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Racial Countermemory: Tourism, Spatial Design, and Hegemonic Remembering

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On July 29, 1910, a massacre took place in the town of Slocum, TX, a small rural community 125 miles north of Houston. Three Black men were walking down a dirt road late at night when they passed a few white men, who murdered them in cold blood (Madigan, 2006). While specific details of the incident are sparse, we know that within 48 hours, an unknown number of Black residents (ranging from dozens to possibly hundreds) were murdered. Most of their names were forgotten, and there was no total body count for the massacre, though the sheriff of the county suggested the death toll could be between 200-300 African-Americans. "The [white men] hunted the Negroes down like sheep," he stated (Madigan, 2006). This mass slaughter, while publicized in the *Dallas Morning News* and the *New York Times*, was quickly erased out of any national narrative on racism during the Jim Crow era. Though people in the Slocum area told stories of the massacre for decades, there were no public memorials dedicated to the incident. Many in the area even described the story as a legend rather than a historical event.

However, in 2016, over a century later, the "legends" of the 1910 Slocum Massacre were enshrined by the Texas Historical Commission (THC) with a marker one mile southeast of the town. The marker claims that eight men died (and acknowledges probably many more did, too) and cites a poignant quote from a piece of Texas legislation that recognized the incident in 2011: "Only by shining a light on previous injustice can we learn from and move toward a future of greater healing and reconciliation" (Ramirez, 2016). Many African Americans in the area celebrated the marker. After hearing for years that many of their ancestors were victims of a terrible massacre but lacking the historical proof to authenticate it, they finally had the THC on their side. One confirmed victim's descendant, Constance Hollie-Jawaid, stated of the incident, "It was being ignored, and by ignoring it, you're spitting in the face of those who died during that tragic event. You're basically saying either it didn't happen or it was not important" (Madigan, 2006). Many in the area were overjoyed that a history they had been privately taught for decades had finally been publicly acknowledged through historical research.

Not everyone was happy, though, especially many white people in the area. Jimmy Odom, chair of the Anderson County Historical Commission, the county where Slocum is located, critiqued the marker: "This is a nice, quiet community with a wonderful school system. It would be a shame to mark them as racist from now until the end of time" (Madigan, 2006). Anderson County Commissioner Greg Chapain agreed with Odom, claiming, "So we've looked at all the

information—as far as all the ones that have been supplied to us. Everything has contradicted itself totally—as far as how many were killed—how many weren't killed. How many Blacks? How many whites? ... Nothing was consistent—and then no one was prosecuted on it. No one was convicted” (Davies, 2015). While the Texas Historical Commission believed they had enough research to construct a monument in honor of the dead (some of which was built from E.R. Bills' 2014 book *The 1910 Slocum Massacre*), many people in the area, especially white people, believed the commission didn't have enough evidence to make its claims. Nonetheless, this controversy on how to remember, or, perhaps, forget, the Slocum massacre illustrates a memory problem—specifically, an issue with countermemory.

Countermemory can be defined as a marginalized (or often erased) form of remembering, one that resituates the narratives of the oppressed or forgotten as equal to dominant narratives and often contains the same—if not more—historical evidence. Counter memories can be constructed for people, identities, historical events, or nation-building. In Slocum, the dominant narrative is that the African-American massacre never took place, or that there isn't enough “evidence” to suggest that it did. Though legends of the massacre spread orally around the area for over a century, some citizens of Slocum downplayed their relevance and played off the stories as fake. However, the new marker in Slocum, along with the Texas Historical Commission's approval, E.R. Bill's book, and a dozen articles or so that implicate the town in a historical tragedy, together build a counter memory in the community that resists the dominant discourse. Many white people in the area oppose these counter memories because they damage the perception of white people and their town's reputation. Thus, the power of counter memories is not just that they can build identities and form communities but that they can drastically alter how a community perceives itself.

In this article, we build a working rhetorical theory of counter memory, a term not sufficiently discussed in rhetorical scholarship but used in cultural geography. To do this, we begin by discussing the rhetoric of public memory and explore how public memory has been constructed, utilized, and performed over the last 30 years of scholarship. Though our work here focuses specifically on race, there are broader rhetorical applications of counter memories, and we hope that other rhetoricians might employ counter memory to better understand the relationship between history, memory, identity, and power because these relationships enhance how we understand ideology, sight, and knowledge creation. We then move to defining counter memory by first using interdisciplinary scholarship to illustrate how other fields employ it and then define it in concrete rhetorical terms. From there, we move into three different case studies of the National Museum of Peace and Justice (NMPJ), the Porvenir Massacre, and the Whitney Plantation to demonstrate the rhetorical nature of counter memory. We explore each case study through certain themes that better characterize its rhetorical capabilities: the spatiality of counter memory at the NMPJ, the hegemonic defenses of white memory at Porvenir, and the relationship between heritage tourism sites and counter memory at the Whitney Plantation. As a subversive rhetorical feature, counter memory re/writes heritage tourism sites, memorials, and historical markers in a way that could be transformative in the American South and Texas.

A History of Public Memory in Rhetorical Studies

According to Susannah Radstone (2008), we can trace memory studies back to the late-1980s and 1990s and one of the first interdisciplinary conferences on memory in 1998, titled “Frontiers of Memory.” Influenced by these interdisciplinary scholars, rhetoricians began applying these concepts of memory to study public memory. Much in the way classical rhetoric analyzed how orators apply mnemonics to aid their memories (seen in the likes of Quintilian’s *Institutio Oratoria* and Cicero’s *De Oratore*) public memory scholars studied how mnemonics affect the public. The emphasis on recall and retention evolved to analysis on seeing how space and place hold rhetorical dimensions. The *ars memoriae* (or, the art of memory) transformed from training the individual mind to studying how people collectively train to identify with public objects. This change from memorization mnemonics to mnemonics of identity (mnemonics that highlight how personal and collective identity are shaped) accentuated the rhetorical dimensions of created objects, space, and memory and how they convene publicly. Below, we discuss a brief history of public memory rhetorics as a means to further explore the need of countermemory studies, labeling the exigencies for our study.

