coming from students at the University of Virginia. In talking to those who happened to be on campus for the summer, either taking classes or working, a repeated concern was that the Memorial was too distanced from the main part of campus and thus difficult to find unless one were to intentionally seek it out. This, to the students, reflected a desire from the administration to avoid possible pushback regarding the Memorial by placing it outside the central area of campus and thus secluded from everyday walking routes. One second-year student reflected on his discussions of the Memorial in class and with other students. He began hesitantly,

I mean, people fortunately are pretty positive about it... I've heard concerns that, uh, some people would prefer that it was more, I guess, in the middle of campus... you could argue that it's sort of, I don't know, disrespectful or not accomplishing its full purpose because it's sort of like out of the way at the side of the Rotunda... if you want to go see the Memorial... you have to be looking for it...

When the labor of enslaved people was actively exploited on campus grounds, it was purposefully hidden from students through separate housing for the enslaved and elevated walkways from which they were expected to navigate campus unseen. Placing the Memorial in a central location on campus would have symbolized a bold commitment to publicly facing past wrongs. Now, students voice concern that this crucial feature of their landscape will go unappreciated by many. One visitor noted, “I'm not even sure too many people would notice [the Memorial] behind the trees, unless they came looking for it, like we did.”

Of the instances mentioned above regarding the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers acting as a site of connection, all events were pre-organized either by the school administration or activist groups in the area. There seems to be a lack of student-led or impromptu efforts that bring Charlottesville locals and students together despite these two groups having the most intimate and routine access to the Memorial. This is perhaps because of an assumption that the space inherently puts these communities in conversation due to its location, or reliance on the University to organize these interactions. However, it is those who move throughout the space most often, not the University administration or the Memorial itself, who have the ultimate power to define the site either as a place of connection or one that belongs solely to one group; the balance of the Memorial between campus and the community can only be actuated through everyday experience. Interpersonal reconciliation does not take the form of publicized photos of solidarity with or protest movements at the Memorial, but instead through commonplace experiences and conversations shared between people existing in a space where they feel welcome to communicate. This process is beginning, though hindered by the COVID-19 pandemic's negative impact on the accessibility of public spaces. The university-led gatherings at the Memorial are not inherently harmful and do provide temporary opportunities for interpersonal reconciliation. However, these events are unlikely to contribute to the level of community healing hoped for by the University if the Memorial is not a space where "multiple publics" feel comfortable engaging in dialogue outside of pre-planned events.

### *III. Blurring the Past, Present, and Future*

One of the major debates I encountered throughout my research was about whether or not the University of Virginia and William & Mary memorials "fit in" with or "stuck out" from the

larger campus landscape. Both campuses are aesthetically characterized by their oldest architectural features: the Academical Village and historic, or “old,” campus, respectively. Red brick and white Greco-Roman columns create the original dormitories at UVA, while Georgian Revival style structures and brick pathways make up the original six buildings that still encircle the Sunken Gardens at William & Mary. These iconic historic areas define the aesthetic representations of the two universities in every aspect of campus life, from merchandise to graduation photographs, and postcards sent to friends and family. The landscapes of William & Mary and the University of Virginia are simultaneously historic and timeless; students are comforted knowing that when they come back to campus for their fifty-year reunion, the heart of their school will look as it did when they walked to class as a freshman. This emphasis on aesthetic continuity prompts a new question: Should memorials be integrated with the surrounding landscape, appearing (like every other building) to have always been there and destined to stay, or assert their presence with abruption of this timeless aesthetic? Does architectural distinction prompt more meaningful assimilation of the site into the fabric of the larger community, or does it distract from the ultimate goal of the memorial? These concerns informed many of my conversations with visitors and authorities on the respective sites.

Memorials are often understood as sites that queer our perception of time; they force elements of the past to remain in the present as an enduring structure that is then meant to inform the future. Benedict Anderson writes, “monuments are really ways of mediating between particular types of pasts and futures”<sup>38</sup> They encourage remembrance of an event or person that would otherwise risk being lost to common memory, this being especially impactful on a college campus where generations only last four years. Thus, memorials are an action toward conquering

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<sup>38</sup> Benedict R. O’G Anderson, *Language and Power: Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia* (Equinox Publishing, 2006), 174.

forgetfulness; by “inscribing memories on a landscape” universities promote “intergenerational memories.”<sup>39</sup> In the case of any memorialization of tragedy, there is a hopefulness that remembrance will in turn prevent the same atrocities from repeating themselves in the future. Amy Sodaro’s study of memorial museums offers a useful interpretation of the ways in which memorials speak to the future by enshrining the past. Especially in regard to memorials of slavery or enslaved people, the sites purposefully “internalize an ethic of ‘never again’” and secure the realities of slavery in the past, so that there is no need for concern in the future.<sup>40</sup> In this way, memorials blur the seemingly clear distinctions our culture has made between the past, present, and future.

The Memorial to Enslaved Laborers has become a site of contention precisely because of the way it interrupts the timeless landscape that embodies Jefferson’s utopic vision of future education. The Facebook page for the University of Virginia features many posts regarding the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers and has become just one site where the tension between the Memorial and the rest of grounds has been played out. One post regarding the Memorial on Juneteenth 2020 reads, “Can anyone explain to me why the Jefferson statue is still on the grounds?” while a comment on a separate post from March 7, 2019, says, “I’m proud to see this happening and proud to see UVa (*sic*) as a leader in acknowledging history. But let’s be conscious that most of the historic buildings at UVa are memorials to the enslaved, by the enslaved.”<sup>41</sup> Both of these comments pose other sites on campus as impeding upon the progress

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<sup>39</sup>James C. Hall and Ellen Griffith Spears, “Engaging the Racial Landscape at the University of Alabama,” in *Slavery and the University*, 304

<sup>40</sup> Amy Sodaro, *Exhibiting Atrocity: Memorial Museums and the Politics of Past Violence*, None edition (New Brunswick Camden ; Newark: Rutgers University Press, 2018), 163.

