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Memorialization on College Campuses Today

Abstract

This study uses the theoretical basis of placemaking and memorialization to examine the placement of memorial landscapes on college campuses. The research is based in case study analysis of other college campuses. It looks specifically at where and what is memorialized and what elements of placemaking are incorporated. The main postulate of my research is that the location of the memorialization of the suspected slave burial ground and history of slave labor on Richmond's campus is appropriately placed in the Eco-corridor. The research suggests this postulate is not true, as the majority of other memorials have been placed in more prominent areas of campus.

Introduction

Theories:

Placemaking

The creation of a place combines physical space, human imagination, cultural context and the many ways humans interact with one another. A 'place,' by definition, combines physical space and some meaning or relevance. Space is not place until it has value. Placemaking is the art of creating quality places people want to live, work and play in (Wyckoff 2014). Good placemaking can shape public spaces to maximize its shared value (Project for Public Spaces 2007). It can support the ever evolving physical, cultural and social identities that define a place (Project for Public Spaces 2007). The practice of placemaking has especially great impacts on spaces like college campuses (Riley and Bogue 2014). Research has shown that the visual impact of a campus is a significant determinant of interest for perspective students and retention of existing students (Knight 2016). Campuses have the ability to facilitate learning outside the classroom through 'ambient learning environments' and through connection with peers (Knight 2016). In more recent years, commemorative placemaking has come to the forefront of university planning (Riley and Bogue 2014). This movement is tied to a larger push to diversify and further desegregate American universities (Riley and Bogue 2014; Menefee 2019). Movements to use placemaking for inclusivity and counter-history storytelling have come to many college campuses (Menefee 2019). The University of Richmond now has its time to use placemaking to tell its hidden history.

Qualifying or examining placemaking is a very subjective task, just as is judging other art forms. Placemaking has no real set rules that determine if it has done its prescribed job or not. However, like art, determining what is "good placemaking" is more about the feeling it creates with those who interact with it. It is hard to determine just what makes good places, but when you're in one you know. In an effort to promote the creation of good places, different institutions promoting the practice have published lists of criteria or suggestions. None of these lists are, or

could be a perfect prescription, as each space demands its own set of unique criteria. However, they give the best possible framework for the judging of placemaking. The four core concepts of placemaking are sociability, uses and activities, access and linkages, and comfort and image (Project for Public Spaces 2007). These four qualities encompass the abstract and practical applications of places, that can work together to make them great.

Memorialization

Memorialization occurs when a society ascribes enough value to one particular event, person, group, or other experience that it feels said entity should be codified into their practiced lives (Alderman 2000). Memorialization can be displayed in countless ways from small plaques or quiet ceremonies to Mount Rushmore and national holidays. What all acts of memorialization have in common, is that to some group of people, big or small, the entity deserved recognition. Memorialization in America, and in particular in the American South, has typically been dominated by the white historiography (Tretter 2011). Whoever writes the history makes themselves look good; controlling the narrative reinforces the existing social hierarchies (Tretter 2011). Recently the ‘counter-histories,’ or previously submerged histories of the American South are starting to be added to the memorial landscape of America. This means that our culture now is finally putting value on these repressed histories. Memorial landscapes don’t just show us what happened in the past, but what we value in the present (Alderman 2000).

Context:

The University of Richmond’s campus, as a place, has a unique, interesting, and varied story, though only parts of that history are discussed and commemorated on campus. Tour guides tell perspective students and their families the story of how the school bought the land for the campus from an amusement park, who created the lake as a site for recreation. They mention that Westhampton College occupied one side of the campus while Richmond College occupied the other, and how the two were separated by a locked gate on the path over the lake. They point out the statue of E. Claiborne Robins and tell about his heroic donation that saved the school from financial trouble. These anecdotes dominate the conversation when discussing University of Richmond history, but large portions of the story are missing.

