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Marco GILIBERTI

Rethinking the memorial in a Black Belt landscape: Planning, memory and identity of African-Americans in Alabama

Although many old sites are well preserved, many sites of historical and cultural value in the United States are disappearing due to their abandonment. In some cases, the condition of these sites makes restorers' work very difficult. In other cases, in order to recover blighted local economies, administrations and cultural institutions are adopting strategic spatial plans to attract tourists or accommodate historical theme parks. However, recent scholarly interest in the interaction of history and collective memory has highlighted these sites. Even if the memory of some historical sites is fading quickly, this

memory is receiving greater attention than in the past in order to enhance local identity and strengthen the sense of community. This article examines a number of plans and strategies adopted to give shape to the memorial landscape in Alabama, thereby documenting and exploring some key relations between city planning and the commemoration of African-American history.

Key words: Alabama, African-Americans, memorial, American landscape, Black Belt

1 Introduction

Alabama was among the cotton-producing states from the second half of the nineteenth century onward. Urban centres in Alabama historically operated as transfer hubs for the slave trade. This trade gravitated around ports and markets (Reps, 1992). A railway system was created to strengthen connections between various cotton markets in the region. It is estimated that from 1625 to 1864 half a million Africans were transported to the United States during the Atlantic slave trade (Curtain, 1969; Anstey, 1970; Hamilton, 1977). An intricate network of waterways connects most counties in Alabama, and especially the counties near the Alabama River, which flows into Mobile Bay before reaching the Gulf of Mexico. In 1864, the Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery. However, this legislation was only part of the legal effort required to completely free the African-American community from its socioeconomic restrictions. The Thirteenth Amendment and later legislation led to broader discussion about democracy in the United States (Dewey, 1927). However, from the end of the Civil War until the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*, African-Americans were subject to racial hatred within some of the most important institutions of the state (Zinn, 2005). This phenomenon was particularly intense in Alabama and in neighbouring states (Flynt, 2004). Jim Crow laws slowed the socioeconomic integration of African-Americans into national society. A study of American society (and, specifically African-American society) shows that it is important to focus on the racial problem for the sake of the democratic future of the entire nation (Myrdal, 1944). The intellectual and political discussion on racial segregation culminated in the struggle for civil rights from 1955 to 1968. Democracy ought to create advantages, opportunities and culture for all (King, 1958). In order to empower the African-American community, which has been excluded from the discussion on democracy, reforms in American teaching challenged the conservative power structure that dominated the politics of Alabama in the first half of the twentieth century. American philanthropic reforms still played a leading role in expanding democracy throughout the twentieth century. The paradigm of American reform changed after the Second World War. It became conditioned by scholarly discourse supported by analyses based on broad sets of social data. In the second half of the twentieth century, the Swedish scholars Alva and Gunnar Myrdal summarized almost a century of reformist discussion about the relationship between race and democracy in the United States (Myrdal, 1944).^[1]

2 Theory

This article examines the contexts and situations that affect plans to strengthen the sense of place and community. This study includes a cross-disciplinary assessment and also exam-

ines the limits and potentials of plans and planning strategies that currently help shape the American landscape.

Identity is based on codified situations and on traditional value systems and sets of rules (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972; Gleason, 1983). Collective identity emerges through the intersection of a multiplicity of perspectives, which in some ways forces the merger of history and memory (Lee, 2010)^[2]. Planners that are interested in the relationship of collective memory and space respond to the general need for public symbols that legitimate social order (Dwyer & Alderman, 2008a: 166). Recent attention to memorial landscapes reveals the key role of places in the development of collective memory (Halbwachs, 1980; Nora, 1989; Wasserman, 1997). Living memory is a vivid, relevant and urgent historical and social critic (Hayden, 1997; Huntington, 1998). The role and value of landscape design for recovering collective memory of historical places and practices has been discussed in recent years (Dwyer & Alderman, 2008b). For Reuben Rose-Redwood et al. (2008), historical memory helps reproduce a sense of common identity. The relevance of celebratory places as social catalysts has been addressed by various studies, especially those examining the connection between collective memory and urban space (Azaryahu & Foote, 2008; Lepore, 2010). Scholars and landscape architects see these collective symbols as parts of regional cultural identity (Cosgrove, 1978; Jackson, 1980; Jencks, 2002). The discourse on the democratic value of the relationship between history, memory, identity and community is gaining ground in discussions about the future of America (Wood, 2011). Planners consider collective memory to be something that fosters action and makes it possible to study history (Lowenthal, 1996; Freire, 2007). The communicative value of memory was clearly expressed in the 1930s. Memory is “the medium of that which is experienced” rather than “the instrument for exploring the past” (Benjamin, 2005: 576; Payne, 2007). The past returns to the present through the medium of memory, which allows the merger of the single and the collective into the traditional circle of time (Deleuze, 1994).

However, recent scholarly interest in non-linear landscape architecture has highlighted the spatial fragmentation of the American landscape (Barnett, 2000). Spatial fragmentation offered an opportunity for experimental design at the end of the twentieth century (Secchi, 1989; Solà-Morales, 1995). Landscapes are like “milestones, horizons, signs or areas” in our memories. These landscapes help us “conjure” memories that encourage further action (Barba Casanovas, 2010: 109). However, remembering is sometimes an act of collective courage when a conflict is still ongoing (Morrison, 1987; Assmann, 2011). Even if it is fading quickly, the memory of some historic sites can be addressed better now than in the past (Tuan, 2001; Evans, 2011). This makes it possible to enhance local identity

and strengthen the sense of community (Sandage, 1993; Erll, 1999). The notion of collective memory can be endorsed in order to claim and assert a specific identity in contrast to the identity of another group (Nora, 1989; Hoelscher & Alderman, 2004). The analysis in this article shows how and to what extent design practices affect the strengthening of local identity.

3 Methodology

This study is based on an analysis of African-American history sites (Table 1). For both geographic and historical reasons, the study is restricted to Alabama. It examines several plans and planning strategies adopted to shape the African-American memorial landscape and illustrates the generic condition of this landscape. Primary and secondary sources are used, as well as visual material, including photos of the places visited. The

article also considers planning reports and discussions with local residents, scholars, professionals, students, administrators and community leaders. Indirect material examined includes books and articles. A deductive, context-dependent, research approach is applied (Figure 1). The Montgomery Civil Rights Museum was specifically analyzed for its contribution in refining the style of its memorial and artistic development. This study also refers to New Orleans, Atlanta and Memphis. The example of the urbanisation of the African-American memorial in Alabama is centred around an analysis of memorials in Birmingham, Montgomery and Mobile. The article analyses the intellectual conditions under which the memorial was created, its function, the message it conveys, the relationship with the other typologically similar works and the general purpose of the planner by using travel notes and summaries of field research. The fieldwork for this study took place in summer and fall 2011 in six Black Belt Alabama Counties: Macon,

Table 1: African-American historical museums and memorials in Alabama and surroundings, 1974 to 2011.