<sup>41</sup> University of Virginia, “Juneteenth Commemorates the End of Slavery in the United States, Marking the Day in 1865 When Union Soldiers Arrived in Texas...,” Facebook, June 19, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/UniversityofVirginia/posts/10158500154173331>; Stef Blokk, June 22, 2020 (8:22 a.m.), comments on University of Virginia, “Juneteenth commemorates the end of slavery...”; University of Virginia,



brought about by the new memorial; they suggest that the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers cannot be truly progressive until other sites of hostility are removed. This paper will explore in a later section how William & Mary is currently engaged in a very similar debate. However, a member of the Descendant of Enslaved Communities at UVA presents a different approach. She believes that the purpose of the Memorial is to tell “the story of the truth, which is harmful, but can be healing.” Living and engaging with a contradictory landscape, one that houses both memorials to the enslaved and statues of their slaveholders, might not necessarily hamper the ability to tell truthful stories. This member of the Descendant Community believes that these types of landscapes can be healing precisely because they breed discomfort and recognition of the competing narratives represented.

Many visitors I spoke with expressed anxiety toward forgetting the narrative of slavery that the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers displays, informing the way they interacted with the memorial. One local expressed the importance of frequent visitation to the site, saying that we must “make sure we don’t forget the people’s names and stuff like that.” Others took photos of specific statements on the timeline to reference at a later date. Personal memories are unreliable, and this acknowledgement prompts a certain use of the space designed to mitigate forgetfulness. This, however, risks that the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers be reduced to, “a good reminder, if nothing else, to keep [the history of slavery] in the front of our brains,” as one visiting alumnus touring his children around the school said. The site, with a design exhibiting many of the aesthetic markers of a contemporary memorial, is recognized as a space of remembrance without intimate exploration. While it can be argued that the Memorial has value in acting as a space that

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“Today, Some of the First Concrete Was Poured for the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers...,” Facebook, March 7, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/UniversityofVirginia/posts/10157152175743331>; Linda Shiflet Pillow, March 7, 2019 (4:56 p.m.) comments on University of Virginia, “Today, some of the first concrete...”

elicits remembrance simply through walking by on the way to class, it prompts the question, does its generalized architectural form and focus on ensuring remembrance obscure the uncomfortable story integral to the memorial's impact? In other words, how shallow does the Memorial allow our remembrance to be? Our culture's reliance on clear distinctions between the past, present, and future result in anxieties manifested in the fears of forgetting and interrupting historical aesthetics. These anxieties drive contemporary memorial design, but what would our memorials look like if they embraced the discomfort that came with asserting past atrocities into the present?

#### *IV. Ensuring "Correct" Interpretation of the Memorial*

Despite the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers being a public space, there are many strategies the University of Virginia has taken up behind the scenes in order to ensure their intended interpretation of the Memorial is received. Constructing a memorial addressing a highly emotional and controversial topic such as slavery is a high-stakes endeavor. In 2019, the Pew Research Center found that 78% of Black people believe the United States has not done enough to address equal rights. While 37% of white people agree, 62% think we have either "gone too far" or have "been about right" in our efforts.<sup>42</sup> Considering that 55% of UVA's undergraduate population is white, the administration must have recognized that white people would make up the majority of the visitors to the Memorial to the Enslaved.<sup>43</sup> As with every artistic endeavor there is risk of mistranslation from idea to reality. Thus, school administrators and those who

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<sup>42</sup> Juliana Menasce Horowitz, Anna Brown, and Kiana Cox, "Race in America 2019," *Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project* (blog), April 9, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2019/04/09/race-in-america-2019/>.

<sup>43</sup> "Diversity Dashboard: University of Virginia," Diversity Data, <https://diversitydata.virginia.edu/>, Accessed April 8, 2022.

worked to build the Memorial have taken steps to prevent misinterpretation and promote acceptance of the Memorial and its intentions. However, I encountered many visitors of the Memorial who had conflicting opinions regarding the school's attempts to guide their experience at the Memorial in a certain direction.

One of the primary avenues used by the University of Virginia to educate the public about their memorial has been social media, both through pages for the University and the Memorial specifically. The type of post most often featured on these pages are explanations of different symbolic elements of the memorial, such as Isabella Gibbons' eyes inscribed on the backside of the Memorial wall, or the "memory marks." These posts educate the public on what to look for when visiting the memorial, and how to interpret it in alignment with University values [Figure 6]. Multiple alumni I spoke with also mentioned receiving emails and announcements from the president of the University regarding the Memorial which included educational information. Finally, the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers' website includes educational modules for elementary, middle, and high school students that walk classrooms

