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**REGION AND REMEMBRANCE: PUBLIC MEMORIES OF CIVIL RIGHTS IN
GREENSBORO, NORTH CAROLINA**

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ABSTRACT

Region and Remembrance: Public Memories of Civil Rights in Greensboro, North Carolina asks how powerful ideas about place can shape our public memories. Greensboro, North Carolina has been the site of civil rights victories, most notably the 1960 lunch counter sit-ins. It has also been the site of tragedy and racist violence, including a 1979 shooting when KKK members murdered five protesters from the Communist Worker's Party. During the twentieth century, Greensboro developed a reputation as a progressive Southern city, and that powerful narrative shapes many residents' perceptions of the city's civil rights past. At the same time, that narrative suppresses counter-memories. This dissertation explores the relationship between Greensboro's progressive reputation and its civil rights past by engaging two fundamental questions: How have constructions of regional identity been deployed to shape public memories of civil rights events in Greensboro? Conversely, how do manifestations of public memory sustain or challenge the most prevalent ideas about Greensboro's regional identity? I take up these questions across analyses of three episodes when public memories of civil rights in Greensboro have been contested. These case studies demonstrate that Greensboro's progressive regional identity is maintained through a rhetoric of exceptionalism that disconnects the city from its larger contexts and reduces the ability of public memories of Greensboro's past to speak to contemporary problems of racism and inequality.

Attention to regional identity is one way that rhetoricians can examine what gives power to a particular construction of public memory. I argue that region is a tool we can use to explore the complexities of cases of public memory—especially those cases in

which multiple versions of memory are competing for traction or significance.

Ultimately, this dissertation offers rhetoricians a model for using critical regionalism to analyze public memory conflicts.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A&T	North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University
BATF	Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms
BCC	Beloved Community Center
CWP	Communist Workers Party
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
GAPP	Greensboro Association of Poor People
GJF	Greensboro Justice Fund
GPD	Greensboro Police Department
GTRC	Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission
ICRCM	International Civil Rights Center & Museum
ICTJ	International Center for Transitional Justice
KKK	Ku Klux Klan
LTF	Local Task Force
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UNCG	University of North Carolina at Greensboro
WC	Woman's College of the University of North Carolina
WVO	Worker's Viewpoint Organization

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Chapter 1: Introduction¹

University communities across the country are pausing to ask themselves how notable but controversial figures from their pasts should be remembered in the present. In early 2016, student protestors demanding the reconsideration of the names of Calhoun College (for John C. Calhoun) at Yale University and the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University sparked national debate over whether it was still appropriate to honor figures whose legacies include racist policies and positions. The debate raised questions like: How should a community reconcile the best and worst aspects of its past? How do public memorializations of the past reflect upon a community in the present? Do public memorializations have more of a responsibility to honor the standards and values of a community's past or present? After months of deliberation, both universities elected not to change the names, for now (Thomason; Ruff). However, similar efforts in North Carolina have had a different result. Three campuses have decided to remove the name of Governor Charles Brantley Aycock from their buildings. While Aycock is often affectionately referred to as the state's "Education Governor" for his Progressive Era reforms, he is also acknowledged to have been "a leading architect and instigator of white supremacy in the Jim Crow era" (Aycock Ad Hoc Committee).

At the start of the twentieth century, North Carolina public schools were among the worst in the country.² But after Governor Aycock's election in 1900, North Carolina became the leader of an "educational awakening" across the South (Christensen 42). "[R]egarded by his contemporaries as a leading progressive voice," Aycock devoted significant energy as governor to improving education in North Carolina. During his

four-year term, 690 new schoolhouses were built, ninety-one of which were for black students, and enrollment increased significantly for both black and white students.

Aycock also secured greater funding for education.³ He rejected a proposal to divide school funds based on race, arguing that the state constitution mandated education for black students as well as white students (Christensen 45).⁴ In the two decades following his tenure, state spending on public schools grew 1,200 percent, and North Carolina was spending more on public schools than any other Southern state (Christensen 43-44). For a century, Aycock was remembered as a progressive governor who vastly improved public education for all students in North Carolina. But, as journalist Rob Christensen writes, “Aycock can be considered the poster boy for North Carolina’s schizophrenic politics” (Christensen 15).

Aycock may have reshaped public education in North Carolina, but he did so as a part of an organized effort to maintain white supremacy in the state. He won his gubernatorial election after an extended, violent campaign by Democrats to intimidate black voters⁵. His victory was accompanied by the passage by popular vote of a suffrage amendment that was explicitly designed to disenfranchise black North Carolinians. The amendment required all voters to be newly registered with a literacy test and a poll tax, measures which disproportionately barred black citizens from registering to vote. To ensure that the amendment would not disenfranchise white illiterate voters, it included a grandfather clause that exempted any person or his descendants from the literacy test as long as they were registered before 1867 (Christensen 28-30).⁶ This exception, however, would only protect those voters until 1908, and Democrats needed to make sure that white men would be able to pass the literacy tests when that time came (Christensen 42).