One of the first pieces of rhetorical scholarship on public memory is Carole Blair, Marsha S. Jeppeson, and Enrico Pucci, Jr.’s (1991) “Public Memorializing in Postmodernity” published in the *Quarterly Journal of Speech (QJS)*. Their article uses a public memory lens to analyze the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington D.C., arguing that postmodern texts and monuments are never “complete,” and rhetoric scholars should attempt “to grasp the multiplicity of any discourse” (p. 282). This groundbreaking article opened the door for people to study the rhetoric of public memory because it highlights the multiple interpretations of monuments and their effects.

In the 1990s, *QJS* published three more texts on public memory that deal with new issues of public tragedy, race, and rhetoric. First, Stephen H. Browne (1995) published a review essay, “Reading, Rhetoric, and the Texture of Public Memory” in *QJS*. The four books he analyzes, however, are not explicitly “rhetorical” texts; rather, they are public memory texts published in American Studies and History. Browne makes the case that public memory is a rhetorical method, and in his conclusion he argues for public memory to be its own subsection in the field of rhetoric. Cheryl R. Jorgensen-Earp and Lori A. Lanzilotti (1998) followed Browne’s lead and published their text on shrines of national tragedy in *QJS* three years later. Their text analyzes the public memories of tragedy (such as the Oklahoma City bombing and the material objects visitors brought to enshrine the horrific event) to see how individuals remember collective pain and create meaning from tragedy. They write, poetically, “The ritual of visiting the site and constructing the new on the ashes of the old, is itself a ‘mnemonic device’ that helps mourners ‘keep in mind certain thoughts and sentiments,’” a way for people to share publicly with others but also to move forward in their private grief (p. 163). Their article challenges how we perceive the differences between public and private grief. Browne (1999) published another piece in *QJS*, titled, “Remembering Crispus Attucks: Race, Rhetoric, and the Politics of Commemoration.” His article explores the public ceremonies that commemorate Attucks’ life, specifically remarking that the “anxiety” over the proper way to remember Attucks highlights America’s collective identity colliding with historical memory (p. 185-186). Browne concludes

his piece by stating that “the relationship between memory and collective identity has always troubled the cultural scene, that Americans well before the advent of ‘postmodernity’ have imagined, contested, expropriated, and otherwise kept their past alive for unabashedly political purposes” (p. 186). Taken together, these three articles further the subfield of public memory rhetorics by exploring their intersections with race, postmodernism, tragedies, and other avenues of identity-making.

Kendall R. Phillips’ (2004) interdisciplinary edited collection *Framing Public Memory* was one of the first books to argue about memory from a rhetorical perspective (though the text is interdisciplinary). He states in the introduction:

Indeed, the study of memory is largely one of the rhetoric of memories. The ways memories attain meaning, compel others to accept them, and are themselves contested, subverted, and supplanted by other memories are essentially rhetorical. As an art interested in the ways symbols are employed to induce cooperation, achieve understanding, contest understanding, and offer dissent, rhetoric is deeply steeped in a concern for public memories. (p. 2-3)

His collection emphasizes rhetoric as a central construct in understanding public memory and place, space, and politics. Greg Dickinson, Carole Blair, and Brian L. Ott's *Places of Public Memory* (2010) locate museums and memorials around the world that build “place” and public memory; Bradford Vivian's *Public Forgetting* (2010) integrates questions of public forgetting into conversations of memory; and G. Mitchell Reyes’ (2010) edited collection *Public Memory, Race, and Ethnicity* analyzes how publics and communities inscribe and interpret race and ethnicity through various sites and act of public memory. Together, these three books (all published in the same year) extend public memory by redefining its significance in modern society.

Defining Countermemory

With a better picture of how memory studies has progressed as a subfield, as well as how scholars in rhetorical studies have engaged memory and public memory, we now turn to focus more specifically on how public memory has been adopted in the American South to illustrate what is missing from this research: countermemory. From there, we will introduce countermemory and racial countermemory as rhetorical concepts birthed out of a problematic memory-politic in the South.

Following the 2017 American Nazi and Klan rally in Charlottesville, Virginia Representative Thomas Garrett made this statement: “[The white supremacists] do not represent who we are as Americans” (Zeit, 2017). Other public figures made similar comments on social media, including Sally Yates (2017), who tweeted, “The poison spewed by Nazis, white supremacists, and the KKK is not who we are as a country.” This line of reasoning, a form of American Exceptionalism, argues that the United States is unique from other nations and plays a specific role in global history. Along with this argument is a parallel one: Because the United States is exceptional, it does not suffer from large scale social ills like Nazism and racial genocide. As a

nation, we may argue that Richard Spencer and his followers are aberrant, but this is an unfounded argument. Racism was a core value when this country was conceived, and hundreds of years later, it is still firmly a part of our national identity. In light of the fact that we suffer from selective amnesia when it comes to remembering our histories, it is not a surprise the memorials, historic markers, and historical societies present a sanitized perspective. As a result, “America has ended up with a landscape of denial” (Loewen, 2007, p. 5). Public memory in the American South is particularly complex, and in many communities, dominant cultural narratives overshadow Other/ed stories. As a way to preserve a distinctly Southern nationalist identity, for much of the 20th and 21st century, African Americans have been written out of public memory. So, the current method of remembering has more to do with forgetting than it does remembering, as well as what and whom we are remembering (Dickinson, Ott, and Aoki, 2006).