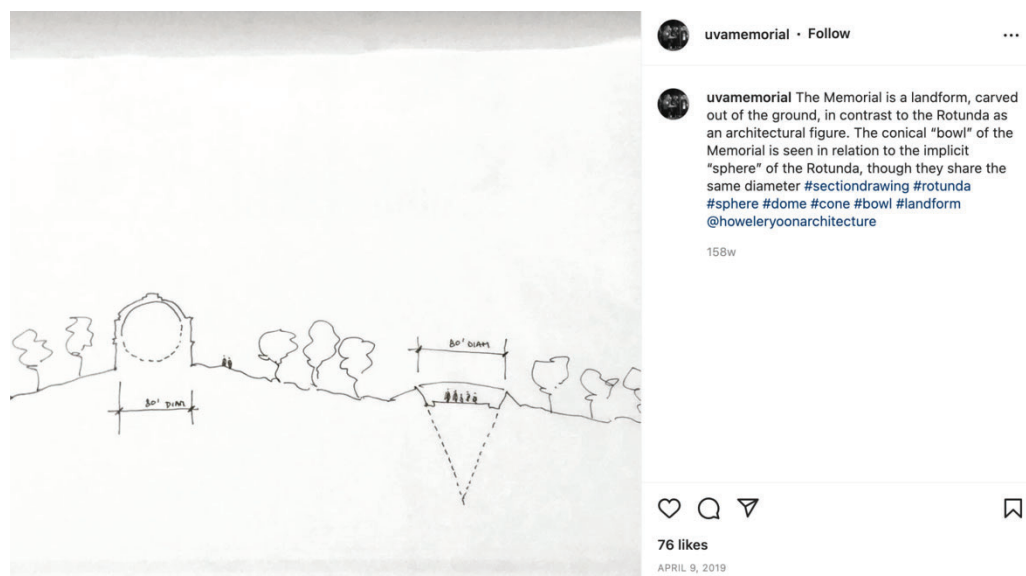


Figure 6. "The Memorial is a landform..."  
(Instagram, the University of Virginia)

through the creation of the Memorial and provide a summary of its main features. However, at the physical site, as has been previously established, there are few explicit guidelines to direct interpretation of the space.

When first entering the enclosed circle of the memorial, there is an inscription on the wall facing incoming visitors that explains the dedication of the site. Strangely, this inscription is on the opposite side from the beginning of the timeline—perhaps the only element of the Memorial that is meant to be experienced in a certain direction. The remainder of the Memorial space can be encountered from all directions and at all paces, making its impact inclusive of different itineraries and physical abilities. However, throughout my time there I realized that some of the more unique and impactful symbolic elements of the memorial, such as Isabella’s eyes inscribed on the back of the Northern Escape, went unnoticed by nearly every visitor since they were outside the primary circle. When questioned about these oft-ignored elements, some visitors expressed that the insular design of the Memorial actually prevented further exploration of the site. One alumnus who was visiting with a friend said, “from where we entered, it was not very contextualized... Those opening statements are easy to miss... and then don't necessarily tell you the entirety of what you'll be seeing” and requested a sign “at the entrance to direct you on what you’re seeing and how to interact with it.” A faculty member at the University mentioned taking upon the responsibility to guide other visitors to the backside of the Memorial and teach them how to find the correct angle to view Isabella’s eyes, since that was the most impactful part of the space for him. He told me, “When they go look for it, they can't find it because the sun is wrong, or they don't know where to look. So, I directed several people where they should look, but they're still hard to find.” The difficulty in viewing this specific feature came from the intentional design of the portrait by artist Eto Otitigbe. The eyes are created by varying levels of

depth within the granite wall, purposefully only meant to be seen from specific angles. Viewing this feature means walking out and around the main circle of the Memorial to the backside that is not directly approachable or navigable with a path. Throughout my fieldwork I was consistently confused, why is the knowledge necessary to fully explore the Memorial not more accessible to visitors?

By the end of my visit, I found myself showing people my favorite parts of the Memorial that they might have missed because they followed the prescribed route. I remember directing one group to the back of the Memorial in order to view Isabella's portrait, only to have them yell to me on the other side of the wall, "Are you sure it's over here?!" These moments of interaction and education formed memorable bonds between me and the visitors whom I interviewed, but it was saddening to see what some considered the most impactful features of the Memorial go completely unnoticed by others. While I recognize the potential for community building in allowing some aspects of the Memorial to only be found through transmitted knowledge, the frequency with which I saw these elements go completely unnoticed emphasized a lack of exploration fostered by the site itself. The vast majority of visitors contained their visit to the circular path between the timeline and large granite wall, never considering there was more to discover. Combined with the challenges inherent in creating a space that is accessible in its entirety is the risk of usage that might appear inappropriate to some.

As I walked up to the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers for the first time in the summer of 2021 it was a bright Charlottesville summer day, about 95 degrees Fahrenheit and incredibly humid. The first scene I encountered was a mother letting her children cool off in the water element of the memorial. They were splashing around in their swimsuits and playing with each other as the mom sat in the middle of the circle with their dry clothes. Throughout the rest of my

time there I did not see anybody else use the Memorial space in this way, but the sight prompted me to wonder: Is the way this mother allows her children to use the Memorial disrespectful? How does our culture enforce and define these societal taboos around “correct” or “respectful” usage of important sites? How can we ensure that memorial spaces are “properly” valued while allowing the space to be as welcoming as possible? Is this unconventional use of the Memorial a sign that people are comfortable with the space, and thus it has become integrated into the community? There were visitors who had some members of their group hold their dogs while the rest went into the Memorial and switched places once they had walked through it, or disclosed that they looked down upon students who played frisbee in the center lawn. Others expressed worry that increased signage around the space would ward off the very communities whose marginalization this memorial is supposed to reckon with.

A tour guide at the school attributed these contesting opinions regarding appropriate use of the Memorial to the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the accessibility of the University of Virginia campus as a public space. One of the more enjoyable moments of my fieldwork was posing as a prospective student and taking an official tour of the campus. Not only was I curious to see if the tour would mention anything about the Memorial, but I wanted the chance to speak with a student who often assumed the role of representing the University. She told me:

Oftentimes people... look a little bit interested in it, intrigued by it, kind of reading around, but there are often like kids... running through it and like playing around in that space. I think, especially because it happened at such poor timing because of COVID, we haven't been able to really educate all of our community members... Hopefully in the next year we can have even more impact... [on] who's using that space and how we're using that space.