Aycock's education reforms were designed, in large part, to reduce illiteracy among white men so that they could successfully register to vote after the grandfather clause expired. While Aycock's policies did result in better education for black students in North Carolina than in any other Southern state during the period of segregation, his reforms were motivated by an organized campaign for white supremacy.⁷

Aycock's Progressive Era reforms were, as historian C. Vann Woodward wrote, "progressivism for white men only" (qtd. in Christensen 44). The suffrage amendment that passed along with Aycock's election successfully suppressed black voting. Before the amendment, in 1896, 126,000 black North Carolinians were registered to vote. Two years after Aycock's victory, in 1902, there were only 6,100 black registered voters in the entire state. This imbalance enabled the passage of Jim Crow laws that confined the lives of black people. De facto segregation was made into law, limiting opportunities for black North Carolinians for decades (Christensen 40).⁸

Regardless, the "Education Governor" was memorialized during the first half of the century through buildings bearing his name on four North Carolina college campuses: residence halls at UNC Chapel Hill, East Carolina University, and Duke University, and an auditorium at UNC Greensboro (UNCG). In the last several years, these institutions have begun to respond to largely student-initiated calls to reconsider the commemoration of Aycock (Will). In June 2014, the Duke University Board of Trustees voted to change the name of their Aycock Hall, and in February 2015 the East Carolina University Board of Trustees voted to do the same (Duke Today Staff; "Statement").

Motivated by these efforts, the Board of Trustees at UNCG, the most diverse campus in the state university system, voted in February 2016 to change the name of their

prominent Aycock Auditorium after over a year of research and deliberation.⁹ Frank Gilliam, UNCG's first black Chancellor, applauded the decision, saying, "It is my view that the beliefs, words, and actions of Gov. Aycock regarding racial matters are so clearly antithetical to our core values and mission that we should no longer honor him, regardless of the contributions he may have made" (Newsom). In each of these decisions, the universities determined that, while Aycock had been a celebrated progressive figure nearly a century earlier, his legacy no longer reflected the goals and principles of their communities and, therefore, he should not be honored on their campuses. Each initiative included a plan to display a history of Aycock's relationship with the university and his work for education in the state while also acknowledging his damaging white supremacist agenda.

This case is just one example from North Carolina's thorny twentieth and twenty-first century politics. "Throughout the twentieth century," Christensen writes, "the state frequently oscillated between its progressive impulses and its broad conservative streak, sometimes swinging back and forth in ugly, violent spasms" (2). While any act of commemoration is always complex, the tension created by North Carolina's political contradictions has resulted in a history of commemoration that is just as intriguing as the history of the state itself, especially when it comes to racism and the struggle for black civil rights. My project is motivated by questions about this part of the state's history: How have North Carolinians shaped and reshaped their perceptions of the state through efforts to remember its history? How have public memories of the state's history shaped residents' experiences of place? How have different people interpreted the complicated

pasts of their cities and institutions and for what ends? For whom does a specific articulation of public memory or expression of regional identity resonate?

This dissertation is, in part, a history of how one North Carolina city has commemorated its civil rights past. I analyze moments of tension and contestation surrounding civil rights public memory in Greensboro, North Carolina. At the same time, this project takes up broader questions about the relationship between regional identity and public memory. In order to understand public memories of civil rights in the community, it is crucial to ask how residents understand the character of Greensboro as a place. Greensboro has and continues to enjoy a reputation as a progressive Southern city; however, this conception of regional identity serves residents unequally. Greensboro's professed liberalism has often bolstered the image of those in power while helping to maintain the status quo. The city's civil rights history has been represented in ways that support and in ways that contest this "progressive" reputation. *Region and Remembrance* attends to three episodes when public memories of civil rights in Greensboro have been contested. In each case, I ask how residents—from city and community leaders, to journalists, to members of the public—have constructed a sense of regional identity to support their arguments about how civil rights events should be remembered and memorialized.

In analyzing this aspect of Greensboro's history, my dissertation explores how regional identities and public memories are rhetorically co-constructed. I demonstrate that how an individual or group remembers civil rights events depends upon how they think about the place where they live; at the same time, how they understand civil rights events influences the way they define and relate to that place. In what follows, I explain

my methodological approach to the study of public memory and regional identity, the additional scholarly conversations that I engage in my work, and important historical context that informs my analysis. Finally, I preview the arguments of each subsequent chapter.

Public Memory and Regional Identity

Scholars in history, sociology and philosophy have long recognized that memory is socially constructed. Since sociologist Maurice Halbwachs's 1920s work on collective memory, scholars across disciplines have assumed that publics construct ideas about the past based on the demands of the present. Public memories are not static, fixed entities; instead, public memories are negotiated and contested by publics according to their present needs.¹⁰ As a result, writes communication scholar Barbie Zelizer, “[r]emembering becomes implicated in a range of other activities having as much to do with identity formation, power and authority, cultural norms, and social interaction as with the simple act of recall” (214).

While memory studies is a vibrant interdisciplinary field, rhetorical scholars have found particularly productive intersections as they have studied how memories “attain meaning and become public” (Phillips 3). Rhetoricians including Stephen H. Browne and Kendall R. Phillips have argued that public memory operates through essentially rhetorical processes. Rhetoric, in turn, is also inherently concerned with public memory. In Phillips's words, “These memories that both constitute our sense of collectivity and are constituted by our togetherness are thus deeply implicated in our persuasive activities and in the underlying assumptions and experiences upon which we build meanings and

reasons” (3). Because, as Aristotle explained, it is the “duty of rhetoric” to deliberate subjects that “present us with alternative possibilities,” rhetoricians have been particularly invested in understanding those moments when publics disagree about how to remember their pasts (1357a5).