Type (figure number in text)	Memorial and location	Established
Church	Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church, Montgomery, Alabama	1974
Museum & park (17a, 17b)	MLK National Historic Site, Atlanta, Georgia	1976
Commemorative sculpture	I Had A Dream Monument, Selma, Alabama	1979
Museum	Dexter Parsonage Museum, Montgomery, Alabama	1982
Memorial (11a)	Civil Rights Memorial, Montgomery, Alabama	1989
Historic commemorative bldg.	National Civil Rights Museum, Memphis, Tennessee	1991
Square (8b, 9a, 9b)	Kelly Ingram Park, Birmingham, Alabama	1992*
Museum & archive (8a)	Civil Rights Institute, Birmingham, Alabama	1992*
Museum	Alabama Jazz Hall of Fame, Birmingham, Alabama	1993
Historic commemorative bldg.	National Voting Rights Museum & Institute, Selma, Alabama	1993
Historic commemorative bridge	Edmund Winston Pettus Bridge, Selma, Alabama	1996**
Museum (11b)	Rosa Parks Museum, Troy Univ., Montgomery, Alabama	2000
Museum	Civil Rights Center, Montgomery, Alabama	2005
Commemorative sidewalk	James Reeb Memorial Sidewalk, Selma, Alabama	2005
Commemorative sculpture (16)	Erskine Hawkins Memorial, Birmingham, Alabama	2006
Museum	Lowndes County Interpretive Center, Hayneville, Alabama	2006**
Historic commemorative bldg. (10)	Belcher-Nixon Building, Birmingham, Alabama	2009
Park (14a, 14b)	Louis Armstrong Park, New Orleans, Louisiana	2010
Commemorative sculpture (15c)	Bamboula Dancers Memorial, New Orleans, Louisiana	2010
Square (15a)	Congo Square, New Orleans, Louisiana	2010
Media library (2b)	Shiloh Rosenwald School, Notasulga, Alabama	2010
Museum & park	Jesse Owens Memorial Park in Oakville, Alabama	2010
Museum (7)	Martin Luther King, Jr., Safe House, Greensboro, Alabama	2011
Funerary stele (12a)	Africatown, Mobile Metropolitan Area, Alabama	2011
Historic commemorative bldg.	Freedom Rides Museum, Montgomery, Alabama	2011
Park	Martin Luther King, Jr. Park, Auburn, Alabama	2011

Note: (*) Birmingham Civil Rights District, Birmingham, Alabama; (**) The Edmund Winston Pettus Bridge and the Lowndes County Interpretive Center are both part of the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail (SEMO), which was established by Congress in 1996 to commemorate the 1965 Voting Rights March in Alabama.

Dallas, Hale, Mobile, Montgomery and Jefferson. It presents the life and space of the traditional African-American community in Alabama. This study will be of interest to planning historians and designers, as well as anyone interested in the role of memory in historic preservation.

4 African-American memorials in Alabama

4.1 The memorial in rural Alabama

The field research for this section was carried out in three rural Black Belt Alabama counties: Macon, Hale and Dallas. In the 1930s, Macon County was a place where segregation of schools and education marked the social and political lives of African-Americans. Early attempts at school reform were made by the Jewish-American industrialist and philanthropist Julius Rosenwald (1862–1932) through the Rural Schools Building Program (RRSBP) in the 1920s and 1930s. This reform was a modernising one and promoted social integration of all school-

children, including those from low-income African-American families. Rosenwald promoted and funded the RRSBP together with the African-American author and president of the Tuskegee Institute Booker T. Washington (1856–1915). Rosenwald and Washington conceived a program of educational improvement at the regional scale. Many urban and suburban school buildings were built throughout the southern United States (Figure 2a). One of these historic school buildings was recently at the centre of national attention (Dyer & Bailey, 2008; Figure 2b).

In Macon County, a historic Rosenwald school building gained attention when Liz Sims promoted the birth of the Shiloh Community Restoration Foundation (Figure 3a). The initial collaboration involved a period of volunteer work from various local educational institutions. Professionals and faculty from Auburn University donated time and expertise to the project and have expressed interest in future work in Macon County with the Shiloh Community Restoration Foundation. They also contributed to building a new technology room in

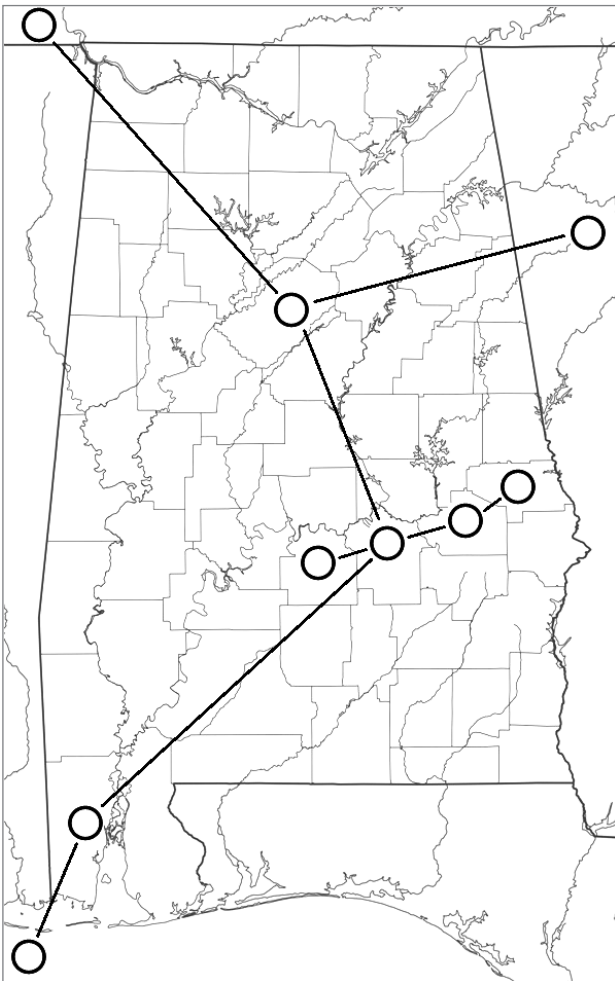


Figure 1: African-American historic places. Left to right: New Orleans, Mobile (bottom); Selma, Montgomery, Tuskegee, Auburn (center); Memphis, Birmingham, Atlanta (top) (illustration: Marco Giliberti).