There appeared to be a fear present in debates about “appropriate” use of the Memorial, its design or location, or misinterpretation of the site’s symbolic elements, that the lack of education about the site could lead to the reinforcement of prejudice and further polarized opinions. My only prior experience related to this research before beginning my fieldwork was witnessing members of the William & Mary and broader Williamsburg communities questioning the necessity of a memorial on my own campus. I shared the worry that both memorials had the potential to be used as spaces for people to voice harmful and dangerous beliefs. While there have been times throughout this research when those fears have been legitimated, such as witnessing bigoted views being voiced in social media commentary on these memorials, I was also shown that a lack of education regarding these sites was not inherently detrimental to its aim. It is necessary to recognize the scope of possible interpretations that can exist within a single space in order to have a comprehensive understanding of its use for different communities.

To my surprise, misinterpretation of the Memorial did not always lead to a harmful understanding of its message. Sometimes, people found more hope in the space than what was necessarily there. Throughout my interviews, I often asked people what their favorite aspect of the Memorial was; the historical timeline and accompanying water feature were the most common responses. Visitors enjoyed the aesthetic aspect of the flowing water and the ability to gain new knowledge from the timeline. The second visitor I interviewed, when prompted to elaborate on why the timeline was their favorite element of the memorial, responded, “Well, it shows flow. And it’s flowing this way [motioning towards the end of the timeline] following the chronology of [the timeline].” Another visitor, this one the parent of a prospective student, told me, “I love the timeline. I love that it’s... *washing away* some, some, some, um, you know, horrible things that have happened here.” To my knowledge, the *direction* of the flowing water



has no specific symbolic intention and is guided only by practical engineering; the water emerges from the center of the Memorial's timeline and proceeds to flow in either direction, so that during the first half of the timeline the water is actually flowing "backwards" in time. However, these visitors saw hope and a traditional understanding of progress when noticing the water flowed in a direction that allowed for symbolic significance. These observations further complicate the debate surrounding enforcement of use and "correct" interpretation, instead suggesting that unguided interpretation of the site may prove more impactful for some visitors.

The University of Virginia plans to take further steps to ensure what they would consider appropriate usage of the memorial. The member of the Descendants of Enslaved Communities at UVA that I spoke with talked about the installment of signs on both ends of the walkway leading to the Memorial identifying the site and saying something along the lines of "honor this space, no climbing, no jumping, no posting." Less explicitly, the University revised their policies reflecting the use of public outdoor space following the Unite the Right Rally, taking more restrictive measures such as banning the use of open flame on campus grounds.<sup>44</sup> While these efforts will aid in communicating the significance of the Memorial, they do not appear to be concerned with enhancing the pedagogical strength of the site and may further perpetuate a dominant power hierarchy that privileges the highly educated and acculturated. Perhaps strategies that lie within the traditional expressions of the power of the University, such as the erecting of signs to advertise a certain experience of the Memorial, are not actually the most effective in creating a welcoming space for the broader community. This is where the University community may be more competent at filling in the gaps with informal tours and other approaches, as they have already begun to do.

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<sup>44</sup> University of Virginia, "SEC-032: Open Burn and Open Flame Operations at the University of Virginia," University Policy (2019), <https://uvapolicy.virginia.edu/policy/SEC-032>.

When I began my observations at the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers, I began with questions such as, “Is the Memorial ‘readable’ or not?” “Does the location create community or isolation?” and “Does the Memorial help us remember or cause us to forget?” Throughout my interviews their subsequent analysis using anthropological theories of space, it has become clear that visitor experience at the Memorial transcends these binary possibilities; use of the space is intensely personal and complex, with many different opposing interpretations occurring simultaneously. Larger power dynamics are localized through the Memorial, from the University using their authority to enforce specific usage of the space to broader racial tensions in the United States that permeate specific statues and memorials on campus. A comprehensive analysis of this array of possibilities, informed by the recognition of present power dynamics revealed by a spatial perspective, exposes the complexities inherent in creating a space that is accessible to all communities. An acknowledgement of these nuanced and perplexing user experiences that defy the intentions of memorial designers is paramount to creating effective (and affective) memorial projects in the future.

### **Parallels to William & Mary’s Hearth: Memorial to the Enslaved**

William & Mary has taken a different approach than the University of Virginia in the design of their memorial, which was unveiled to the public via a campus blog post and various posts on the College’s social media accounts. However, parallel concerns and debates have already begun to emerge amongst the campus community. Much like the University of Virginia, the William & Mary landscape is thoroughly saturated in reminders of past injustices that once occurred there. Each student is reminded of this on the first day of every semester, when the College’s official acknowledgement of the Indigenous land upon which the institution is built

appears in every class syllabus. From my own experiences at each school, it appears as though there is a lack of informational plaques or spaces at William & Mary aimed at contextualizing this past within the landscape. However, in recent years the College has already renamed a number of buildings to reflect the contributions of enslaved individuals and are beginning an ambitious project concerning the recently-rediscovered Bray School, where many enslaved and free Black children were educated in the 18th Century.<sup>45</sup> After significant restorations to return the building to its original design, it will become both a space for the education of visitors and house further research into the school's history. These efforts reflect a growing momentum amongst administrators and students to acknowledge the College's potential pedagogical capacity.