We turn first to cultural geographer Stephen Legg (2005) to define and unpack counter-memory. Conceptually, Legg draws from Walter Benjamin (1968), but for the actual term, “sites of counter-memory,” he credits Michel Foucault (1977) as well as Pierre Nora (1989), a French historian. According to Legg, “[s]ites of counter-memory mark times and places in which people have refused to forget. They can rebut the memory schema of a dominant class, caste, race, or nation, providing an alternative form of remembering and identity” (p. 181). Following Walter Benjamin’s warning about historicism, Legg asserts that the way public memory is presented historically does not actually recognize the overlooked stories of marginalized individuals and events. For Legg, a more accurate representation of history comes from the idea of melancholia in Benjamin’s (1940) “On the Concept of History.” Because of the flawed way that we remember history, Benjamin recommends that we maintain an active, evolving, and melancholic attitude towards the past. When we adopt a mournful posture towards history, it “. . . generates sites for memory and history, for the rewriting of the past as well as the reimagining of the future” (Eng and Kazanjian, 2003, p. 1). The focus of Legg’s research is how certain memories are repressed or forgotten in Dehli, a similar pattern that we trace in the American South with regard to African American, Indigenous, and Mexican American stories. As he analyzes various contested spaces and places in Dehli, he applies the term, “sites of counter-memory”:

This phrase combines the work of Foucault with French historian Pierre Nora. Nora coined the phrase *lieux de mémoire* (sites, places, or realms of memory) to represent the ways people came to identify with the nation. These could be material sites, such as monuments or battlefields; symbolic, such as idols or flags; or functional, such as histories or institutions. Combining Nora’s and Foucault’s work allows us to seek out the sites in which dominant processes of ordering and memory formation were challenged, mobilizing a counter-historical narrative—in this case that of nationalism—to forge a site of counter-memory, whether it be material, functional, or symbolic. (p. 183)

As such, sites of counter-memory are characterized by a challenging—even a disruption—of dominant historical narratives. These sites can also be material, digital, metaphysical, or symbolic.

Also taking up countermemory, cultural geographer Derek Alderman (2010) examines the African American monument in Savannah, Georgia and focuses on the complex relationship between contested public memory and Savannah's African American community. He describes the lengthy battle that teacher and activist Abigail Jordan fought to get the monument approved, the debate over the monument's text (taken from Maya Angelou's writing), and the conflict with local leaders and community members over all aspects of the monument (its placement, the text, and its purpose). Alderman argues that the monument represents a site of countermemory, and, drawing from Legg, also establishes how these sites function to remember the forgotten or suppressed stories:

These sites 'can affect contemporary restitution and reparation, force recognition of wrongdoing, and increase readiness of groups to listen to the stories of the previously silent'. The construction of counter-memory can be highly contentious because of the political stakes involved and the inherent difficulty of recovering long repressed (and suppressed) memories and identities. (p. 90-91)

We see several important principles from Legg's and Alderman's research as we seek to cultivate a rhetoric of countermemory.

First, countermemory resists dominant/hegemonic cultural narratives for the purpose of exposing and circulating diverse narratives. Dominant cultural narratives are often disguised as "historical facts" that are objectively true. These narratives are normalized as they are repeated from one generation to another; they are also normalized via public discourse (historical monuments, memorials, markers, and museums) and become what Giroux (1991) calls "master narratives." In contrast, countermemory disrupts and deconstructs by either presenting a competing narrative of the same evidence, augmenting the narrative already in place with additional information, or telling the story from the perspective of a marginalized group or person. For example, Dave Tell's (2019) work in *Remembering Emmett Till* demonstrates the process and impact of rewriting and remembering the story of Till's murder in contrast to the problematic ways that his death has been conveyed to the public. Countermemory celebrates story, because as Christina Cedillo (Cedillo et al., 2018) writes, "story [is] research [and] research [is] story." Story disturbs the orderly, hegemonic dynamics at play in public memory sites.

Second, countermemory is both an individual and collective project to remember inequalities, tragedies, and injustices, especially those that are not a part of public memory. Running parallel to our first point, countermemory actively seeks to remember that which has been forgotten, misinterpreted, or co-opted because memorials function as memory-aids for the public. Contrary to the 718 memory sites crafted by the United Daughters of the Confederacy to circulate a Lost Cause narrative (Lowndes, 2017), countermemory identifies individuals who were enslaved, lynched, or bought. For example, at heritage tourism sites like plantation houses, countermemory looks like the Whitney Plantation, where the enslaved are named, the majority of the tour avoids the "Big House," and the docents identify as people of color.

Finally, countermemory is a way to link the past and the present instead of disassociating the present moment from the concerns of the past, or, in other words, countermemory reminds us of “the presentness of the past” (Legg, 2005, p. 186). Because white Americans tend to distance themselves from events or individuals that remind us of our country’s racism and settler-colonialism, countermemory creates a continuous narrative that forms connections between past events and current concerns. For example, the National Memorial for Peace and Justice (hereafter NMPJ) depicts the United States’ legacy of lynching and begins the tour with sculptures of enslaved individuals, progresses through the indoor section that names the individuals who were lynched, and leads back to an outdoor area with another sculpture of Black men with their hands up. The movement through the memorial takes the visitor on a chronological journey as well, one that materially and physically links the country’s history of slavery with its present-day concerns of violence and imprisonment of Black males. Likewise, countermemory functions to remind us of the links between past and present.