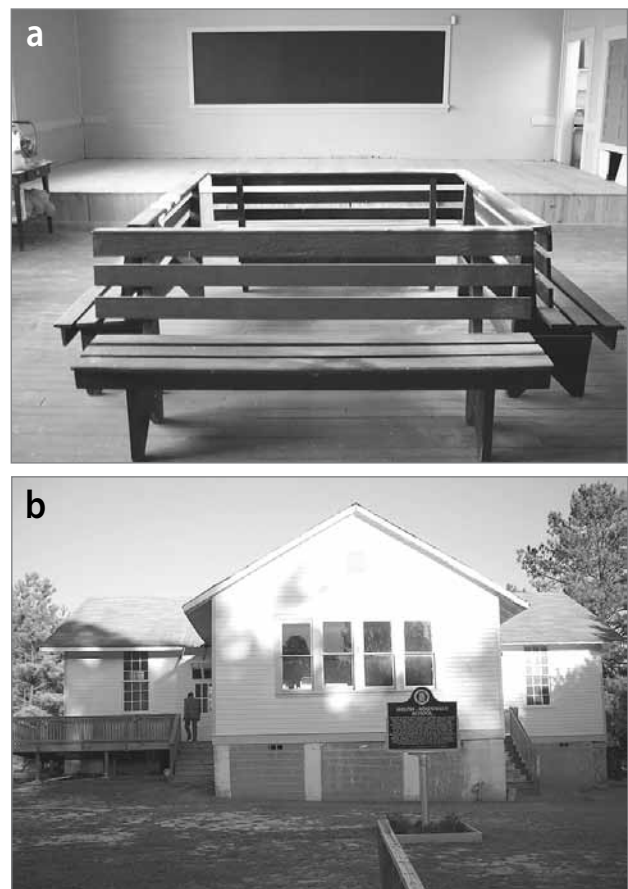


Figure 2: a) Interior of a Rosenwald school at Notasulga, Alabama. Original school desks (front), blackboard and stage (back); b) A Rosenwald school built in rural Notasulga, Macon County, Alabama. View of the restored facade (photo: Marco Giliberti).

the school's addition. The landscape that surrounds the school is dominated by large shady trees (oak, elm and hickory) and vines (kudzu). Such vegetation has overgrown the historic rural landscape of the early twentieth century. However, a rural church emerges from this landscape (Figure 3b), which was a scene of the Tuskegee syphilis study (Reverby, 2001).

The Tuskegee syphilis study was a clinical study conducted by the U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) between 1932 and 1972. It violated ethical standards by recruiting 399 African-Americans with syphilis for research related to the progression for the disease and leaving them untreated. Many of the participants in this study were from Macon County. Figure 4a shows the cemetery where many of the participants in the study are buried. In 2000, the first African-American bioethics facility was established on the Tuskegee University campus in Macon County. The project is funded by the government to apologise on behalf of the participants and their descendants that suffered from the Tuskegee syphilis study and its aftermath (Jones, 1993; Gray, 1998; Sims, 2009).



Figure 3: a) Shiloh Methodist Baptist Cemetery, Notasulga. This cemetery epitomizes the rural African-American cemetery in Alabama; b) The Shiloh Methodist Baptist Church is home of the Methodist Baptist African-American community in the rural village of Notasulga (a: source: Google Maps, 2013; b: photo: Marco Giliberti).

However, government policies such as that establishing the bioethics centre on the Tuskegee campus have been criticised in recent years. Sims (2009) argued that the institutional response did not satisfy community expectations. She argued that the African-American community of Notasulga had always considered the neighbouring Tuskegee University to be a place apart, historically, culturally and morally segregated from the community of Notasulga (Ware, 2011). Instead of the Bioethics University Facility, Sims valued a tree planted close to the Shiloh Rosenwald School in rural Macon County. This tree, Sims says, is a symbol that is able to perpetuate the



Figure 4: a) The Shiloh Methodist Baptist Cemetery, where the largest number of victims of the syphilis study are now buried. The majority of victims were from Notasulga; b) This tree is a symbol of collective memory of the Tuskegee syphilis study. The tree marks where patients with syphilis stood waiting for treatment (photo: Marco Giliberti).



Figure 5: a) Shiloh, Notasulga. African-American Community leader Liz Sims is accompanied by an official from the National Register of Historic Places; b) Tuskegee choir members before singing at a funeral in the Shiloh Methodist Baptist Church at Shiloh, Notasulga (photo: Marco Giliberti).

collective memory of the syphilis study for further generations of African-Americans (Figure 4b). Notasulga’s African-American community takes the memory of the tree seriously. The memory of this tree is venerated and is generally considered a symbol of identity reproduction. According to local oral tradition, the tree’s canopy offered relief from the summer heat for unknowing syphilitics waiting for treatment in the 1970s. The image of these men waiting for treatment is a key element in the communicative approach to design. In this specific case, the creation of a complex and stratified memorial landscape offers an opportunity to design a space in which old and new practices can coexist (Giliberti, 2011) (Figures 5a and 5b).

Dallas County historically held a strategic spatial position in the regional river-based cotton trade and was a notable place in civil rights history during the march from Selma to Montgomery in 1965. The town of Selma is located in Dallas County on the banks of the Alabama River and is the site of the Edmund Pettus Bridge, where a key moment in the African-American struggle for voting rights occurred in



Figure 6: Selma’s historic cemetery. Spanish moss is a blossoming parasite that often grows on large southern trees such as cypress and live oak (photo: Marco Giliberti).



Figure 7: The new Safe House Black Historic Museum in Hale County, in southeast Alabama. The museum is dedicated to the memory of Martin Luther King, Jr. (photo: Marco Giliberti).

the 1960s. Selma’s Department of Historic Preservation prescribed that the memorials in the area (especially the National Voting Rights Museum and Institute established in 1993, the Slavery & Civil War Museum established in 2002 and the Jeff Reeb Memorial Sidewalk established in 2005) be developed together with a restoration project for Saint James’s Hotel and restoration of the old urban commercial axis of Water Avenue in Selma’s downtown historic district. Planners and administrators adopted preservation strategies, hoping to attract tourism to the town. In Selma, however, the old African-American cemetery is the main memorial (Figure 6).