Hearth, currently in the final stages of construction, has also been caught in the midst of a debate surrounding its location, which has prompted community members to use social media to air their grievances with the design. The most common critique I encountered online was the belief that the memorial—a square, angular structure made of brick that will be placed adjacent to the Wren building on Jamestown Road—did not “fit in” with the aesthetic of old campus buildings.<sup>46</sup> This fixation on aesthetics reveals an unease amongst the community with the erection of a permanent structure that impinges on their “sacred” campus landscape, and echoes the previous discussion of UVA visitors debating whether or not their memorial should be located in the historic Academical Village. Various members of the Williamsburg community commented statements such as, “This design does not match the vernacular of the historical

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<sup>45</sup> Staff, “W&M and Colonial Williamsburg Announce Bray School’s Future Location, Launch Initiative to Research Its History and Legacy,” William & Mary, accessed April 22, 2022, <https://www.wm.edu/news/stories/2021/wm-and-colonial-williamsburg-announce-bray-schools-future-location,-launch-initiative-to-research-schools-history-and-legacy.php>.

<sup>46</sup> See Fig. 4.

campus. Too modern. Too heavy-handed. Please rethink,” “Please consider a design that is more in keeping with the historic context and the heart of the campus,” and “Should not be anywhere near the Wren building.”<sup>47</sup> Many of these types of comments included the belief that the “unworthy” appearance of the Memorial would distract visitors from its meaning.<sup>48</sup> Some students have begun to dispute the idea that the memorial’s modern form symbolizes the desecration of the campus aesthetic, and argue that the design allows the space to more accessibly communicate the truths of the College’s relation to slavery.

Student responses to these comments on social media reflect a critical understanding that William & Mary’s historic campus continues to embody the legacies of the enslaved people who constructed it and the slave owners who funded the project. One commenter asks, “Why is the colonial aesthetic more important to preserve than the memory of the enslaved people who built it?” another writes, “The look which you are trying so desperate (*sic*) to protect is the very voice of oppression.”<sup>49</sup> The comment threads underneath posts regarding Hearth devolve into political trolling and personal attacks at multiple points, but nevertheless reflect one of the only platforms upon which the William & Mary students and larger community can meet to discuss this addition to their landscape. While many comments were simply congratulating the school and expressing hopefulness for the future, others challenged the idea that progress must be socially acceptable by pointing out the irony in asking for the Memorial to mirror the very buildings that were maintained and erected by enslaved individuals. Hearth, while made of brick like the rest of

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<sup>47</sup> William & Mary, “‘It’s Going to a Striking Addition to Historic Campus...,’” Facebook, August 25, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/williamandmary/posts/10164013168390006>; Marna Ashburn, August 31, 2020 (7:32 p.m.), Fiona Bessey-Bushnell, August 25, 2020 (10:15 p.m.), Helen Salin Godomsky, August 25, 2020 (8:19 p.m.), comments on William & Mary, “‘It’s going to be a striking addition...’”

<sup>48</sup> Ben Smith, August 25, 2020 (8:16 p.m.), comments on William & Mary, “‘It’s going to be a striking addition...’”

<sup>49</sup> Alli Seifert, August 26, 2020 (8:14 a.m.), Matthew Forcier, August 29, 2020 (2:01 p.m.), comment on William & Mary, “‘It’s going to be a striking addition...’”

campus, takes a drastically different shape that allows it to stand in distinction from its surroundings. The angular and simplistic design reflects the age of modernity in which it was conceived, emphasizing the length of time it has taken to begin to reckon with our past. I am hopeful that the Memorial will stick out in a beneficial way and draw people in. It seems that there are members of our community who are willing to educate others on the importance of its aesthetic.

Currently, there is an absence of published information from William & Mary regarding Hearsh's symbolic elements, and it is currently unknown if any signs or plaques will be erected at the memorial site aimed at guiding visitors. A campus tour guide has told me that it is common for tours to get a short explanation of the Memorial, precisely because it is unable to go unnoticed from the most trafficked campus walkways. Previous observations at the University of Virginia have found that the concern of educating the wider public about a memorial's intention and its appropriate uses is incredibly complex; both embracing the pedagogies of place inherent at William & Mary and taking added steps to influence visitation could be either beneficial or detrimental. Until the Memorial opens to the public it is impossible to predict how people will navigate these possibilities through their interaction with the site.

## **Progress**

### *I. "A Step in the Right Direction"*

The most common response I received from tourists, students, and locals alike when asking questions about their experience at UVA's Memorial for Enslaved Laborers was various iterations of the sentiment that the Memorial was "a step in the right direction." What we are walking toward was never clarified, but these types of statements always accompanied generally

hopeful attitudes toward the Memorial as a beneficial addition to campus. One visiting alumnus told me that “I think it's like just such a scratch on the surface of the kind of reconciliation that really needs to happen in this country... I think it's a good first step, but it's just a first step.” while another graduate said “at least we're continuing to move in the right direction (with some backsliding at times) ... I'm just thrilled that this is here... it's absolutely a step in the right direction.” These responses recognize the importance of pushing the University administration toward acknowledging their history within the larger narrative of race relations within the United States. However, upon hearing this genre of response so consistently repeated I began to feel disheartened, though I was not exactly sure why. During the virtual dedication of the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers on April 10, 2021, one alumnus described the Memorial as “a space of truth-telling.”<sup>50</sup> The truths of slavery, the sheer violence and inhumanity of the experience, hold the power to elicit fear, horror, and immense sadness from those who seek to understand it. These were not emotions I witnessed during my time at the Memorial.

A long lineage of Black feminist theorists, including Audre Lorde and bell hooks, have taught us how emotion is one oft-ignored aspect of the healing process, especially if those emotions breed discomfort. Related studies of trauma within the realm of Anthropology have come to similar conclusions, further illuminating the danger of shying away from the truth of an event. Here I think of Judith Herman, Shoshana Felman's exploration of “bearing witness,” and Dori Laub.<sup>51</sup> Only once did a visitor vocally reflect on their emotional response to the Memorial with me. While I recognize that these displays of emotion are intensely personal and just one aspect of affective engagement, I was surprised I did not witness more reactions to the Memorial

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<sup>50</sup> Duda, Erik, *The Dedication to the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers at UVA*.