A central issue for memory studies is how to account for contested or conflicted public memories. Historian John Bodnar argues that public memory conflicts are a result of the disconnected interests of official culture, which is defined by legitimated institutions or powerful publics, and vernacular culture, which is made up of ordinary people or counterpublics. Many public memory scholars have used these concepts to categorize expressions of public memory and to understand public memory debates. Ekaterina V. Haskins, however, has critiqued Bodnar’s distinction because it suggests that vernacular expression originates outside of official culture rather than engaging from within. According to Haskins, this distinction implies that ordinary people are the “authentic bearers” of vernacular expression rather than “subjects whose identities are continuously formed and reformed through a complex process of enculturation and rhetorical negotiation” (6). Instead of adhering to this dichotomy, Haskins advocates for a “spectrum of engagements with the past” that more adequately “capture[s] the reality of public expression” (8). I follow Haskins in my approach to understanding public memory debates, and I offer a way to extend her approach. To analyze public memory conflicts in Greensboro, I consider how publics use ideas about place to navigate the spectrum of public memory. Specifically, I adopt critical regionalism as a methodology to study the history of civil rights commemorations in Greensboro. In the remainder of this section, I first explore the theoretical connections between memory and place. Second, I provide a

justification for my use of critical regionalism as a methodology and explain the consequences of this approach.

I bring public memory and place together on the basis of their roles in identity formation. Steven Hoelscher and Derek H. Alderman write, “Together, social memory and social space conjoin to produce much of the context for modern identities—and the often-rigorous contestation of those identities” (348). Attention to regional identity is one way that rhetoricians can examine what gives power to a construction of public memory. Region is a tool that we can use to explore the complexities of cases of public memory—especially those cases in which multiple versions of memory are competing for traction or significance. Scholars accept that public memories (1) have the power to “narrat[e] a common identity” by connecting groups to their pasts, and (2) are “animated by affect,” deemed worthy of preservation based on emotional attachments (Blair et al. 7). But, as Carole Blair, Greg Dickinson, and Brian L. Ott argue, it is necessary to push these assumptions further by asking: “Why is *this memory* so alluring as compared to another? *What affect* is being deployed that helps secure adherence to this particular memory content and to the group that holds it to be important to its collective identity?” (14, emphasis in original). Regional identity can be a productive avenue for exploring how memories are made alluring and important.

Blair, Dickinson, and Ott argue that affiliation (from Aristotle’s *philia*) is “the principal affective modality of public memory” (16). The affiliative mode of public memory is “*felt and legitimated rhetorically*” in the sense that “it is produced...by and among discourses, objects, events, and practices and the ways in which these are taken ‘to matter’” (16, emphasis in original). They point out that place, “with its own

particularities and its own kinds of rhetoric” is one mechanism that helps to conceive of memory rhetorically (24). Affiliations to place can help explain what makes memories matter. I explore affiliations to place by asking how individuals and groups conceive of their regional identity. Following historians Timothy R. Mahoney and Wendy J. Katz in defining regional identity as “a sense of belonging, an awareness of similar traits among people living under similar conditions, or not coincidentally, of how their cultural patterns are distinctive in comparison to other regions or places” (xi). In this dissertation, I work to understand how perceptions of regional identity have shaped civil rights commemorations in Greensboro—and vice versa. Ultimately, my analysis demonstrates that public memories and regional identities are rhetorically co-constructed.

Much like public memory, rhetoricians largely understand place as a social construction. As Jessie Stewart and Greg Dickinson describe it, places are a product of human efforts to transform space into place. They describe place-making as a communicative practice by which verbal or nonverbal forms and signs allow places to “make a claim to placeness.” “More than communicative,” they write, “place-making gestures are rhetorical” (283). While rhetoricians agree that spaces are made into places through rhetorical processes, there are several approaches to the study of those processes. Each of these approaches emphasizes different aspects of place.

In one approach to studying place, the representational nature of space and place is understood by what Jenny Rice labels “textualizing” place (*Distant Publics* 10). If the process of transforming space into place is “textualized,” then place is a rhetorical composition that can be studied. In this approach, the critic’s attention is directed first to how a constructed space acts as the locale of discourse about place. Second, the critic

attends to how constructed space itself is a textual arrangement of narratives and traditions (Poirot and Watson 94). Kristan Poirot and Shevaun E. Watson have exemplified this textualizing approach in their study of public memories of slavery in Charleston, South Carolina. They argue that this frame allows rhetoricians to ask questions like: “In what ways does place orchestrate narratives, arguments, and ideology? How is place a performative iteration of rhetorical traditions and cultural idioms? And, more importantly, to what extent and to what end does place saturate and contour rhetorical acts?” (94). Ultimately, a textualizing approach focuses on how places are assigned meaning and, at the same time, how those places help to create meaning themselves (J. Rice, *Distant Publics* 11). Making places into texts allows for scholars who rely on textual analysis to apply familiar methodologies to the study of place. However, even though “text” can be (and is) taken to include the physical, this approach has the potential to flatten some of the particularities of place by sidestepping specific attention to the materiality of place.

Alternatively, Jenny Rice takes a “publics approach” to place in her book-length study of urban sprawl in Austin, Texas. She looks “beyond an examination of the relationships between discourse and place” to “the way discourse helps to create particular kinds of *public subjectivities*” (*Distant Publics* 13, emphasis in original). Instead of investigating place itself, Rice examines “how people imagine themselves in relation to (and as a part of) those publics that populate, change, and undergo the effects of material places” (*Distant Publics* 14). As Rice explains, this approach strives for a particular critical goal, one that is distinct from other approaches to the study of place. Her publics approach aims to improve public discourse by examining how it “cultivates

subjectivities that that tend to encourage or discourage intervention in the crises of place” (*Distant Publics* 14). Rice argues that rhetoricians stand to make the strongest intervention into “imperiled places” through the publics that affect those places rather than through the places themselves. Rhetoricians are, after all, critics of public discourse (*Distant Publics* 16). A publics approach is most useful when the material stakes are the highest. Rice suggests that geographers, urban planners, environmental scientists, and designers—those who are best situated to intervene in the material—can benefit from what rhetoricians might contribute to their understanding of public talk about material problems.