Hale County, in southeast Alabama, assisted in the birth of a new museum: the Safe House Black Historic Museum in Greensboro (Figure 7). The historic importance of this place is related to an event in the last period of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s life. This museum evokes the iconic image of “the safe house”. This kind of image creates a sense of empathy between the tourist and the memorial. The planners’ aim to create an emotional link between history and memory has been

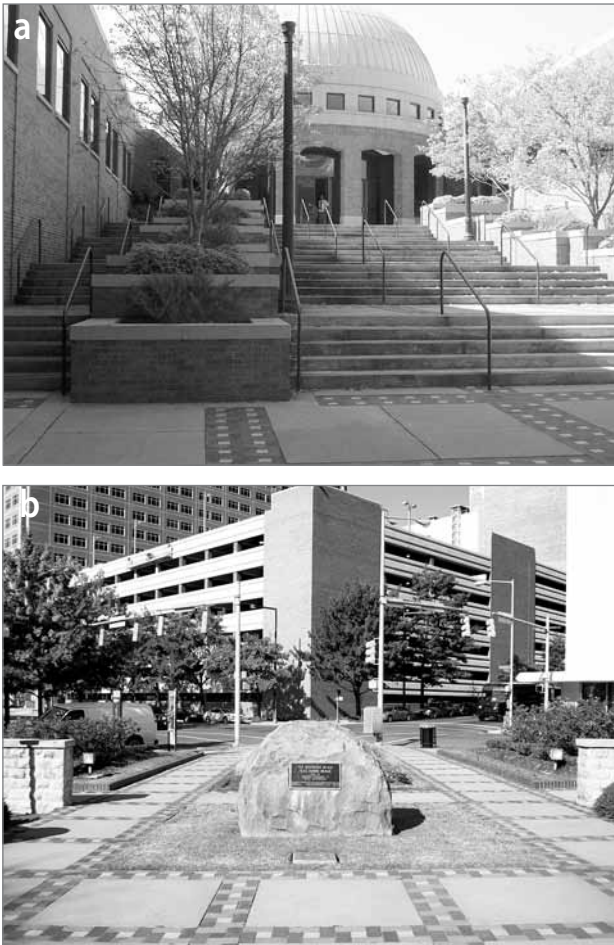


Figure 8: a) Birmingham Civil Rights Institute (Birmingham Civil Rights District). The district includes the Alabama Jazz Hall of Fame and the 16th Street Baptist Church; b) Kelly Ingram Civil Rights Memorial Park (Birmingham Civil Rights District). Interior view (photo: Marco Giliberti).

accomplished in this case. King was in peril when he found this shelter to escape the persecution of the Ku Klux Klan. There is a symbolic representation of temporal suspension and uncertainty, such as what King experienced during his stay in Greensboro in 1968. However, in this case the planners adopted hagiographic rhetoric. This rhetoric helps strengthen the already grand emotional connection that the visitor experiences at such a place. However, the museum finds its *raison d'être* in its rural surroundings, which are inhabited by low-income African-American families. The cases of Macon, Hale and Dallas counties epitomise the African-American memorial landscape in the Alabama countryside.

4.2 The memorial in urban Alabama

A second wave of urban migration began in Alabama at the end of the American Civil War. In Jefferson County, the city of Birmingham is the historic industrial urban model for the region. Financed by private capital, industrial planning shaped Birmingham's geography in the twentieth century. Capital



Figure 9: a) A sculpture in Kelly Ingram Civil Rights Memorial Park, (Birmingham Civil Rights District); b) Entrance to Kelly Ingram Civil Rights Memorial Park (photo: Marco Giliberti).

paternalism fuelled the underclass' political and economic optimism. However, urban Alabama slowly and constantly declined in the second half of the twentieth century. Both politicians and administrators failed to curb urban physical decay and racial tensions. In the second half of the twentieth century, the growth of the civil rights movement and its rapid spread forced designers to face new challenges and work on new disciplinary paradigms, which can operate in a rapidly changing society (King, 1958). The emerging socio-political scenario represented an opportunity for experimentation in design (Sandage, 1993; Blair & Neil, 2000; Assmann, 2011). The theme of the memorial highlighted the need for research (Blair & Neil, 2000). Because the city of Montgomery occupies a fundamental place in the collective memory of the civil rights struggles of the 1950s and 1960s and at the end of the twentieth century, the Civil Rights Memorial in Montgomery became the new paradigm for memorial design (Conerly, 2005; Boyer, 2011). The new frontier of the memorial landscape of African-Americans is Mobile. It is the oldest among the harbours facing the Gulf of Mexico, and it was a

pivotal port of the slave trade before the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. These two aspects make this city an important place in the history of slavery in America. Mobile's memorial landscape was discovered in recent years after the American novelist Sylviane Diouf published a story focusing on the last slave ship to America. A number of Africans arrived in Mobile in 1860 and established an African village in Mobile (Diouf, 2007).

The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute (Figures 8a and 8b) is part of the Birmingham Civil Rights District, comprising the Kelly Ingram Civil Rights Memorial Park, the Alabama Jazz Hall of Fame and the 16th Street Baptist Church (Gallagher, 1999). Figure 9a shows a sculpture in Kelly Ingram Civil Rights Memorial Park. The artist denounces and condemns the institutional violence perpetrated by the police against African-American protesters in their search for more opportunities and extensions of citizens' rights. The theme of Kelly Ingram Civil Rights Memorial Park is an open complaint against repressive police methods and their aftermath (Figure 9b). The sculptures in this park are generally characterised by vivid realism. It draws on the iconographic repertoire of photographic reality (Dekel, 2009). The sculptures in the park are dynamic and expressive of the civil conflict in the 1960s. The kinetic action that the sculptor portrays is frozen at the very moment of

the struggle for freedom. Imbued with populist rhetoric, these sculptures create a dramatisation of facts on the one hand, and on the other hand they offer an interpretation of reality that is openly emotional, while the narrative tone is epic instead of historical.