<sup>51</sup> Shoshana Felman, “Education and Crisis, or the Vicissitudes of Teaching,” in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth, 1st edition (Baltimore: JHUP, 1995), 31.



that embodied the perspectives above. According to these theorists, true interpersonal reconciliation, an expressed goal of both the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers and Hearth, cannot occur if emotions are ignored or avoided. I recognize that it is not my place to decide whether or not these memorials have brought healing experiences to anyone. However, I do hope to integrate both Black feminist and anthropological theorizing into this conversation to develop a perspective through which we may better understand the “steps” we have left to take at our universities and as a larger society. The notion that the Memorial is “a step in the right direction” both heavily relies on the eurocentric notion of time and healing as exclusively linear phenomena and fails to acknowledge the potential affective power of the Memorial site that is productive for reconciliation.

Progress is supposedly a linear process; white European cultures are constantly moving toward an ideal, while communities of color are wrongly stereotyped as farther behind in this development than their white counterparts. This white supremacist ideology perpetuates an oppressive colonialist mindset that forces Western ideals onto people of color and diminishes moments in history that challenge the idea that civilizations are not constantly moving toward an ideal.<sup>52</sup> In my experience, many visitors of the Memorial saw the site as another tick mark in Charlottesville’s historical and racial timeline. One parent who was touring the campus with her daughter in high school believed the Memorial to be “a positive outcome of the white supremacy rally that was held here several years ago,” despite the concept for the Memorial having taken hold in 2010 with the student-run design contest previously mentioned. Posing the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers as a response to an event that is widely accepted to be glaring fault in our culture’s supposed linear development (in this case the Unite the Right Rally of 2017) suggests

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<sup>52</sup> Makau Mutua, “Savages, Victims, and Saviors: The Metaphor of Human Rights,” *Harvard International Law Journal* 42, no. 1 (2001): 207.

that the Memorial provides a correction for the past, putting us back on the right track. Furthermore, it reduces the Rally to a simple misstep in our collective timeline, even as a net positive precisely because it brought about the construction of the memorial, thus pushing this event back into the progress narrative. While these interpretations of the space are not necessarily harmful, they reveal an unspoken reliance on this eurocentric ideal.

This perspective of progress, Edward Soja argues, is no longer sustainable. He writes, “we can no longer depend on a story-line unfolding sequentially, an ever-accumulating history marching straight forward in plot and denouement, for too much is happening against the grain of time”<sup>53</sup> Studies of trauma and its victims show that not only do our minds fail to naturally heal or grow in a linear fashion, but forcing this narrative onto spaces of healing “often diverts us from the present injustices for which the previous generations only set the foundations.”<sup>54</sup> For example, the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers, while primarily focused on presenting the notion that the University of Virginia has learned from its past mistakes, obscures the instances of both systematic and interpersonal racism and oppression toward other marginalized communities that still exist on campus. Relying on this temporal attitude risks “the effect of limiting the ability of adopting a new narrative” that is more inclusive of people’s lived experiences.<sup>55</sup> The false security of the Memorial serving as an adequate reminder fails to adequately challenge the story of progress that has always been told. The Transatlantic Slave Trade has been reduced to a misfortunate, but now past, chapter of our collective history (or simply forgotten altogether) precisely because it is a glaring reminder of the hypocrisy of the traditional progress narrative.

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<sup>53</sup> Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*, (London New York: Verso, 2011), 23.

<sup>54</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Beacon Press, 1995), 150.

<sup>55</sup> Kenneth J. Bindas, “Re-Remembering a Segregated Past: Race in American Memory,” *History & Memory* 22, no. 1 (Spring/Summer //Spring/Summer2010 2010): 121, <https://doi.org/10.2979/HIS.2010.22.1.113>.

Michel Trouillot writes of slavery as a ghost, “both the past and a living presence... something that is and yet is not.”<sup>56</sup> Similarly, Christina Sharpe’s concept of “the Wake” is a salient metaphor in understanding how the ghost of slavery should be known outside of our traditional temporal narratives. She describes how the waves left behind by the Middle Passage still reverberate today, an illustration of the “past” that can never truly be left in the past.<sup>57</sup> Sharpe makes it clear that the role of memorials is twofold: they must add a critical analysis of our present moment to the conversation as well as educate others on the brutal reality of slavery. Acknowledgement of the Wake, or even the ghost, would fundamentally change how memorials are perceived as a moment in history.

With these perspectives in mind, two new goals of memorialization are illuminated: First, to explicitly contextualize the present-day experiences of Black Americans within the history of the Transatlantic Slave Trade; memorials to the enslaved on college campuses should connect their spaces to the lived realities of other marginalized groups within their communities today. Second, to demonstrate a commitment to truth no matter how uncomfortable it is; memorials must present a counternarrative to popular white discourse instead of stopping at asking for remembrance or reconciliation. In speaking of the process of Holocaust memorialization, Dori Laub reminds us that “the ‘not telling’ of the story serves as a perpetuation of its tyranny.”<sup>58</sup> Through these goals, memorials for slavery are reimagined as a space for reflecting on discomfort, an effort to break silence, instead of presenting a conclusive distillation of a past event.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 147.

<sup>57</sup> Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, Illustrated edition (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2016).

<sup>58</sup> Dori Laub, “Truth and Testimony: The Process and the Struggle,” in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, 1st edition (Baltimore: JHUP, 1995), 64.