Selective memory is not unique to the University of Richmond. It can be seen across the city, state, and region. The South’s history and symbolic landscapes have long been dominated by those who wish not to remember and commemorate the underbelly of the regions past (Dwyer 2000). But in the more recent years, the submerged legacy of the American South is starting to be recognized and memorialized (Riley and Bogue 2014; Moore 2000; Menefee 2019; Leib 2002; Dwyer 2000; Alderman 2000). Movements to uncover, document, recognize, memorialize, and conscientize previously submerged histories have been happening across the south, in both institutions and in the public expressions (“Brother General Gabriel, 6PM” n.d.; Riley and Bogue 2014; Moore 2000; Menefee 2019). Recent protests over confederate monuments in the South have brought this issue to the national stage. As this issue grows into the conscience of the American public, institutions of higher learning in the South are under pressure to form

thoughtful responses to the issue. The way higher learning institutions respond to this issue matters the students they are trying to recruit (Riley and Bogue 2014).

The University of Richmond's submerged history came to light in the summer of 2019. The school newspaper, *The Collegian*, published a story about a burial ground of enslaved people that, evidence suggests, lies beneath campus (Diaz n.d.). This story was picked up by several national news sources, spreading the news to the broader American public. The author mentions the steps that the University administration, namely University President Ronald A. Crutcher, has taken and plans to take to integrate this history into the campus (Diaz n.d.). The article states that the University plans to conduct further research on the site's history and specific location and then create a plan for memorialization in 2020 (Diaz n.d.). However, the article, and the further reading it directs readers to, leaves exact plans vague (The University of Richmond 2019). What is stated clearly, and repeated several times, is that the University is dedicated to further research and eventually implementation to codify this research on the campus. I plan, with my own project, to participate in this further research. In this project, I will use case studies from other universities to research memorialization of submerged histories and placemaking on college campuses.

The University of Richmond broke ground on a stream restoration on campus in the summer of 2019. The project focuses on the portion of Little Westham Creek that runs through the Gambles Mill Eco-Corridor. This project was funded by the City of Richmond, as part of its effort to meet its Total Maximum Daily Load set by the Environmental Protection Agency (Robbie Kent 2019). While the main goals of the project are ecological in nature, the school has pushed for human-environment interactions to be included in the planning of the space. A new, improved trail is being installed through the corridor for recreational use by both the students and broader West End and Richmond community. The community garden where students and other community members manage plots is being renovated and reopened. A nature classroom is being built so students can enjoy the space in an academic forum, not just recreational one (Robbie Kent 2019). All of these improvements are acts of placemaking. So, while the place is being re-made physically for ecological reasons, it is also being on a more abstract level by introducing elements of placemaking.

The construction of the Gambles Mill Eco-Corridor opens up a conversation about memorialization on the University of Richmond's campus. During construction of the project, different remnants and artifacts were discovered in the area that tell the story of the place. An earthen dam and an old water treatment facility were discovered near Little Westham Creek. And there was a railroad track that ran through the space and was used transfer coal to the heating facility for decades. These three pieces of the campus's history are intended to be commemorated with new signage during the restoration. However, this space has more to say as well. The corridor is located adjacent to where the slave burial ground is hypothesized to be. This study will be using case study analysis to prove or disprove the postulate that the Gambles Mill Eco-Corridor is the appropriate location for memorialization of the burial ground of enslaved peoples.

Methods

The basic framework of this study was a case study analysis to determine if the postulate is true or untrue. The study focused on answering the three questions: what was the school memorializing? Where was the memorialization placed? And, what elements of placemaking did the school incorporate into the memorialization? Analysis was done on each case to answer these three questions. The answers could then be used to determine the validity the postulate that a memorialization of the slave burial ground should be included in the Gambles Mill Eco-Corridor project.