Tuxedo Junction is a few miles from Kelly Ingram Civil Rights Memorial Park. This is an African-American historic locality in the suburb of Bessemer. In the 1920s, at night, at the intersection of Twentieth Street and Ensley Avenue, the life of the African-American community flourished, nourished by the sophisticated icon of jazz. On the second floor of the music hall, located in a triangular red brick building (Figure 10), Birmingham's native son Erskine Hawkins led a unique, vibrant, musical scene. Jazz music started becoming a distinctive mark and a part of the Tuxedo name. A point of pride for those committed to the musical re-vitalisation of the city, the song "Tuxedo Junction", performed by Glenn Miller and written by Hawkins, was very popular in 1939 (Connerly, 2005). Currently, Tuxedo Junction is one of Birmingham's historic landmarks. The building still stands where it was sixty years ago. A sign marks the building's historic value. From the intersection, from the right distance, it is possible to appreciate the singularity of this historic remnant that appears alienated



Figure 10: Tuxedo Junction: An African-American historic locality in the suburb of Bessemer in the Birmingham Metropolitan Area (photo: Marco Giliberti).



Figure 11: a) The establishment of the Civil Rights Memorial in Montgomery is part of a renewal plan with a set of operations for remodeling the city's fabric; b) In 1990, Troy University's campus in Montgomery established the Rosa Parks Museum (photo: Marco Giliberti).

Figure 12: a) What remains of the historic site of Africatown is the cemetery and a memorial stele; b) Remaining objects testifying that slaves once lived in Africatown. Some musical instruments have been collected and are now displayed in a small museum (photo: Susan Godwin).



Figure 13: After decades of modification, a space historically used for selling and trading slaves has been remodeled to be the main square in Montgomery (photo: Marco Giliberti).

from Tuxedo's urban landscape, now dominated by the over-riding presence of a Honda car dealership.

The establishment of the Civil Rights Memorial in Montgomery was part of a renewal plan prescribing a set of operations for remodelling the city's fabric (Figure 11a). The memorial, which was established in 1989, is conceived as the pivot of a constellation (Abramson, 1996; Dwyer & Alderman, 2008b). Rosa Parks, who was among the first activists to challenge segregation, played a key role. In 1990, Troy University's campus in Montgomery established a museum of the civil rights movement called the Rosa Parks Museum (Figure 11b). In Mobile County, Africatown was another community of freed African slaves that found refuge in the Alabama bayou. Dreaming of a return to Africa, the small group instead made a grand effort to preserve African heritage and identity in Mobile (Diouf, 2007). The memory of Africatown has remained alive until the present, surviving the village's decline after abandonment. What remains of the historic site of Africatown is the cemetery (Figure 12a). Some common objects of Africatown's everyday life have been collected and are now exhibited in a small structure adjacent to the cemetery (Figure 12b).

5 An emergent American landscape?

Montgomery gained a special place in the history of urban areas of the Black Belt after the civil rights struggles. Links between planning and the history of the African-Americans can be revealed in the creation of the Civil Rights Museum in Montgomery in 1989. This new memorial, which was conceived by the famous American landscape architect Maya Lin, launched a debate on the theme of the memorial landscape of African-Americans and its future. The debate is still ongoing, however, and the historic patrimony of African-Americans is now generally suffering a series of prolonged abandonments. The effects of this are evident in counties such as Macon, Hale, Dallas, Jefferson, Mobile and Montgomery, which were selected to show how the current condition of fragmentation of the historic landscape of African-Americans can affect preservationists' design choices.

For Maya Lin, the memorial is a space and not a mere object (Krauss, 1979). This assumption allows planners to set the bases to rethink the memorial as a vast matrix of relationships between different historic spaces. However, at present, this aim has not yet been fully accomplished. The city squares of today were a major site of the slave trade in the nineteenth century (Figure 13). There is an opportunity to connect these squares to the newer network of urban museums of African-American history. A similar issue can be seen in Mobile. There, the historic slave market was replaced by a parking lot. Furthermore, the city's nineteenth-century harbour, which

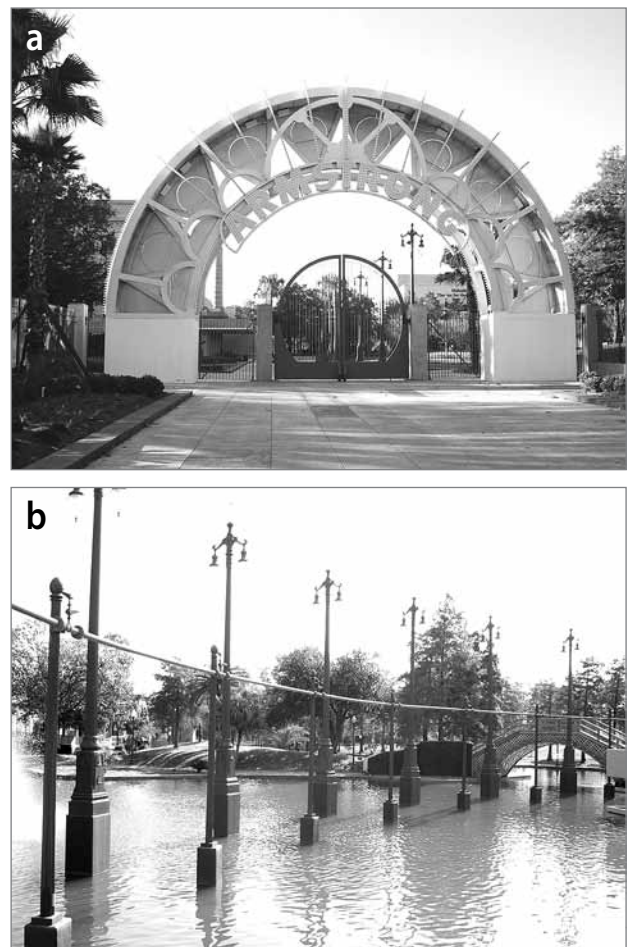


Figure 14: a) Louis Armstrong Park, New Orleans. Main entrance; b) Louis Armstrong Park introduces some elements of the traditional English landscape into New Orleans' urban setting (photo: Marco Giliberti).

was established close to the slave market and the railway, is now reduced to a few physical fragments. The old physical connection between the slave market and the railway has recently been broken. Such developments raise the following questions: How should one conceptualise a new type of museum for celebrating African-American history in the southeastern United States? How can one better use, imagine, plan and re-design buildings and spaces of African-American history? How can the severely damaged places of African-American history be restored and rehabilitated?