Finally, some rhetoricians have adopted English studies scholar Douglas Reichert Powell’s critical regionalism approach to the study of place.¹¹ By Powell’s definition, the idea of region refers “not to a specific site but to a larger network of sites.” Region is always, he asserts, “a relational term” (4). Regions are never isolated spaces, but are always bound up in “larger cultural forces and processes.” Even when the idea of region is used to isolate, “these demarcations are always in relation to broader patterns of history, politics, and culture.” A region that is defined by its disconnectedness is still in a “specific relationship” with its larger contexts (5). Importantly, though, what Powell and other scholars have begun to ask is not just “whether a particular version of a region is valid or invalid, authentic or not.” Instead they are asking how “regions come into being and become influential” and “whose interests are being served by a given version of a region” (7).

Powell offers *critical regionalism* as “a methodological umbrella for work that recognizes...that regionalism is not necessarily parochialism” (7). Critical regionalism

rejects a kind of study of place that might be given to nostalgia (at least on the part of the scholar). Instead, this approach disrupts narratives of place through an interrogation of the power dynamics that always shape ideas about place. Rice, who has adopted Powell's approach in some of her other work on place, argues that this disruption is "where critical regionalism meets rhetoric." She proposes the study of *regional rhetorics* to analyze "[w]hat do people actually do in region, as well as through rhetorical appeals to region." In examining regional rhetorics, she writes, scholars "disrupt given narratives of belonging" in order to "provide alternative ways of framing our relationships" giving us "new descriptions of power" ("From Architectonic to Tectonics" 203).

Rhetoricians Carly S. Woods, Joshua P. Ewalt, and Sara J. Baker adopt a critical regionalism approach for the study of places of public memory. They argue that critical regionalism can assist scholars in "critiquing and re-imagining the rhetoric of memory places," especially state and regional history museums (342). To the questions of critical regionalism and regional rhetorics, they add questions that directly concern memory places: "How do memory places articulate the relationship between multiple spaces (including the local and the national) in order to produce the discursive contours of a region? In what ways can this regionalism fall into a problematic sense of regional nostalgia instead of disrupting state, local, or national narratives? How can the particular rhetorics at the site function to enable or constrain certain memories in the region or the formation of counter-public resistance?" (345).

These questions echo throughout my study, though I approach the intersection of regional rhetorics and public memory from a different analytic category. Woods, Ewalt, and Baker's questions are limited to the analysis of memory places—those places that are

“more closely associated with public memory than others, for example, museums, preservation sites, battlefields, memorials, and so forth” (Blair et al. 24). For this project, I consider constructions of public memory that include, but are not limited to, memory places. I look to the larger systems that constitute public memory, ranging from public discourse (the textual) to memory places (the material). I examine the role of rhetorical constructions of regional identity within these various manifestations of public memory by studying how people describe the relationships between places and what is at stake in those descriptions. Ultimately, this dissertation asks how ideas about place and ideas about public memory influence each other. How do constructions of regional identity offer a way to understand the relationships and power dynamics that contribute to constructions of public memory? How do appeals to region influence and constitute constructions of public memory? How are region and public memory articulated differently by different groups?

Following rhetoricians like Rice, and Woods, Ewalt, and Baker, I adopt critical regionalism as my approach to place throughout this dissertation. Regionalism is not my object of study, but is instead a methodology. Essentially, I am analyzing public memory through the lens of critical regionalism. This approach is best equipped to answer my questions for two main reasons. First, attention to region is ultimately a way to attend to the negotiations between different conceptions of place. In the United States, the local, state, and national are always bound up in and inflecting one another, and region—as a relational term—allows for the flexibility to attend to the gaps between those different conceptualizations of place. Powell explains, “Regions are not so much places themselves but ways of describing relationships among places” (10). When I ask how

Greensboro residents craft a sense of regional identity, I am asking how they define Greensboro in relation to other places. With critical regionalism, I can consider not only how people define Greensboro against other cities but also its relationship to the state of North Carolina, the South, or the nation.

Seeing region relationally leads to a second advantage of critical regionalism: this approach ultimately “shapes an understanding of the spatial dimensions of cultural politics in order to support projects of change” (8). If regions are ways of describing the relationships between places, then these descriptions “serve particular purposes for the people doing the describing.” Powell argues that understanding that idea “might help us develop strategies for devising regions, ways of linking together the experiences and struggles of diverse groups of people and places, that help us confront and respond to the cultural and political conflicts of our times” (10). Throughout this dissertation, I analyze how different stakeholders deploy ideas about region to direct public memories of civil rights events in the city. As I will demonstrate, these memories can be used to draw attention to past and present problems of racism—or they can be used to deflect attention away from those problems. While my work does not attempt to prescribe the right or best way to remember civil rights in Greensboro, or any city, I believe that this is a “project of change” nonetheless. Public memory and regional identity can be powerful forces that shape conversations about racism in our communities. Understanding the tangle of those issues, as my dissertation attempts to do, is an important step toward improving discourse about racism.

Public Memory of the Civil Rights Movement

In the last several decades, as the nation has moved through the 50th anniversaries of significant civil rights events, questions have naturally emerged about the way these histories are remembered and memorialized. Who is in control of the narrative? What choices have been made about what or who is remembered? How can a memory's authenticity be determined? What do those memories mean for the present? Scholars within rhetorical studies, history, African American studies, and geography have taken up these questions in a growing body of work on public memories of the United States civil rights movement. My dissertation engages with and contributes to that scholarship.