The first step was to gather the case studies. A set criterion was created to narrow down the most applicable cases for the purposes of this study. The memorial had to be an ode to a previously buried part of the campus's or school's history. Each memorialization had to take place on a college campus. The memorialization had to be embodied in something physical. The memorialization had to be a recent addition to the campus. And finally, each case had to have enough consistent information available publicly to allow analysis of them. These criteria excluded many memorials, including annual ceremonial events used as an act of memorialization, any of the many memorial landscapes on non-campus grounds, long standing memorials, and ones with few sources describing them. These criteria were used in order to make the study most applicable to the uses of the University of Richmond.

Answering the three questions for each case had to be standardized in order to avoid bias as much as possible. For the first two questions repetition of the same answer across different sources was determined to be the best way to make sure the data being gathered was correct. If the explanation was corroborated in three different sources, it was deemed a suitable answer. For question concerning the location an exact location in space was not important, but rather the location relative to the rest of the campus, or to the location significant to what was being memorialized, if that was significant to the case. Rhetoric in the sources was used to determine if the location of the space was well-known or not. If the location needed more description to be defined versus if the location could be described using minimal reference points was a useful way to locate it in the relative space of the campus. Based on analysis each case was assigned the locative designation of: extremely prominent, less visible or prominent, non-prominent or non-visible.

To study how placemaking elements were incorporated into the memorialization a specific code was created. A framework made by a third party placemaking focused group formed the loose basis for this section of the study. The Project for Public Places published a graphic that lists elements of placemaking separating concepts by the categories: key attributes, intangibles, and measurements.(Project for Public Spaces 2007) Based on loose reading of the cases, words from the intangibles were gathered in a list. These placemaking words were then used to create a code to use as the basis for analysis. Each word was assigned a definition or

description that would be the criteria for if any given case embodied that word. The words and criteria are listed below.

Accessible: The memorial could be interacted with or have an impact on any person on the campus, regardless of any distinction. Accessibility here is meant to be more than just accessible to all regardless of physical ability. The memorial also has to be accessible to all social, academic or other group as well. For placemaking purposes this makes creates environments of openness to all and fosters understanding across different groups.

Active: Interaction with the memorial happens during active moments, or an active state is required to be connected with the memorial. Activity helps foster connection and therefore impact of the memorial on the person interacting.

Attractive: the memorialization has an aesthetic element and/or was created with aesthetics in mind. The actual look of the memorial is not to be subjectively judged, but instead the intent to make the appearance of the monument to be visually appealing interesting, or thought-provoking.

Connected: The memorialization serves somehow as a connector on campus, either between two physical spaces or a physical and an abstract space. This connectivity also has to provide some sort of juxtaposition between the two elements being connected.

Historic: The memorial has a direct tie to another historically memorialization on campus. This can mean re-inventing or changing a memorial to now have new meaning or be located in a place of historical significance on campus. This element shows a tie to the already present effect of placemaking that existed before the new memorialization.

Interactive: Those interacting with the memorial can in some way change the memorial, or the memorial in some way shapes their physical expressions while the person consumes the memorial. Interaction promotes one seeing how they fit into the conversation the memorial is provoking.

Proximity: The memorial is noted to be in an area in the vicinity of large numbers of students or community members. Exact geography of the campus and the patterns of movement across it does not have to be completely understood. To get this indicating word writings about the memorial have to mention its proximity in a positive way.

Readable: The memorial has some element that explains the memorial in writing. This helps to promote understanding of the monument and therefore further its impact.

Real: The memorial was made just for this purpose and is a physical thing, for example a sculpture. An example of a non-real memorial would be naming an existing place in memorial of something or someone. This memorialization has not brought a new physical entity to the space, which is what this indicator is looking for.

Stewardship: The memorial calls for stewardship of the space in some way. The type of stewardship has to occur from the observers of the memorial and not by a maintenance-oriented group assigned for upkeep.

Useful: The memorial serves some sort of purpose in a practical way. The memorial serves as a sort of means to an end for a specified activity. All memorial is, or should be, culturally useful, but in this definition is supposed to denote physical usefulness.