The analysis of the urbanisation of the African-American memorial in Montgomery shows that, after decades of modification, a space historically used for selling and trading slaves has been remodelled to be the main square in Montgomery (Figure 13). This space lies just a block away from the city's new Rosa Parks Museum. The visual connection between the memorial and the capitol building is perhaps the most powerful statement of social reconciliation after the struggles of the 1960s and 1970s (Blair & Neil, 2000). In 1989, the establishment of the Civil Rights Memorial began a twenty-year

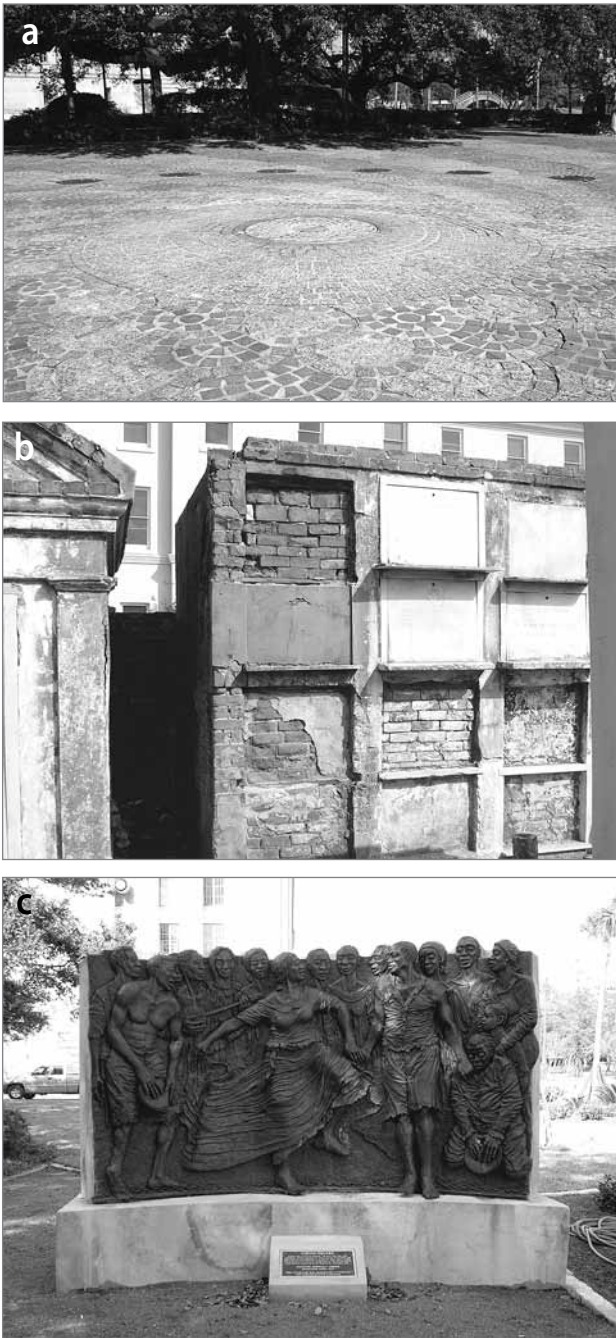


Figure 15: a) Congo Square is the familiar name for an urban landscape in the southern part of Louis Armstrong Memorial Park in New Orleans; b) Saint Louis Cemetery No. 1 is part of a whole that finds its *raison d'être* in New Orleans' grid; c) *African-Americans Dancing and Singing the Bamboula*, by Adewale Adenle. The sculpture is in Congo Square Park, New Orleans (photo: Marco Giliberti).

period of urban renewal. In 2005, a Civil Rights Center was established in close proximity to the memorial. In 2010, the Southern Poverty Law Center was established, which now dominates the view of the capitol building from the memorial. Observing the distinct physical and symbolic relation of the memorial and the street reveals that the multifaceted arithmetic associations of the master plan were calculated to create



Figure 16: A metallic silhouette commemorating jazz composer Erskine Hawkins. The memorial is in the renewed historical African-America neighborhood of Tuxedo in Bessemer (photo: Marco Giliberti).

a unique place. The preservation plans and strategies aim to slow the process of physical degradation and fragmentation of historic sites, and to some extent they show the necessity of combining scholarly and creative efforts for preservation. A memorial should enhance social reproduction in Birmingham, Memphis and New Orleans. The Federal Housing Administration (HUD) and the municipality of Birmingham agree that the urban revitalisation project should to some extent include, African-American heritage as part of revitalisation plans such as the Tuxedo Court HOPE VI Revitalization Project (TCRP).

However, in Memphis, Tennessee, HUD is sponsoring the Vance Neighborhood revitalization Project. American planner Ken Reardon, from the University of Memphis, is leading a project of participatory planning that focuses on renovating a low-income African-American historic neighbourhood in close proximity to downtown Memphis. In these cases, and in other cases, local memory is considered a key strategy for a successful urban regeneration (Talen, 1999; Lah, 2001; Jankovič, 2001; Throgmorton, 2007). In New Orleans, architect Robin Riley's Louis Armstrong Park (Figures 14a and 14b), the historic Congo Square and Saint Louis Cemetery No. 1 (Figures 15a and 15b) are parts of a whole that finds its *raison d'être* in the urban grid (Tretter, 2010; Evans, 2011). The newer sculpture in Congo Square (built 2010), is dedicated to the memory of the African-American dancers and musicians that animated nineteenth-century New Orleans (Figure 15c). In Birmingham, the memorial dedicated to Alabama jazz composer Erskine Hawkins is close to the TCRP (Figure 16). An unusual urban landscape is emerging just a few blocks from the Martin Luther King, Jr., National Historic Site (Figure 17a), close to the historic African-American district of Auburn Avenue in metropolitan Atlanta (Figure 17b). Conceived to be small in size and painted with bright and lively colours, these small, old,