## *II. A Different Approach*

So, how can memorials actualize these new standards? Some believe that we should do away with memorialization altogether. Mabel Wilson, one of the designers and cultural historians for the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers, writes “memorializing the enslaved is not enough. It’s by illuminating architectures of violence that we can best speak truth to the brutal and dehumanizing conditions of slavery and its legacy in today’s rising inequalities.”<sup>59</sup> Wilson recommends we turn our attention toward the preservation of structures once integral to the experience of slavery, specifically plantations; only in these spaces can meaningful connections be found that connect the history of slavery to the present-day experiences of Black people in the United States. For the University of Virginia and William & Mary, this would mean allocating more resources for the education and preservation of specific pre-existing sites, and perhaps foregoing memorialization altogether. However, I believe that the educational potential hoped for by Wilson can still be reached with memorialization. bell hooks’ “engaged pedagogy,” informed by feminist theory, affirms the emotional vulnerability and agency of the student in a classroom (in our case, the visitor to a memorial) in a way that creates environments that “inform our habits and being and ways of living outside the classroom.”<sup>60</sup> This perspective, when applied to memorials, requires a reimagination of the role of the visitor, thus shaping how a memorial space is constructed around them. This would place more pedagogical agency upon both the visitor and the space itself, allowing for the realization of the previously proposed goals of contemporary memorialization.

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<sup>59</sup> Wilson, “OPINION: Tell Slavery’s Violent Story through Its Architecture,” *Aljazeera*, April 6, 2015, <http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2015/4/tell-slaverys-violent-story-through-its-architecture.html>.

<sup>60</sup> bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 194.

If memorials of slavery are a representation of a traumatic event visitors should not be provided the luxury of assuming the role of the passive tourist, engaging with the site without the reflection necessary to make it relevant to their own lived experience. The visitor is a witness to trauma, one who agrees “to bear the solitude of a responsibility, and to bear the responsibility, precisely, of that solitude”<sup>61</sup> This means accepting a role akin to a medium, of experiencing the raw and unfiltered emotion that might come with processing an event, be that anger, confusion, or immense sadness. It also implies a relationship of respect and mutual trust between the witness and the storyteller. Visitors to a memorial concerning the history of slavery should feel as though that space gives them the freedom and safety to cry, get impassioned, or even leave feeling angry that more has not been done. Memorial designers should recognize the role these emotions play in the process of asking for forgiveness and educate themselves on the Black feminist and anthropological literature that addresses this approach to confronting trauma. What would happen if instead of (or in addition to) erecting a sign outlining appropriate behaviors at the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers, there was a sign offering support groups to reach out to in case a visitor found the experience difficult to emotionally comprehend? What if the timeline for the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers, instead of ending with Emancipation and the subsequent death of Isabella Gibbons, continued on to include the Unite the Right Rally, the Black Lives Matter protests of 2019, or one of the many instances in which marginalized groups at the University of Virginia had to fight for their own recognition and respect from the school?

These are large roles to assume, both the visitor as witness and the memorial space as educator, but ones that are necessary in order for a memorial site to engage critically with our

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<sup>61</sup> Shoshana Felman, “Education and Crisis, or the Vicissitudes of Teaching,” in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, 15.

present. Audre Lorde writes, “As they become known to and accepted by us, our feelings and the honest exploration of them become sanctuaries and spawning grounds for the most radical and daring of ideas.”<sup>62</sup> In some ways, refusal of this emotion is a further disservice to those who have been systematically oppressed: “Guilt is only another form of objectification.”<sup>63</sup> A memorial committed to positing the visitor as witness would tell a story that prioritizes truth and lived experience, no matter how uncomfortable it may be. Perhaps then would these spaces fully embrace their pedagogical potential, inviting both physical exploration of the sites’ architectural elements and individual emotional exploration.

## Conclusion

This paper began with the use of anthropological theories of space to examine sites of memorialization in relation to hostile campus landscapes that perpetuate the silencing and euphemistic representation of their histories. This perspective was applied in the following in-person and online ethnographic engagement with the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers at the University of Virginia and Hearth: Memorial to the Enslaved at William & Mary. The campus landscape was complicated as a space where present-day students and visitors become intertwined with a surrounding history that universities often fail to make transparent. Memorials were analyzed as spaces where our notions of past, present, and future are challenged, reflected in interviews that described the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers as a space of progress and negotiation of future memory. This ethnographic analysis concluded with an investigation of how the community of the University of Virginia has influenced the depiction of the Memorial

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<sup>62</sup> Audre Lorde, “Poetry is not a Luxury” in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, Revised edition., (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007), 37.

<sup>63</sup> Audre Lorde, “The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism” in *Sister Outsider*, 132.



within the context of larger university power structures. A larger conversation about progress emerged, informed by Women of Color feminisms' reimagination of potential futures that are instilled within the memorial space. A remaining question is: Where do we go from here?

In reflecting on the community feedback panels conducted by the Memorial for Enslaved Laborers' design team, one panelist insisted that the site would be an "ongoing project" for those who experience it.<sup>64</sup> Similarly, the University of Virginia has made concerted efforts between educational posts on social media, giving guided tours to key community members, and publishing various guide materials, to acknowledge that there is still more work to be done. Right now, that work looks like finding more names to inscribe onto the wall of the memorial; in January of 2021, five new names were added in a public unveiling ceremony.<sup>65</sup> However, in speaking to students and those who worked on the Memorial, it is unclear what further steps the University will take outside of the Memorial space to continue addressing their past and working toward a more inclusive future.

Today, many memorials represent an effort to cling to the narrative of progress that persists in our culture. As places of higher education, universities have a pedagogical responsibility to make not just memorials, but many different spaces on campus sites that foster the radical reimagining of different futures. Memorials are sites of learning with the potential to be just as valuable as the classroom, as we have established in earlier discussions informed by both anthropological and Black feminist theory. They must also be integrated into visitors' broader education of current race relations in the United States. Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor reminds us, "The struggle for Black liberation... is not an abstract idea molded in isolation from

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<sup>64</sup> AIA Virginia, "The Memorial to Enslaved Laborers at the University of Virginia Panel Discussion."