Walkable: The memorial can somehow be traversed or is experienced on foot. This definition does not include memorials that you simply walk up to but is more specifically looking for memorials that you walk in or through. This helps build placemaking is creates a pathway

Analysis was done on each case and then the data was studied to look for patterns.

Results

The schools selected for this study are: Brown University, George Mason University, Georgetown University, Harvard Law School, Princeton University, the University of Georgia, and the University of Virginia. Two separate cases of memorialization came from Princeton University, so the total number of cases is eight.

What was the school memorializing?

From the eight cases studied, four memorials were erected to honor slave work done on campus. Two memorials honored individuals and two were an ode to the collective group of enslaved people. Three memorials honored the work of slaves and its contribution to the funding of the campus. One school created a memorial to pay homage to the lives of the slaves whose sale paid off a debt the school owed. Two other schools honored the lives of the slaves whose work financially benefitted their owner, who then gave money to the school. One memorial commemorated a slave burial ground found on campus. And one memorial was erected to honor the work of enslaved people and their contribution to the nation as a whole.

Where is the memorialization?

Three cases' memorials are located in extremely prominent locations. Three cases are in less prominent or less visible locations. And two cases are located in non-visible and non-prominent places.

What elements of placemaking were incorporated into the memorialization?

Accessible: five cases

Active: three cases

Attractive: four cases

Connected: two cases

Historic: three cases

Interactive: three cases

Proximity: seven cases

Readable: five cases

Real: seven cases

Stewardship: one case

Useful: one case

Walkable: four cases

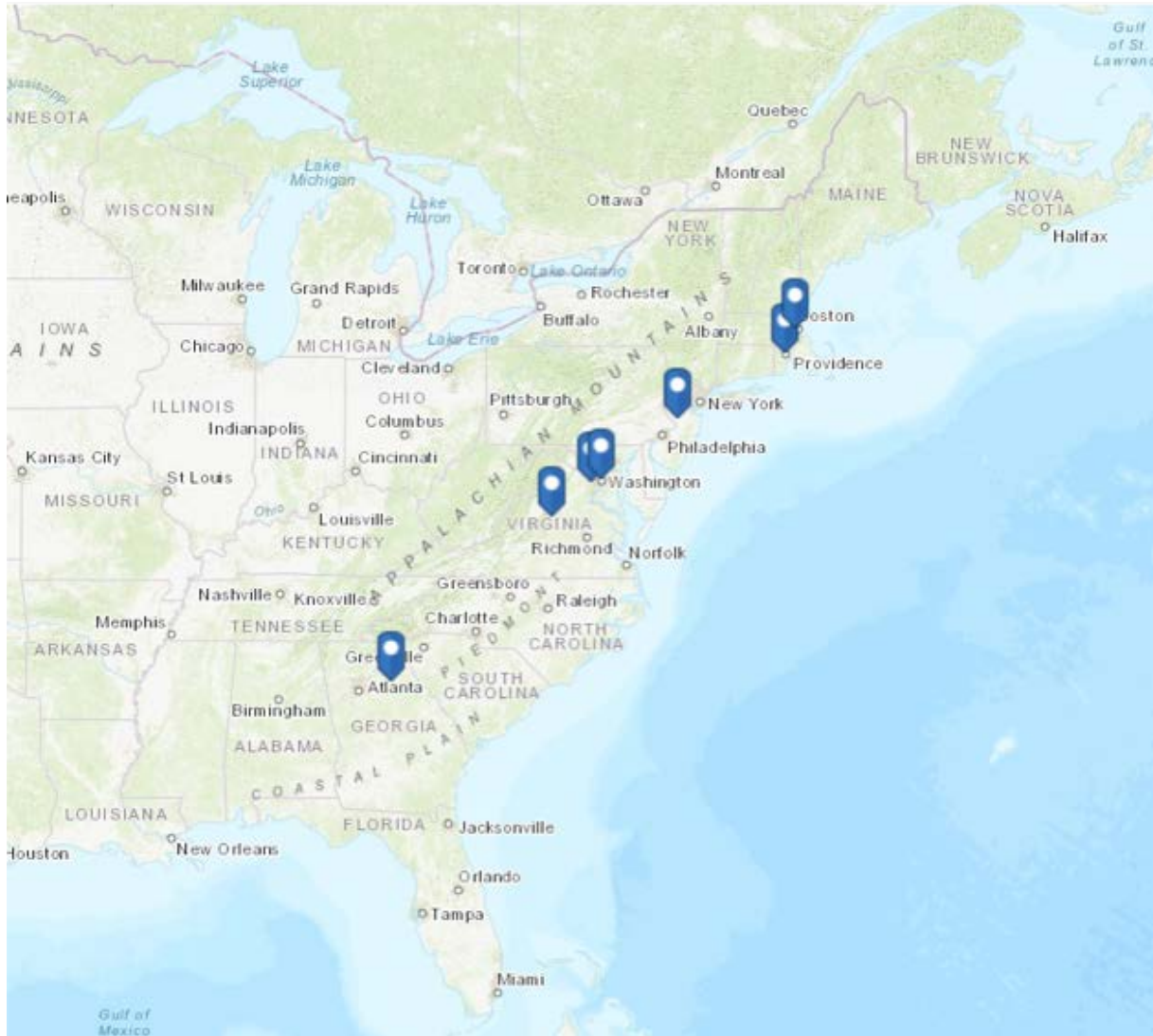


Figure 1: This figure shows the locations of all the case studies examined in this study. The universities are spread down the eastern coast of the country. When considering the history of American geography, this dispersal makes sense. Much of the United States population was, and to some degree still is, concentrated in this area. All of the memorials in this study were commemorating slaves in some manner. By the time the American west was settled to the point of establishing universities, slavery had been abolished.

Discussion