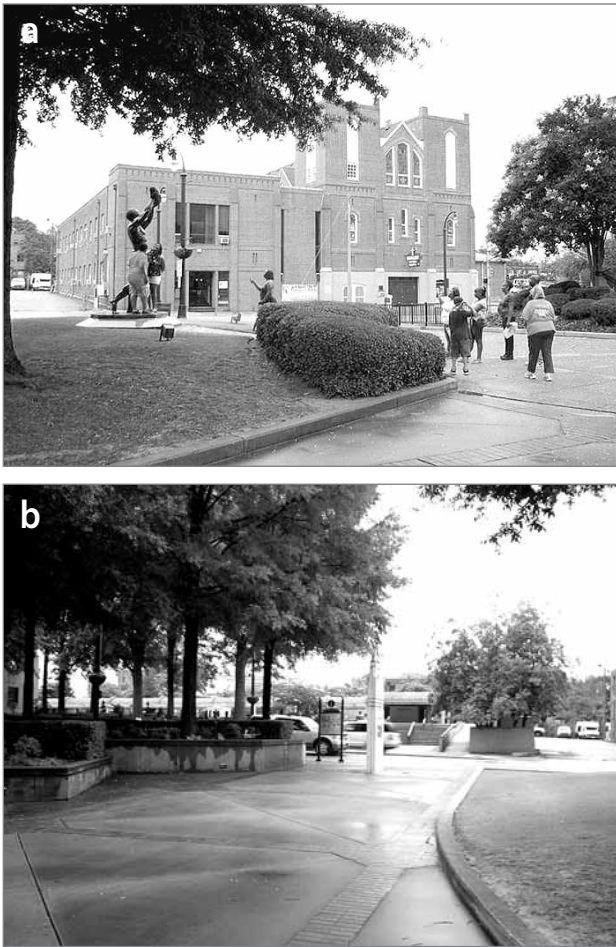


Figure 17: a) North side of Ebenezer Baptist Church. Martin Luther King, Jr., National Historic Site. View from the entrance street; b) Martin Luther King, Jr., National Historic Site. Interior view. The Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) connects it to the cultural center of the city (photo: Marco Giliberti).

houses (known as shotgun houses) are now lived in by both students and African-American low-income householders (Alderman, 2003). Together with tourists, students from the Atlanta university system have helped diversify a neighbourhood that is otherwise essentially African-American. Unfortunately, this study did not more thoroughly investigate the interaction between planning and the politics of memory. More research is needed in these directions. However, in 1996 the U.S. Congress recognized the fifty-four-mile Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail (SEMO), which celebrates the course of the 1965 Voting Rights March in Alabama and the actions and citizens involved in it.

In 1965, a group of black unemployed sharecroppers set up tents to accommodate march participants and civil rights activists halfway between Selma and Montgomery, in Lowndes County. To commemorate that event, in 2006 planners and administrators decided to build an interpretive center. The Lowndes County Interpretive Center (LCIC) in Hayneville testifies to the planners' ambition to document and explore the

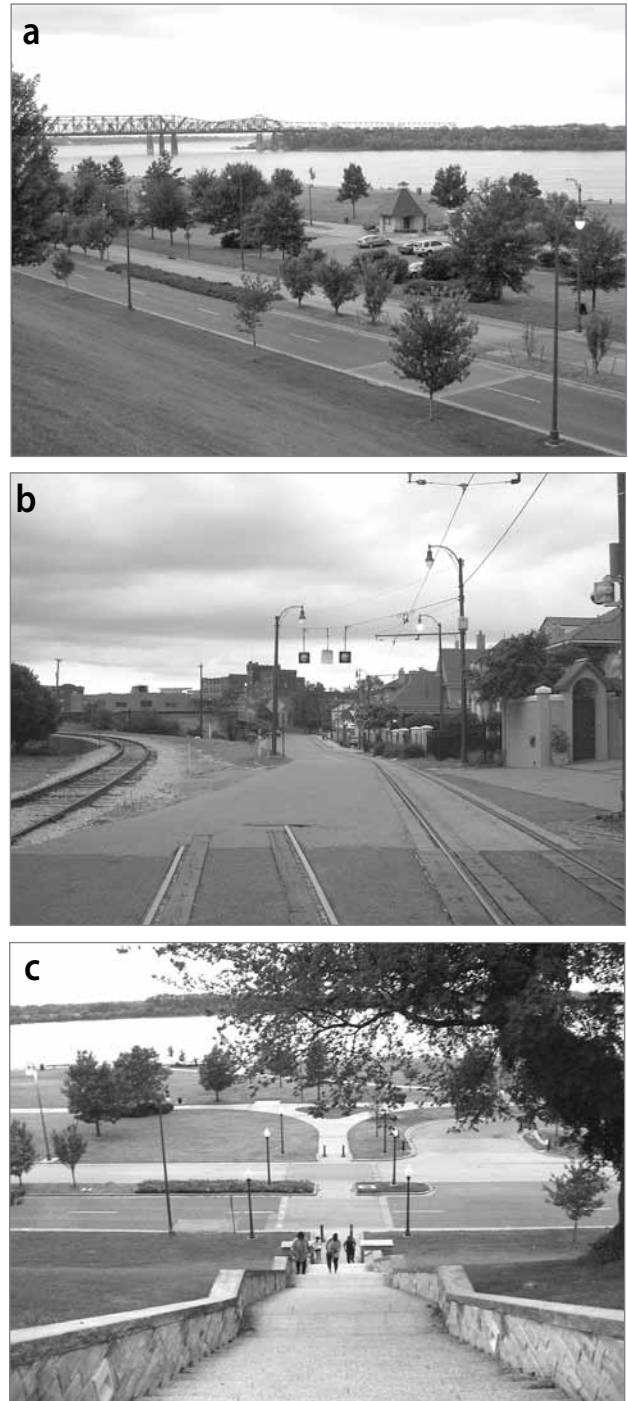


Figure 18: Memphis. a) The old riverbank was transformed in the years following 2000; b) The original urban railways join up at the backyard of a luxury real estate complex. This railway historically connects port and plantation; c) Steps connects luxury real estate and the part of the riverbank where the old port was (photo: Marco Giliberti).

relationship between the history of the civil rights movement and African-American history. Built close to U.S. Route 80, the Interpretive Center is now part of the SEMO. Tourist guides mark this place as the site of the tent city. Both the site of the tent city and the LCIC are destinations for school groups, scholars, historians and activists. A bus line links the sites and the LCIC to nearby cities. Currently, planners and



Figure 19: Auburn, Alabama. The original urban nucleus was transformed during the twentieth century (photo: Marco Giliberti).

local administrators consider African-American heritage a factor that can boost local tourism in eastern rural Alabama. The LCIC is also an indicator of an emerging phenomenon. The practice of planning for African-American history is involving new strategies. Specifically, the practice of memorializing a historical event “where it was, as it was” has been gaining popularity among planners in recent decades. The memorial should preferably be placed within the landscape where the historic event occurred. Planners believe that following this principle is sufficient to serve the African-American community. This practice has created some advantages. A memorial such as the LCIC has powerful symbolic value for old civil rights activists. On the other hand, there is the risk of the planner creating an isolated site for African-Americans. Although this is not what always happens, there is a risk that this typology of museums (due to their location in a remote rural town) can fail the planners’ aims. Who are such museums intended for? This observation leads the planner toward a general conclusion. The practice of planning for African-American history is based on a complex set of operations that requires combined efforts from different types of communities, institutions and agencies.