In their landmark collection, *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory*, African American studies scholar Leigh Raiford and historian Renee C. Romano explain that “there exists today what we might call a consensus memory, a dominant narrative of the movement’s goals, practices, victories, and, of course, its most lasting legacies” (xiv). In the “realm of memory,” the civil rights movement is romanticized and simplified down to the most “[c]harismatic and eloquent leaders [who] led a nonviolent movement of African Americans and supportive whites in a struggle that sought to change legal and social, rather than economic, barriers to equality” (xiv-xv). This consensus memory of the overall movement creates similarly inflected consensus memories of events along the civil rights timeline. Consensus memory even circumscribes the civil rights timeline, usually dictating that the movement began in 1954 with *Brown v. Board of Education* and ended with the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act in 1964 and 1965. Jacquelyn Dowd Hall argues that simplifying the timeline down to this single decade “simultaneously elevates and diminishes the movement,” presenting it as a triumph of

American progress by limiting understanding of its history and its continued relevance.¹² For many scholars, the goal of studying civil rights public memory is to interrogate these issues, to ask how memorial practices contribute to or challenge public perceptions about the struggle for civil rights in the United States.

One strand of this scholarship analyzes the physical places and structures through which the civil rights movement is memorialized. Geographers Owen J. Dwyer and Derek H. Alderman trace the spread of civil rights memorials (from the naming of streets and schools to the unveiling of statues and the opening of museums) across the country in the context of national memorial conventions. They argue that how civil rights memorials work within and against these conventions ultimately offers insight into the victories and shortcomings of the movement itself (7). In particular, they assert that the location of a memorial affects how it is interpreted: “Where an event is commemorated—and, conversely, where it is not commemorated—affects how it is remembered” (16). Rhetoricians engaged with public memory studies have analyzed specific civil rights museums or monuments, working to understand the rhetorical performances of memory places.¹³ These scholars consider the material as well as the symbolic aspects of these sites. As Victoria J. Gallagher writes in her study of the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, “the highly-contested nature of race relations and civil rights in the United States means that related memorials enact a dialectical tension between reconciliation and amnesia, conflicts resolved and conflicts simply reconfigured” (304). She analyzes the museum’s visuality and materiality to explain how the past is narrated through a “silently powerful institutional discourse” of the American tradition of progress. Carole Blair and Neil Michel’s reading of Maya Lin’s Civil Rights Memorial in Montgomery, Alabama,

attends to the design of the memorial and “its material performances and force within its context(s)” to analyze how the memorial reproduces tactical dimensions of civil rights protest actions. Marilyn Bordwell DeLaure argues that the International Civil Rights Center & Museum in Greensboro confines racist trauma to the past through its archival displays while the embodied experience of touring the museum’s exhibits simultaneously encourages visitors to identify with sit-ins participants and “celebrates the activist potential of the ordinary citizen” (4).

Other scholars ask how civil rights memory is shaped by public discourse. Through an analysis of news magazine coverage of civil rights anniversaries and subsequent mass media discourse, Edward P. Morgan argues that mass media, driven by consumerism, obscures public memories of the civil rights movement in a way that undermines the democratic ideals to which the movement aspired. Kristen Hoerl’s work asks how the movement is remembered through film and through conversations about those films in popular media. She argues that memories of civil rights events are never static and that “different sites of memory including films, news broadcasts, and film reviews engender additional discourses that alter the popular memory landscape” (“Burning Mississippi” 59).¹⁴ Romano argues that contemporary trials of past civil rights crimes (specifically the Birmingham church bombing trials), as they are publicized through courtroom arguments, media coverage, and fictionalized accounts, “are actively constructing a particular narrative about the past that may well influence both how people remember the movement and what they think about race relations in the present” (99).

In this dissertation, I join scholars who are weaving these two strands together to consider how and to what ends memorials and the processes of commemoration are

publicly perceived. These scholars ask how memories of the movement shape identities or are deployed to support a range of political agendas (Raiford and Romano xix). Dwyer argues that memorials, which are necessarily partial, cannot portray the complete legacy of the civil rights movement. They can, however, shape contemporary politics by “instigat[ing] a new dialogue about the movement’s history, meanings, and legacies” (20). In his history of the development of the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, Glenn Eskew illustrates how the museum’s message of tolerance and international demand for human rights was negotiated alongside the economic desire to use black history to fuel tourism to the city. Throughout my dissertation, I pursue similar lines of argument by asking how the commemoration of the struggle for black civil rights in Greensboro has been perceived in relation to residents’ ideas about the city’s regional identity. My questions are motivated by a conviction that scholars of civil rights public memory share. As Raiford and Romano write, “the struggles over the memory of the civil rights movement are not a diversion from the real political work of fighting for racial equality and equal rights in the United States; they are key sites of that struggle” (xxi).