<sup>65</sup> Mike Kropf, "Hern Family Members Added to UVA Memorial to Enslaved Laborers," *Charlottesville Tomorrow*, January 20, 2021, sec. Public Education, Government, + Politics, <https://www.cvilletomorrow.org/articles/hern-family-members-added-to-uva-memorial-to-enslaved-laborers/>.

the wider phenomenon of economic exploitation and inequality that pervades all of American society; it is intimately bound up with them.”<sup>66</sup> We must ask ourselves, what parts of this reality do our current memorials of slavery address? How do we hold future memorials responsible for speaking on our current moment? As I reflect back on my time in Charlottesville, I think of sitting under a tent one afternoon waiting for new visitors as the memorial had been silenced by the looming thunderstorm. I stuck around, hoping that the rain would pass soon, and approached the Memorial to see droplets of water streaming from the memory marks on the inside wall. I learned later that this was an unintentional feature of the space, nuance that was born from the space itself; the lines in the granite just happened to hold onto water long after the rest of the wall had dried. It looked like blood running from the gashes of whip marks, or tears streaming from the people represented only by their name. It was haunting and mournful, but only showed itself to those who decided to wait out the rain.

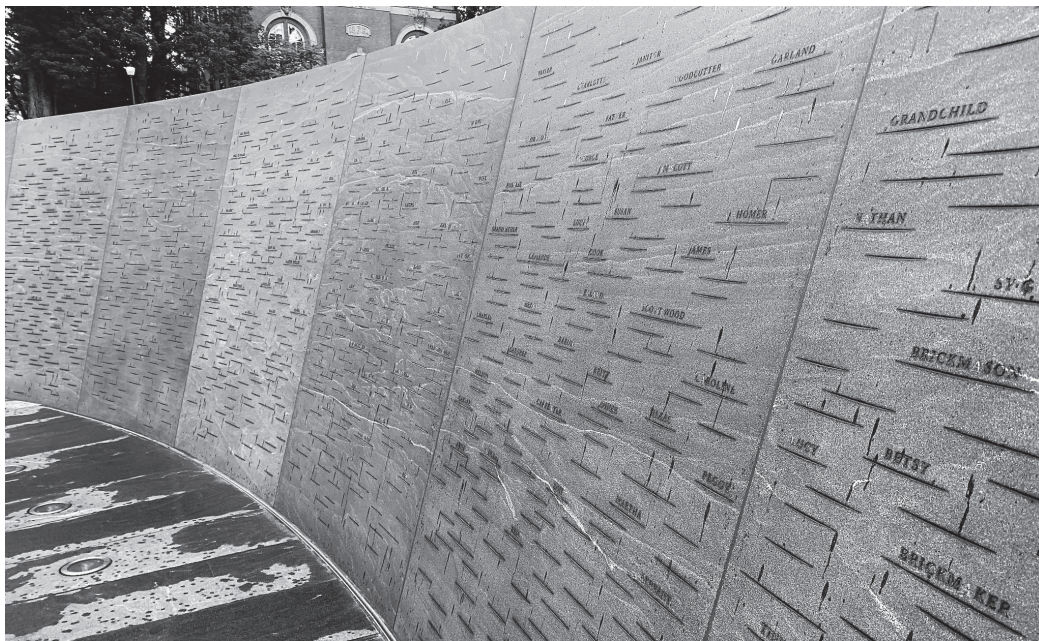


Figure 7. Memory Marks  
(Author, August 10, 2021)

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<sup>66</sup> Keeanga-Yamahatta Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*, Updated edition. (Chicago, Illinois: Haymarket Books, 2021), 194.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to include the following statements from William & Mary regarding the use of stolen land and exploited labor to create the institution we benefit from today:

Acknowledgement of Indigenous Peoples as the Historical Custodians of the Land at William & Mary:

William & Mary acknowledges the Indigenous peoples who are the original inhabitants of the lands our campus is on today – the Cheroenhaka (Nottoway), Chickahominy, Eastern Chickahominy, Mattaponi, Monacan, Nansemond, Nottoway, Pamunkey, Patawomeck, Upper Mattaponi, and Rappahannock tribes – and pay our respect to their tribal members past and present.<sup>67</sup>

Statement on Slavery and its Legacies:

The Board of Visitors acknowledges that William & Mary enslaved people, exploited them and their labor, and perpetuated the legacies of racial discrimination. The Board profoundly regrets these activities, apologizes for them, expresses its deep appreciation for the contributions made by the African and African American members of its community to the vitality of William & Mary then, now, and for all time coming, and commits to continue our efforts to remedy the lingering effects of past injustices.<sup>68</sup>

Thank you to all of the people who gave me guidance throughout this project. To my advisors, Andrea Wright, Joseph Jones, and Claire McKinney, I am grateful for all of the recommended readings, writing edits, and patient listening to me trying to make sense of all of these ideas in our meetings. It was wonderful to have such caring supervision as I navigated a project representing the culmination of my time in the Anthropology Department. Thank you to all who let me interview them during my time in Charlottesville and on Zoom, your input formed the foundation for this entire project. Finally, thank you to my partner Jacob and best friend

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<sup>67</sup> “Acknowledgement of Indigenous Peoples as the Historical Custodians of the Land at William & Mary,” William & Mary, August 2020, <https://www.wm.edu/as/anthropology/research/centers/airc/land-acknowledgement/index.php>.

<sup>68</sup> “Statement on Slavery and Its Legacies,” William & Mary, accessed April 22, 2022, <https://www.wm.edu/sites/lemonproject/statement-on-slavery/index.php>.

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