In this article, we broadly focus on countermemory but use race as a lens to illustrate this rhetorical concept. We highlight racial countermemory and use the American South (including Texas) as a backdrop for a larger conversation about race and public memory. In his research that focuses on the Mississippi Delta region, Dave Tell (2019) argues for an “ecology of memory,” or a deep relationality between place, race, and memory. Tell writes that “histories of racism . . . commemoration . . . and of the Mississippi Delta cannot even be *described* (let alone understood or analyzed) apart from the ways that race, place, and commemoration work through each other—and transform each other” (p. 6). Much of the time, examinations of countermemory intersect with conversations about race (and place). If countermemory opposes dominant narratives, then racial countermemory more specifically looks to identify, analyze, and refute dominant racial narratives and replace them with narratives that have either been forgotten or suppressed. Sites of racial countermemory are frequently fraught with conflict by different groups of people for distinct reasons. In the case of the 2016 memorial for the Slocum Massacre marker, the friction was from white residents who did not want to carry the responsibility of the historical events—although residents framed it as an issue with the number of Black individuals killed or the documentary evidence of those deaths.

Other sites of countermemory have been met with similar contention. When the NMPJ was built in Montgomery, Alabama in 2018, many residents resented it, citing a fear that it would “dredge up the past and incite anger and backlash within Black communities.” One resident complained that it was “. . . a waste of money, a waste of space [and was] bringing up bullshit” (as cited in Levin, 2018). Similar reactions occurred in response to the Whitney Plantation in Wallace, Louisiana and the African American Monument in Savannah, Georgia. Suffice it to say: when sites of countermemory are created, white people feel threatened. This country’s dominant narrative seeks to deny, forget, or alter the truth about slavery and the persistence of racism and explicit racist policies—so, when countermemory confronts these false histories, the reaction is frequently one of fear, anger, and resentment.

For the remainder of this article, we turn to focus more specifically on three case studies to demonstrate the rhetorical nature of countermemory in action: the NMPJ in Montgomery,

Alabama, the site of the Porvenir massacre in West Texas, and the Whitney Plantation in Wallace, Louisiana. While the case studies are related in their countermemory subject matter, we characterize each based on distinct rhetorical themes. For the NMPJ, we focus on the spatiality of countermemory, both in terms of the memorial's layout as well as its proximity to traditional Southern heritage tourism sites in Montgomery. For the Porvenir massacre, we highlight the way Mexican Americans fought against white people to preserve this history as an opportunity to analyze white resistance to racial countermemories. For the Whitney Plantation, we contrast the tour's spotlight on enslaved individuals and minimization of the wealthy slave owners (and the "Big House") with most plantation tours in the South that valorize slave owners, their wealth, and their lifestyle. Each case study will further enhance our understanding of the principles of countermemories described above through spatial analysis, discursive analysis, and first-hand accounts.

The NMPJ: The Spatiality of Countermemory

The NMPJ, a memorial built to honor the more than 4,400 lynchings of Black people in the United States between 1877 and 1950, opened its doors on April 26, 2018 after much anticipation (Equal Justice Initiative, 2017). The memorial is modeled after the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin and the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg and is meant to document the thousands of racial terror lynchings in the United States. In spite of the fact that lynchings occurred for nearly 75 years, there were no large-scale sites to remember this atrocity until the NMPJ was built. According to Bryan Stevenson, director of the Equal Justice Initiative, it is important that visitors "see the names of all these people [who have] never been named in public" (as cited in Robertson, 2018). The names are carved on steel columns and arranged according to state and county. April visited the NMPJ in August 2018 and is able to describe firsthand how the memorial's layout and its proximity to Montgomery's Southern heritage tourism sites illustrates how countermemory disrupts the American's South's nostalgia for the antebellum era. The NMPJ accomplishes this disruption by communicating one unbroken narrative of injustice and violence towards Black Americans that continues to present-day concerns about police brutality and mass incarceration.

Other scholars in rhetorical studies have examined the intersection of race, spatiality, and memory, and we, too, see their significance in reference to the NMPJ (Shackel, 2003; Gallagher & LaWare, 2010). The first point of interest is the NMPJ's location in Montgomery, Alabama, a city awash in conflicting racial memories; Montgomery boasts many historical markers that remember Confederate "heroes," annual celebrations for Confederate Memorial Day on the Alabama State Capitol Grounds, and daily tours at the First White House of the Confederacy. These spaces and places in Montgomery demonstrate a Lost Cause ideology, which is a belief that the cause of the Confederacy was honorable and heroic. This outlook is commonly circulated in Southern heritage sites, memorials, historical markers, and monuments. Alongside these spaces and places that valorize a Lost Cause ideology, are contrasting memory sites like the Civil Rights Memorial Center, Court Square Fountain, the Legacy Museum, and the NMPJ. Montgomery is a city divided by how history is remembered for residents and visitors alike. As mentioned earlier, the construction of the NMPJ was not welcomed by many white residents,

and this is a theme that recurs when countermemory disrupts dominant cultural narratives. The NMPJ's location is particularly disruptive to tourists walking around/through Montgomery's Lost Cause sites, as sites like the First White House of the Confederacy and the extensive Confederate Memorial Monument are within walking distance from the NMPJ. These tourism destinations are walkable, so it's not uncommon for tourists to experience these three spaces and places on foot. The proximity of these opposing memory sites from each other sets up a material/metaphysical affect for/to visitors and creates a sense of affective dissonance. The geographic proximity of the NMPJ with these sites that depict a hegemonic cultural narrative is jarring; in some ways, it makes the NMPJ's message even more impactful simply because just a few blocks away, we can see the relevance for this site of countermemory amidst a tourism industry that is founded on Lost Cause principles.