Rhetorics of Racism

Given that the project of understanding how the civil rights movement is memorialized is necessarily invested in the ongoing struggle for equality, my project also engages with sociological, historical, and rhetorical work on racism. Several key definitions come from this scholarship. Throughout this dissertation, I maintain a distinction between race and racism. Following sociologist Karen E. Fields and historian Barbara J. Fields, I understand that *race* “stands for the conception or the doctrine that

nature produced humankind in distinct groups, each defined by inborn traits that its members share and that differentiate them from the members of other groups of the same kind but of unequal rank” (16). This concept is a fiction, but one that nevertheless shapes our daily lives through *racism*. Racism, as defined by Fields and Fields, is the “theory and practice of applying a social, civic, or legal double standard based on ancestry, and to the ideology surrounding such a double standard” (17). In so much of our public discourse, race is used as a “homier” shorthand for racism (Fields and Fields 101). This seemingly innocuous replacement covers over a crime, “something an aggressor does,”—racism—with a fiction about “something the target *is*”—race (Fields and Fields 17). I do my best to separate these terms throughout this writing. I consider how racism is evident in articulations of public memory and regional identity in order to understand how the memorialization of civil rights extends or challenges practices of inequality.

Mark Lawrence McPhail questions whether or not racism is a problem that can be solved through rhetorical strategies, through learning how to communicate across differences. Nonetheless, he works to understand the rhetoric of racism that shapes our national discourse. He argues that “racial antagonisms begin with the assertion of a distinct identity and its negative differentiation from the other” (198). Understanding identity through negative difference forwards essentialist ideas about race that can be used to justify inequities. Since the height of the civil rights movement in the 1960s, as whiteness has come to be understood as a marker of racial identity, McPhail argues that racism is sustained in large part by a politics of innocence that positions whiteness and blackness against each other. The politics of innocence is predicated on the assumption that racism is ending and that the country is becoming a color-blind society, which allows

white Americans to “deny the historical realities of racial power and privilege that have contributed to [problems of racism] that ‘they’ did not create” (190). Of course, the implication is that if white people are not responsible for social and economic inequality that plague black communities, then black Americans themselves must be at fault.

Another term for this is sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva’s “color-blind racism,” which “explains contemporary racial inequality as the outcome of nonracial dynamics,” instead blaming disparities on market dynamics, naturally occurring phenomena, or the cultural limitations of people of color (2). The politics of innocence and color-blind racism are both enabled by a fundamental misunderstanding of how racism operates. For many white people, if they do not recognize Jim Crow-era prejudice, they assume that racism cannot be at work. While out-and-out prejudice certainly is an example of racism, racism is also systemic and institutionalized. One can be complicit in racist systems without feeling openly prejudiced. This definitional misunderstanding is the undoing of many contemporary conversations about racism.

McPhail worries that these powerful logics have dramatically limited the possibility that people of color can convince those who identify as white to “call into question the power and privileges they enjoy in the present that are embedded in the racial past” (198). Perhaps he is right, but there remains great power in the ability to “provid[e] tools to deconstruct and interpret representations of race and racism, while explaining how and why race and racism function for people in everyday life and across time,” as Michael G. Lacy and Kent A. Ono advocate (2). The essays in their collection, *Critical Rhetorics of Race*, engage in the political work of analyzing cases of “inferential racism,” those “mundane, everyday, and routine cultural practices [that] perhaps have the

greatest potential to survive, work in tandem with overt racism, and affect us in their commonplace and taken-for-granted forms” (3). Throughout this dissertation, I take up that political project, demonstrating how the relationship between public memory and regional identity can be shaped by racist assumptions that have profound consequences for public understanding of our civil rights past and the problem of racism in the present.

Greensboro and Rhetoric of the Progressive Mystique

I could ask questions about the co-construction of regional identity and civil rights public memory in any city in the country. But I have chosen Greensboro, North Carolina for several reasons. First of all, both regional identity and civil rights memory have been debated openly and consistently in the city, giving me lots of evidence to work with. Second, Greensboro’s national reputation has been defined by the student sit-ins that began there in 1960. The city’s public identity is bound up in its civil rights past. In Greensboro, the stakes are high when it comes to the relationship between regional identity and public memory. Finally, Greensboro’s relationship to the rest of the South has long been contested, adding depth to residents’ debates about regional identity. For some, the city is an exception to the worst of the South’s perceived characteristics.

Founded in 1808 as the new seat of Guilford County, Greensboro (originally Greensborough) was named for Revolutionary War General Nathanael Greene, who led a defeat of British troops at the Battle of Guilford Courthouse in 1781. Before the Civil War, Greensboro’s economy was shaped by agriculture, and the city was surrounded by large plantations as well as small farms. English Quakers had been among the first to settle the area, and they created a thriving community in Greensboro. In the late 1700s,

Quakers publicly spoke out against slavery and several local families began helping runaway slaves. By the 1850s, the Greensboro Quaker community was considered part of the Underground Railroad, a secret network that aided escaped slaves.

At the start of the Civil War in 1861, local voters rejected secession, but many turned their allegiance when the state legislature voted to join the Confederate States of America. However, many dissenters remained. Slaves, freed slaves, and Quakers helped such a high number of men resist the draft that historians later dubbed the area the “Quaker Belt.” After the end of the war in 1865, Greensboro’s economy struggled under government debts, but new investments and railroad connections helped business in the city rebound over the next two decades. Greensboro’s postbellum politics were largely defined by conflicts over the political rights of the city’s black residents (*Voices of a City*). With the election of Governor Aycock in 1900, which marked the disenfranchisement of most black voters but also the beginning of Progressive Era reforms, the era of North Carolina’s double-edged progressive politics began.

In 1960, the year the sit-ins began, Greensboro’s population was just under 120,000 (*Greensboro City Data Book* 3-5). Its residents were approximately 74 percent white and 25.8 percent black (Gibson and Jung). Greensboro had a strong industrial base in textiles and was home to some of the largest insurance companies in the region. With a balanced economy, the city looked forward to continued growth (Chafe 5). While the atmosphere in Greensboro was notably more permissive than in most Southern cities, that tone was not enough to “eradicate or diminish the pervasive presence of Jim Crow” (Chafe 22). As one resident remarked, “Greensboro [was] a nice-nasty town” (Chafe 23).