In 2002, the Memphis City Council approved the Memphis Riverfront Master Plan (MRMP), with the goal of reuniting

the city and the river. The plan prescribed a wide set of operations of historic preservation. Specifically, the Beale Street Landing Project (BSLP) was directed toward recovering a significant segment of the old harbour. Memphis’ municipal administration states that the BSLP should function as a pilot plan for the MRMP. The new riverfront should function as a first-class docking facility able to accept large vessels and small boats. A design competition seemed to provide the most effective means of achieving these goals. Planners consider the MRMP and BSLP a pilot design intervention for Memphis’ transformation. Currently, Memphis’ riverfront is a well-maintained grassy area that slopes from the site of the old railway to the bank of the Mississippi River (Figures 18a and 18b). On top of the slope there is luxury real estate. Steps connect the top and bottom of the site, and the part of the riverbank where the old port was (Figure 18c). Like many other southeastern ports, this port is connected with African-American history. The only African-American historical memory in this place is marked by a monument dedicated to Tom Lee, a freed slave that showed bravery in rescuing a large number of persons during a shipwreck in Memphis in the 1920s.

Both history and culture are themes that catalyzed planners’ attention in sites otherwise considered of little interest. In the

case of Atlanta's public transit system (MARTA), the theme of culture (and finance) has been central for both planners and administrators among those wishing to set up a master plan at the metropolitan scale. Do MARTA's planners prefer to emphasize mutual links between cultural and financial institutions instead of connecting various urban economies? A partial answer to this question was offered in the late 1990s by sociologists Christoph Bollinger and Keith Ihlanfeldt (1997), who said that, since its origin, MARTA had had little discernible impact on total population employment. This result is confirmed by Larry Keating, who confirmed that MARTA had no impact on reducing gaps in race and class, or on urban sprawl (see Keating, 2001). MARTA was conceived during the civil rights struggle and was implemented in the following decades. It now draws customers from all Atlanta neighbourhoods, according to the MARTA website. The presence of sites of historic interest, however, has drawn transport planners' general attention to look at historic African-American neighbourhoods such as Old Fourth Ward, Sweet Auburn, Georgia State, Washington Park and West End. However, in Alabama the college town is where planners are now finding spaces for experimentation. In 2011, in Auburn in Lee County, city administrators decided to name a park after Martin Luther King, Jr. Auburn is well known for its public university, which has just decided to further urbanise the campus. This is a grand opportunity for planners and administrations of Auburn to demonstrate their ability to deal with complexity in planning and, specifically, to establish a new set of relations between town planning, university planning and planning for commemorating African-American history (Figure 19).

6 Conclusion: Rethinking the memorial as a web of places

This article has addressed memorials in the backdrop of city planning in the American south. Section one examined the political and social aspects of Jim Crow legislation, focusing on some aspects of various reform efforts in the twentieth century. It examined the social, cultural and economic conditions under which the civil rights movement matured. The next section presented evidence for the need to forge a new set of strategies for historical investigation in the twentieth century. Postcolonial studies introduced the perspective of memory, which gained ground in scholarly discourse. A discussion emerged that stressed collective memory and local history in combination with, and not at the expense of, institutionalized history. Sections three and four examined the influence of memorials in urban and rural settings in Alabama and its surroundings. It was shown how administrators used plans in each case and in different ways to protect African-American heritage.

Section five focused on the content of planning activities and presented some aspects of the ideology that shaped American regional culture in the twentieth century. This ideology shaped the African-American landscape throughout the United States, and so the Black Belt is a valid case study in the history of transformation of the American memorial. This section also set up the conditions for rethinking the memorial. This was started by counting a selected number of emergent landscapes that I believe can be considered part of a larger network of places. This can be achieved because the intersection of planning and memory can help strengthen the identity of a place. Section six proposed considering the African-American memorial landscape as a spatial puzzle, which changes in proportion to the level of internal cohesion of the groups, in proportion to the level of closeness of clusters of autonomous districts and density of family connections, and in proportion to levels of coexistence of sub-cultures, which develop with social stratification.

From the theoretical viewpoint, plans to commemorate the history of African-Americans appeared determined by a variety of concepts, including a fluid theory. Such plans also principally addressed the search for new forms of approval, intended as practical use of memory for improving society as a whole. This new awareness is based on the promise of commitment by a handful of architects and planners that are more attentive to the fundamental changes in place that occurred in the late 1960s. Planning techniques and democracy started to merge in the 1960s, after a century of oppression of the black population. However, the level of coordination between planners, administrators and other actors involved in the spatial transformation of the African-American memorial landscape is determined by coordination between various levels of power. This stratification originated in and was conditioned by history. This stratification has also left physical traces throughout the American landscape. To invoke Michel Foucault, these traces testify to the presence of fools in town. On the one hand, the contemporary city seems ready to accept these traces as part of a shared palimpsest but, on the other hand, this process is still in its infancy.

Current research suggests that the last three decades have seen deep changes in planning commemorations of African-American history. However, in line with Rod Barnett's theory, which stresses the relevance of thinking about the landscape in a non-linear fashion, several rationales – spatial, political and ecological – are indispensable in helping scholars and planners express planning for African-American history (Barnett, 2000). Alongside these rationales, one must consider the general state of fragmentation of African-American historic sites throughout Alabama. In many cases, this fragmentation is associated with the poor durability of African-American tra-

ditional architecture. Given the high density of African-American historic sites in Alabama, additional studies are needed to examine the association between memory and sites' physical function. Further research should primarily focus on the search for design proposals that explicitly aspire to generate a more cohesive African-American memorial landscape. From this perspective, preserving African-American heritage is an opportunity for urban regeneration as well as an opportunity to create places for all.

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 Marco Giliberti

Auburn University, College of Architecture, Design and Construction,
 Landscape Architecture Program, Auburn, Alabama, USA
 E-mail: mzg0014@auburn.edu

Notes

^[1] Alabama has a population of 4,802,740, of whom 1,272,726 are of African descent. Alabama's Black Belt region contains a number of counties with a high percentage of African-Americans. Forty percent of those in Jefferson County are of African origin. This percentage increases in rural Alabama. In Dallas County, the share of African-Americans is 80% (US Bureau of Census, 2011).

^[2] For the Alabama novelist Harper Lee, the act of remembrance is a process by which things memorized converge in vivid descriptions of places. Remembrance may be painful but necessary if one wants to heal collective amnesia.

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