In addition to the NMPJ's location in relation to Southern heritage tourism sites, we highlight its layout within a rhetorical framework of countermemory, including its role that resists dominant hegemonic narratives, remembers injustices that are not a part of public memory, and links the past and present. The memorial is separated into five distinct areas: the outer garden/courtyard, the walkway up to the structure, the memorial with the engraved names (the covered portion), the outdoor memorial with duplicates of the engraved names, and the walkway back around to the entrance/exit. These five regions flow into each other and generally follow a large circular pattern. Each area also has a distinct purpose that ties into the overall narrative, as well as a more generalized chronological pattern. The outdoor courtyard/garden is open to the public, so there is no need to purchase a ticket to walk around and read some of the signage. The centerpiece of the garden is a brick wall composed of bricks made by enslaved Black people in Montgomery in the late 1850s, and according to the exhibit label, ". . . who endured the humiliation of bondage with strength and skill that we can touch today." The wall, a material work of rhetoric, speaks of the talents and skills that are usually overlooked by Southern tourism heritage sites, which tend to cite the white slave owners as the ones who built the plantation homes. For example, the historic markers placed near the plantation homes in northwest South Carolina list the original owner as responsible for building the mansion instead of more accurately attributing the labor to those who were enslaved. Not all parts of the NMPJ are intended for physical touch, but this part is. The exhibit label encourages visitors to run their hands on the bricks and remember the hands and bodies that labored for wealthy white individuals.

Upon purchasing a ticket, visitors can enter the memorial. The main part of the memorial (the part with the roof and the hanging markers) was only a few hundred yards away at the top of a small hill. The sheer size of the memorial in conjunction with the statues of enslaved individuals at different stages of the slave trade immediately evokes an affective response. Ghanaian artist Kwame Akoto-Bamfo created the sculptures in remembrance of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, and in particular, the Trade's lasting mark on his home-country (see Figure 1). Akoto-Bamfo asks this question in all of his artwork: "Are we really free from the legacies of slavery and colonisation?" (as cited in Martin, 2018). On one side of the path was the statues and to the right was informational signage that relayed the story of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. The immediate purpose of the long walkway up to the main part of the memorial is to provide a



Figure 1: Sculptures created by Ghanaian artist Kwame Akoto-Bamfo in remembrance of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Photograph by April O'Brien.

framework for visitors; it re/tells a story that is notoriously minimized or elided to prevent white Americans from grappling with their violent history. This story leads to the physical memorial where visitors can view the names of some 800 men, women, and children who were lynched. As a site of countermemory, this first space within the NMPJ functions to replace hegemonic Southern narratives of gentility and hospitality with the jarring reality of the suppressed memories of individuals who were lynched.

The main part of the memorial is an open-air structure covered by a roof. Each large, steel rectangle includes the name of an individual, along with the state and county where s/he was lynched. Initially, the steel slabs are face-to-face, but the floor slants down and the slabs become hanging structures, enacting the image of lynching (see Figure 2). Just outside the covered area is a space that corresponds with the main space; in this space, though, duplicates of the steel slabs lie on the ground in parallel rows. One of the volunteer docents informed April that the duplicates were intended for the communities where these individuals were lynched. The Equal Justice Initiative ultimately seeks to circulate this message of counter-memory into the communities where these injustices occurred. These duplicate slabs would then be sent back into the communities so that these individuals can be remembered in the



Figure 2: The inside portion of the NMPJ. Photograph by April O'Brien.

spaces and places where they lived and worked. In the case of the NMPJ, it remembers the 800+ individuals who were lynched around the country, so the Equal Justice Initiative maintains the circulation of these individuals' names beyond the memorial in Montgomery as a long-term goal. In this case, circulation resists the dominant narrative in the South that has erased these names from public memory.

The spatiality of the NMPJ is composed in such a way to tell one continuous narrative—a countermemory of violence, injustice, and racism that persists to this day. The memorial's physical location in Montgomery generates a sense of affective dissonance through its streets named after Confederate leaders, its proximity to the First White House of the Confederacy, as well as to the Alabama River, where enslaved individuals were unloaded and sold like cattle. Whereas a memory site like the First White House of the Confederacy relays a false Lost Cause narrative and valorizes injustices like slavery, the NMPJ, as a site of countermemory, disrupts this dominant cultural narrative by telling one continuous story from the perspective of Black Americans. The NMPJ exposes the fallacy of White America and compels visitors to grapple with a country built on inequality and injustice.

The Porvenir Massacre and Hegemonic Memory

However, counter-memories don't only occur in museum spaces; they also conjure resistance on small plaques miles away from society. In West Texas, near the border of Mexico and Big Bend National Park region, lies the unincorporated village of Porvenir. The village has no industry nor discernable population and is only remembered as the site of a terrible, racist massacre. In January 1918, at the height of anti-Mexican sentiments along the Texas-Mexico border, a Texas Rangers squad entered the village looking for the perpetrators of a raid that took place in another part of the county a month prior. They didn't find any evidence that people in the community took part in the raid but arrested three male villagers anyways. The next day the villagers were released and returned home, but the Rangers once again returned--this time with injustice on their minds (Carrigan and Webb, 2013). They separated the male villagers from the female villagers and took the 13 men and two boys outside of the town where they proceeded to shoot and kill all 15 of them.¹ The 15 boys and men were murdered as an act of retaliation for the raid, but, as stated, no evidence suggested anyone involved in this crime lived in this camp. The Rangers company was eventually disbanded, yet no one was ever charged with a crime (Carrigan and Webb, 2013).