As of 2016, the population of Greensboro is 282,840, making it the third largest city in the state (*City of Greensboro Fact Sheet*). In 2014 (the latest year for which detailed demographic information is available) a majority of the city's population, 53 percent, were people of color (with 47.7 percent of the population reported as white alone and 40.1 percent of the population reported as black alone), making Greensboro more diverse in regard to race than other comparable urban areas, statewide and nationwide (*Demographic 4; City of Greensboro Growth 6*). Unemployment in the city is not improving as quickly as is in the state or comparable cities, and it has a higher instance of poverty than both the nation and the state (*City of Greensboro Growth 7*). While my analysis primarily attends to how residents define the city for themselves, these statistics provide a sketch that suggests that Greensboro might still be “a nice-nasty town.”

Greensboro's progressive regional identity developed throughout the twentieth century as the state of North Carolina came to be regarded as more progressive than other Southern states. Many scholars credit V.O. Key, Jr.'s *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, originally published in 1949, with popularizing this image of the state. In his chapter, “North Carolina: A Progressive Plutocracy,” Key sets the state apart:

The prevailing mood in North Carolina is not hard to sense: it is energetic and ambitious. The citizens are determined and confident; they are on the move. The mood is at odds with much of the rest of the South—a tenor of attitude and of action that has set the state apart from its neighbors. Many see in North Carolina a closer approximation to national norms, or national expectations of performance, than they find elsewhere in the South. In any competition for national judgment they deem the state far more “presentable” than its southern neighbors. It enjoys a

reputation for progressive outlook and action in many phases of life, especially industrial development, education, and race relations. (205)

There were reasons to celebrate North Carolina's positive progress, as the story of Gov. Aycock at the start of this chapter illustrates, but not all residents of the state were affected by this progress in the same way. While the state was described as an "inspiring exception to southern racism," this image existed "side by side with social and economic facts that contradicted profoundly the state's reputation" (Chafe 4-5).

Historian William Chafe argues that Greensboro, as a microcosm of the state, "embodies the paradox that lies at the heart of North Carolina's history" (6). For many, Greensboro was and continues to be a "bustling 'New South' city" and a "beacon of Southern progressivism" (Chafe 6).¹⁵ However, the lived experience of many residents belies that narrative. Chafe defines this paradox as Greensboro's "progressive mystique." Chafe dedicates his entire book, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina and the Black Freedom Struggle*, to the progressive mystique and how it operated. Published in 1980, Chafe's work is one of the most well-respected accounts of Greensboro's history. But Greensboro's civil rights story has continued beyond Chafe's study. My work is, in one sense, an extension and reconsideration of Chafe's argument. At the same time, I use his argument as part of the foundation for my exploration of the rhetoricity of public memory and regional identity.

The progressive mystique is, essentially, a rhetoric through which white leadership in Greensboro has upheld the city's progressive regional identity. The culture of white progressivism in Greensboro "did not operate as a political system with rigid regulations and procedures," writes Chafe. Instead, "it functioned as a mystique, a series

of implicit assumptions, nuances, and modes of relation that have been all the more powerful precisely because they are so elusive.” Chafe describes four distinct features of the progressive mystique: consensus, openness, paternalism, and civility. Each of these features is a strategy that allows white people in positions of power to maintain the status quo while absolving themselves of blame. First, consensus is valued over conflict. By the logic of the progressive mystique, disagreement reflects personal dislike and conflict could “permanently rend the fragile fabric of internal harmony.” Second, openness to new ideas reflects “how enlightened and tolerant a community is” (7). The progressive mystique values candid discussion and celebrates the willingness to participate in discussion, even when no further action is undertaken. Third, the progressive mystique is rooted in an unconscious paternalism masked as a sense of responsibility or moral obligation to help those perceived as less fortunate. Fourth, and most importantly for Chafe, the progressive mystique is defined by the belief that civility should govern all human relationships. “Civility was what white progressivism was all about,” writes Chafe, because it offered “a way of dealing with people and problems that made good manners more important than substantial action” (8). White leadership has and continues to use the rhetoric of the progressive mystique, with its racist internal logics, to prescribe the rules of political and social change in Greensboro.

For my study of Greensboro’s progressive regional identity, I add a fifth feature to the rhetoric of the progressive mystique. A crucial element of Greensboro’s progressive regional identity is its orientation toward other places. The rhetoric of the progressive mystique relies on a narrative of exceptionalism, a sense among some residents that Greensboro is characterized by its superiority over other places. According to this

narrative, Greensboro's relationship to other cities, to the state, or to the nation is defined by its disconnectedness. In this dissertation, I explore how this narrative of exceptionalism helps to explain constructions of regional identity in Greensboro—and the consequences of those ideas for public memories of the struggle for black civil rights. Ultimately, I ask how this exceptionalism shapes regional memory practices.

This question is both especially resonant and particularly fraught because of the influence of ideas about the South over the regional identities of Greensboro residents. Those residents of Greensboro for whom the progressive mystique resonates see themselves as part of an exceptional region within an exceptionalized South. If the South is *negatively* exceptional for its social and political structures that promote racism and racist violence, separating it from the rest of the country, but North Carolina, and especially Greensboro, is an “inspiring exception” to that rule—then Greensboro's progressive regional identity is a construction that is doubly defined by its separation from its larger contexts.¹⁶ My subsequent chapters will demonstrate that, while this progressive exceptionalist narrative has changed and shifted as the city has faced different public memory conflicts and debates, it has always been available to frame the city's role in or responsibility to civil rights issues.