In order to accept or decline the postulate this study set out to answer one more case needs to be studied: the slave burial ground and the Gambles Mill Eco-corridor. The University would be commemorating and memorializing “previously excluded figures in our University history on campus” (The University of Richmond 2019). The hypothetical location would be the eco-corridor. The place-making incorporations are yet to be determined but based on works published by the University, and conversations with University officials, the memorial would most likely be able to claim the words: accessible, readable, walkable, attractive, active and interactive (The University of Richmond 2019). The hypothetical Richmond plan is interesting in comparison to the other cases in this study. The “what” the schools are memorializing is the same. All want to pay homage to their submerged histories. The University’s plan, whatever they determine it to be, will also most likely incorporate many placemaking elements that the other universities did. However, the school’s plan does not align with the other cases on two very important points. The two most common placemaking words: proximity and real would not be incorporated in this proposed location, and this location goes against the locative decisions other universities have made. The eco-corridor is not at the heart of campus and will be seen by very few individuals on a daily basis. Compared to the standing memorial to Mr. Robins, this memorial would get significantly less view-time and therefore have much less of an impact on everyday life. The memorial would also not fit this study’s definition of “real” as it would not be its own entity. The memorial would be part of something else, not a stand-alone piece. Six out of eight cases described memorials as being located more or less in prominent or visible locations. This location is neither.

Based on the results of this study the postulate that the location of the memorialization is appropriately placed the eco-corridor can be rejected. The Gambles Mill Eco-corridor is not in a location of prominence or visibility. While the space will likely be used more by students and the community than it has in the recent past, it is in a more secluded area of campus. Students and community members do not go to that part of campus in their everyday lives. This location serves well for other places being designed inside the eco-corridor. Gambles Mill will be a great place for everyone to interact with the natural world and learn a little about interesting parts of that space’s history. However, it is not the appropriate place to erect a memorial to our buried past. This location is buried itself, under the veil of being on the proximity of campus. The placement of the memorial here would be a disservice to the movement of telling the untold. Memorialization displays the value that a society places on whatever entity they are memorializing and placing it in the eco-corridor space would tell the world the University of Richmond places little value on telling this story.

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