The memory of this event soon left public knowledge, and it has been left out of Texas state history and even forgotten by many of the descendants of the massacre. This history recently garnered new attention, however, once Arlinda Valencia (a descendant of Longino Flores, killed in the massacre) learned of this incident as an adult. She realized she needed to tell the story and organized a remembrance event at the Texas State Capitol in 2018 that hosted 400 people (Romero, 2019). Before this, though, historian Monica Muñoz Martínez petitioned the Texas Historical Commission to add a marker about the massacre near Porvenir because people needed to understand the "state-sanctioned violence" of the era (Nguyen, 2018). The marker's text was approved in July 2013 and was placed near Marfa, the closest town to the now abandoned Porvenir, in early-2019. The text reads, partly, as follows:

A group of Texas Rangers from Company B in Marfa, U.S. Army soldiers from Troop G of the 8th Cavalry, and local ranchers arrived at Porvenir in the early morning hours of January 28, 1918. They came to the ranch of Manuel Moralez and separated fifteen able-bodied men and boys from women, children, and other men. Though initial accounts denied any wrongdoing, later testimony confirmed that these 15 victims were shot and killed.

The rest of the text situated the historical context of anti-Mexican aggression at the time and details the lack of investigation into the massacre.

¹ It is important to us to name the 15 dead boys and men: Manuel Moralez, Román Nieves, Longino Flores, Alberto García, Eutimio Gonzales, Macedonio Huertas, Tiburcio Jaques, Ambrosio Hernández, Antonio Castanedo, Pedro Herrera, Viviano Herrera, Severiano Herrera, Pedro Jiménez, Serapio Jiménez, and Juan Jiménez.

However, this plaque was not placed in Presidio County in early-2019 without controversy. After the text of the marker was approved in July 2018, Presidio County Historical Commission Chair Mona Blocker Garcia attempted to prevent the marker, by sending an email to the Texas Historical Commission, stating, “The militant Hispanics have turned this marker request into a political rally and want reparations from the federal government for a 100-year-old plus tragic event” (as cited in Tyx, 2018). Other County officials effectively delayed approval of the marker until they all agreed upon the text, which led to the American Historical Association denouncing the delay because of this “dog whistle” (Tyx, 2018). In relation to the other counter-memories being presented in this article, the debate around remembering the Porvenir Massacre illustrates the rhetorical power of counter-memories in the way it forces the hegemony to react and keep its power intact, revealing the artificial construction of that power in the discourse surrounding these memories.

Hegemonic theory proposes that those in power want to remain in power and will utilize all means to keep power (Gramsci, 2011; Mearsheimer, 2010). This principle translates to memories as well, as those who have power in portraying specific memories that portray them positively will fight to keep them intact. Counter-memories exist as direct opposition to maintaining hegemonic memory; counter-memories disrupt typical systems of knowledge and how that information is spread because they create *alternative* forms of memory. Thus, when counter-memories form, agents with power typically attempt to erase them or challenge their validity. Such is the case in Charleston, SC, when the city quickly scrubbed over spray paint that challenged the Confederate Defenders of Charleston monument as racist (Sanchez and Moore, 2015). Instead of allowing people to stick with this counter-memory that the Confederacy might not have been “honorable,” the city chose to hide the spray paint but keep the monument intact—a powerful, symbolic gesture that they would not openly deal with arguments against the Confederacy. Or, similarly, the same defenses came to light when a statue of Clarence Darrow, the famed, agnostic defense attorney for the Scopes Trial, was erected beside a statue of William Jennings Bryan, the Christian fundamentalist who was the prosecutor in the trial, at the Rhea County Courthouse in Tennessee in 2017.² A statue of Bryan had existed at the courthouse since 2005 and represented rural Tennessee’s Christian values, and when the Darrow statue was erected, many in the community felt their values were being challenged because of the “ongoing attempt by secularists in America to blur or remove symbols reminding us of our Judeo-Christian heritage” (Fausset, 2017). Counter-memories cause those in power to react, defend, and try to levy their power because counter-memories are perceived as a visceral threat to the hegemony.

In Porvenir, hegemonic defenses developed swiftly. People, many of whom were white but some who were Mexican-American, attempted to charge the counter-memory as being nothing more than a political stunt to gain power (as seen above in Garcia’s quote). Of course, such an argument leaves out the fact that this counter-memory is a *true*, under-reported incident.

² James attributes this research to his student, Porter Bowman, who wrote a seminar paper on the memory of the Scopes Trial at the Rhea County Courthouse in a recent course.

Garcia’s argument solely relies upon perceived politics. Yet, her entire argument could be analyzed as a red herring that attempts to move people away from the real history in West Texas to align them with different political beliefs. Others in the community have attempted to fight back against this countermemory by questioning why it was labelled a “massacre” or saying “radicals in the ‘brown power’ movement” *only* want to share negative stories about white people (as cited in Tyx, 2018). Nonetheless, the argument that we should remember the massacre was met with harsh criticism by those who argue that remembering it as a crime is solely as a political act.

The marker itself lies 27 miles from Marfa (the closest incorporated town) and over 10 miles away from Porvenir on US Highway 90. It exists—almost quite literally—in the middle of nowhere (as can be seen in Figure 3). It doesn’t interact with other memories in the same way the NMPJ does because there is nothing to interact with. Yet, even this marker, placed miles away from civilization, still causes people with power to react because it simply exists. Hegemonic memory calls for Black and white interpretations of history and balks at any sign of dissent. White people in the area don’t have to face their tragedies every single day with the placement of this marker. Actually, one would have to go out of their way to interact with it. Yet, its mere presence and the idea that a tragedy was misremembered forces them to combat it, even when the state history board tells them that this massacre took place. Hegemonic views of memory cause people to revolt against anything that might be perceived as a challenge, even when the site of the memory is distant.



Figure 3: A picture of the Porvenir Massacre plaque 27 miles west of Marfa, TX (*New York Times*).

All of these arguments are extensions of hegemonic views of history that attempt to downplay or negate the real history of the massacre. They exist solely as defenses for a hegemonic view of history—not one concerned with truth, but one concerned with power. Counter-memories are political because their very nature emphasizes disruption of normalized discourse that is either wrong or that downplays negative historical moments. The fight to remember the Porvenir Massacre emphasizes the logical hoops people will jump through in order to preserve their imagined view of history, one that systemically erases dissenting points of view.

Whitney Plantation: How Counter-memory Challenges Heritage Tourism Sites

Located less than an hour from New Orleans, Whitney Plantation is situated on the west bank of the Mississippi River in St. John the Baptist Parish. While it is relatively close to New Orleans, Whitney feels worlds away from the hustle of the city's tourism industry. Aside from a handful of cottages, churches, and one or two gas stations, there is little activity between the city and Whitney. Whitney opened to the public in December 2014 as the first slavery museum in the United States. Although it may seem logical to house such a museum within the borders of a plantation house, as we have already indicated, these heritage tourism sites are instead used to circulate a narrative of the Old South (Poirot and Watson, 2015; Azaryahu and Foote, 2008). Consequently, John Cummings's decision to turn the property into a slavery museum directly opposes the U.S.'s long history of remembering wealthy plantation owners, their furnishings, and a Lost Cause ideology and omitting/limiting slavery, enslaved individuals, or how their labor directly funded the country's early economy. Mitch Landrieu, mayor of New Orleans from 2010-2018, called Whitney "America's Auschwitz," citing the similarities between the Holocaust and slavery, a comparison that many Americans are not willing to make (as cited in Amsden, 2015).

We position the Whitney Plantation as a site of counter-memory and focus especially on how it radically departs from plantation tours in the American South. In fact, its counter-memory actually challenges heritage tourism dogma. While it is true that some plantation tours have begun to incorporate more Black history, including McLeod and Magnolia (both outside of Charleston), Whitney is distinct in that its entire purpose is, in the words of Sen-egal-ese scholar Ibrahima Seck, is to make ". . . reparations. Real reparations" (as cited in Amsden, 2015). Seck, who works alongside Cummings as the director of research for Whitney, explains that Cummings's goal in opening Whitney was to shift "the consciousness of others as his own has been altered." As with the NMPJ and the marker for the Porvenir Massacre, Whitney's opening was also met with protest from the white community, who argued that the tour would be too disturbing. In response, Cummings contends, "It is disturbing . . . But you know what else? It happened. It happened right here on this road" (as cited in Amsden, 2015).

While we draw from Poirot and Watson's (2015) article that examines the relationship between place and public memory in Southern heritage tourism sites like Charleston; Dickinson, Blair, and Ott's (2010) work with public memory and museums; as well as research in cultural and human geography that examines tours in plantation houses (Azaryahu and Foote, 2008), we intentionally position Whitney as a site of counter-memory to inspire more discussion about

memory and plantation houses in rhetorical studies. It cannot be stressed enough that Whitney forcefully and powerfully rejects the traditional plantation tour narrative, and, instead, uses the genre of tourism as a disruption of the white-centric, slave owner story.

Outside the visitor's center is a dramatic metal sculpture of an anchor with chains to commemorate the slave trade with a pewter plaque that reads:

Every slave and every slave owner came to this place from different villages on different boats. Today we find ourselves all in the same boat awaiting another voyage. We must take the voyage together, regardless of the difficulty and the pain. Together we chart a course to a place where we can understand our part and find a cure for all evils brought here when the first boat visited our shore. Welcome to Whitney.

From the moment April entered the visitor center, it was apparent that this tour would be dramatically different from the other tours that she had previously taken. While the center includes a small gift shop (where visitors can peruse slave narratives, handmade goods from local Black artisans, and fair trade jewelry from West Africa), it also includes a mini-museum to educate visitors before their tour. After paying for her ticket, she was given a lanyard with a picture of a young Black girl who was enslaved at Whitney along with some biographical information about her. The three-room museum documents various aspects of the transatlantic and domestic slave trade and specifically focuses on the process of suppression and resistance among enslaved individuals in Louisiana. The tour-before-the-tour sets the tone for Whitney, and it's immediately obvious that the tour would not focus on the wealthy slave owners' furnishings, clothing, or their privileged lives.

It's helpful to contrast a typical plantation tour with Whitney. In their examination of two antebellum plantation tours, Stephen Hanna et al. (2019) studied the relationship between the ordering of space and narrative. Through the use of narrative mapping, Hanna and his colleagues were able to map how traditional plantation tours “. . . give voice and legitimacy to certain historical actors and interpretations while eliding others” (p. 49). In one of their case studies at Berkeley Plantation, they found that docents and visitors used vague and distancing language to discussed enslaved individuals or the concept of slavery in sharp contrast to the language used about the slave owners:

Observers noted that when guides and visitors mentioned Berkeley's enslaved population, they only discussed basic facts, such as the number of slaves the Harrisons owned or the labor performed by enslaved persons. Some observers found that guides used passive voice, such as 'there were 110 slaves', or deployed words like 'servants' and 'they'. Guides never named enslaved individuals, did not provide humanizing details about their lives, and did not attempt to engage visitors emotionally on the topic. This contrasts with the rich biographical details visitors learn about members of the Harrison family. (p. 9)

These findings are to be expected and are also matched by April's study of Woodburn Plantation in Pendleton, South Carolina. During her tour of Woodburn (in spite of the fact that it was a private tour and the docent was aware of her research about Black history in

Pendleton, South Carolina), the docent spent the majority of the time delineating the slave owner family's opulent lifestyle. When she discussed the enslaved individuals, she explained that one reason that the kitchen was located in an out-building was because the slaves could not be trusted to not burn the house down because they were not used to such fine furnishings. She also attempted to downplay the humiliation and lack of freedom that the enslaved experienced, citing their freedom to move around the region at night while the owner and his family slept. These examples, along with Hanna et al.'s, illustrate a typical plantation tour in Southern heritage sites. While there are an increasing number of plantation tours that now include the perspective of enslaved individuals and even provide names and narratives, Whitney diverges from these by re/making the plantation tour into a slavery museum.

The tour begins in a church, where visitors are shown a short video that builds on the information from the visitor center. It sets the expectation for the tour: the focus will be on the actual people who labored on this plantation. For this tour, the white slave owners would be the footnote instead of the heroes of the narrative. In the church a few clay sculptures of enslaved children were scattered around the sanctuary—the same children that many of the visitors wear around their neck on a lanyard, and the same children that re/appear in various sites on the grounds. These sculptures are, in Jared Keller's (2016) words, "... a ghostly



Figure 4: The Wall of Honor. Photograph by April O'Brien.



Figure 5: Clay sculpture of an enslaved child at Whitney. Photograph by April O'Brien.

monument to [the children's] lost childhoods." From there, the guide, a Black man named Ali, took us to the Wall of Honor, where the names of Whitney's enslaved are engraved on a row of stone walls in random order to demonstrate their chaotic and tumultuous lived experience. The tour weaves through the grounds, stopping at various memorials/art installations that mark the many children and babies who died at Whitney, like the *Field of Angels Coming Home*, a monument that records the 107,000 held in bondage in Louisiana from 1719-1820, as well as the slave cabins and the prison for slaves who were being punished for various "crimes" like poor production. After an hour and a half walking around the grounds, the last 15 minutes were spent at the Big House.

Rather than beginning at the Big House, the Whitney tour ends there, and somehow seems inconsequential when compared to the stories presented throughout the tour. We argue that this decision is a rhetorical one: It explicitly demonstrates the impact of countermemory when employed in typical Southern heritage sites. Keeping the Big House at the end of the tour functions to footnote what is usually the highlight of a plantation tour. In doing so, Whitney enacts the principles of countermemory. It replaces a dominant hegemonic narrative with the perspective of those who were enslaved. It poignantly remembers the injustices that the American South has attempted to conceal. And it materially links the past with the present, through the clay sculptures of enslaved children, the various memorials on site, and the open

discussion with Whitney's docents. At one point, April turned to the guide and asked him, "It seems like most of the people on this tour are prepared for the narrative that Whitney tells. Have you ever given a tour where your audience was surprised or offended by Whitney's message?" He nodded his head, chuckled, and told April about an older white lady who marched off in a huff and waited for two hours in the tour bus rather than take the tour, as well as others who were clearly shocked by his statements about structural racism that persists to this day. Whitney Plantation represents an important feature of countermemory—a rhetoric of countermemory subverts and re/writes heritage tourism sites in a way that could be transformative in the American South.

Conclusion

Memories are all that we are. Memories create identity and community and share our values on both the personal and collective levels. Yet, as with all systems of knowledge, memories can normalize or disrupt. Countermemories challenge the power dynamics of normalized memory—whether spatially, through designs that dispute the towns in which they exist (as with the NMPJ), or how they disrupt hegemonic views of history (as with the Porvenir Massacre), or the capacity in which they can confront tourism industries (as with the Whitney Plantation). Countermemories are vital to ensuring that the typical ways of remembering do not go unchecked by consistently confronting what memories can be tied back to historical interpretations and which exist as a means to preserve certain ideologies. If memories are all that we are, then countermemories make sure that we don't just accept memories at face value. We must continually revisit and reexamine how our memories exist, what they say, and how they affect different audiences.

While research on countermemories has been furthered in other interdisciplinary fields, we argue that rhetoricians need to better consider the impact of such work not just on memory and history but on how these subjects greatly influence systems of knowledge, ways of seeing and thinking, and ideology. Memory is never apolitical and does not exist in a vacuum. And countermemory specifically influences public discourse on a daily basis and has the potential to alter the spaces and places that we inhabit. Rhetoricians should explore countermemories not because the field is ripe for analysis (though it is) but because countermemories are uniquely positioned to "alter reality" as Bitzer (1968) might say. Their rhetorical charges are ever-present. They exist to dispute, change, and persuade.

On a personal note, the countermemories we have engaged in this essay have forever altered some of our own understandings of history and even our personal memories. They reshaped our emotional connections to the lack of history on slavery, as April notes in visiting the Whitney Plantation and the NMPJ, and repositioned how James viewed his own Mexican-American heritage in light of understanding the Porvenir Massacre and the history of Texas Ranger violence near the Mexico border. We have discussed our own memories of race; reflected on space, time, and place; and considered how they contributed to this article. This is the capability of countermemories—to mold and affect people on deeply personal and emotional levels because they ask us to contemplate our own lives, our own understandings of

history, our own memories. Countermemories continually call for us to question ourselves and the memories that construct our realities.

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