Overview of Chapters

Chapter 2: Bennett College Women and the 1960 Greensboro Student Sit-Ins

My second chapter focuses on public memories of the 1960 student sit-ins movement in Greensboro and how women's roles have been forgotten, due in part to patriarchal ideas about regional identity, in favor of presenting a simplified narrative of the protest. The consensus memory of the sit-ins suggests that four black men were solely

responsible for starting the demonstration. Contrary to that memory is the story of black women at Bennett College who began planning the sit-ins in the fall of 1959. In 1960, rather than speaking publicly about their role, Bennett women protected the credibility of the demonstration by taking a position of silence. As time passed, public memories of the event were defined by the four men, and the women's stories were further suppressed through the processes of commemoration. In this chapter, I consider how, in 1960, regional identity shaped the reactions of many white Greensboro residents who assumed and perpetuated the silence of Bennett students. In particular, newspaper coverage of three white women students who sat in solidarity with black students for one day of the demonstration played on racist and sexist notions of "southernness" and drew attention away from the black women who organized and carried out the sit-ins. Ultimately, I argue that by overlooking the leadership of the Bennett women in 1960 and throughout the more than fifty years since, consensus memories of the sit-ins have presented a limited version of the sit-ins and enabled Greensboro's progressive regional identity.

In addition, this chapter serves as important context for the following chapters. The sit-ins are the event for which Greensboro is most well-known, and commemorations of the event loom large in Greensboro's memorial landscape. Public memories of the sit-ins as the city's defining civil rights moment have been constructed to bolster Greensboro's current progressive regional identity. Other civil rights events—as well as larger questions of racism and inequality in Greensboro—are read through the sit-ins. In examining how memories of the sit-ins have been limited by overlooking Bennett women, this chapter also explains the foundational public memories of the sit-ins through which other civil rights events in Greensboro are understood.

Chapter 3: The Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission

My third chapter explores an equally significant, but much more troubling, civil rights moment. The 1979 “Greensboro Massacre,” where five protest marchers at a multi-racial Communist Worker’s Party anti-Klan rally were murdered by members of the KKK, is perhaps one of the most contentious events in the city’s history. From the day the shooting took place, the Greensboro community has disagreed about what happened, why it happened, and how the event affected the city. White city leaders were quick to argue that the shooting was the responsibility of two violent groups, both outsiders to the city, and that the event did not and should not reflect negatively on Greensboro. Many residents, especially low-income black residents, saw things differently and were alienated by their city government’s response. The justice system’s resolution to the case further alienated black communities. Despite video footage that plainly showed the shootings, the Klansmen who were charged with the murders were acquitted by all-white juries. In 1985, a civil law suit found the police guilty of colluding with the KKK, but no criminal charges were ever filed. This chapter focuses on the 2004-2006 Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which used public hearings, community forums, and statement-taking in an attempt to reconcile the fragmentation caused by the shooting and its aftermath. I argue that the Commission was a formalized process through which the Greensboro community could craft a coherent public memory of the shooting. To present their findings, however, the commissioners had to address the progressive regional identity that city leadership had used to distance Greensboro from the event. In this chapter, I analyze the rhetorical strategies the commissioners deploy throughout their written *Final Report* to articulate a different regional identity for the city.

Chapter 4: The International Civil Rights Center & Museum

Chapter 4 analyzes the debates surrounding the International Civil Rights Center & Museum in downtown Greensboro. When the F.W. Woolworth Company closed its Greensboro location in October 1993, Melvin “Skip” Alston and Earl Jones decided to step in to preserve the building where the famed sit-in movement began. They created a nonprofit organization, The Sit-In Movement, Inc., and began the process of transforming the space into a museum that celebrates the sit-ins and challenges visitors to continue to fight inequality. From the beginning, the founders promised that the museum would be a boon for tourism in Greensboro, and many city leaders were enthusiastic about the project at the start. The museum was initially scheduled to open as early as 1997, but the fundraising, planning, and construction ended up taking 16 years. This drawn-out process was increasingly marked by suspicion and mistrust across racial and institutional lines. Finally, in 2010, the museum opened its doors. But since its opening, questions surrounding its financial status have led to tension with the City of Greensboro, which has loaned money to the museum.

The Greensboro community has been contending with this memorial site and its importance to the city for over two decades. In this chapter, I argue that debates over the museum are about much more than money. I ask how regional identity shapes and is shaped by ideas about the museum’s value and role as a tourist destination. I analyze the debates between museum leadership and city government according to their perspectives about the relationship between the museum and Greensboro’s larger tourism profile.

Conclusion

Together, these chapters approach the question of how public memory and regional identity are rhetorically co-constructed from different angles and from different points along Greensboro's civil rights timeline. In chapter 2, I consider how regional identity shapes initial perceptions of an event and how those perceptions are perpetuated through subsequent processes of commemoration. In chapter 3, I analyze how regional identity is addressed throughout a formalized process, in this case a truth and reconciliation commission, designed to craft public memory. In chapter 4, I examine regional identity as it is manifested through tourism and I ask how tourism shapes perceptions about the importance of public memory and the role of memory places. To conclude, I consider how each of these cases contribute to the full scope of Greensboro's current civil rights memorial landscape and I explore the larger implications of a connection between public memory and regional identity for understanding contemporary struggles against racism.

Notes

¹ The Office of Research Protections determined that interviews conducted for this project met the criteria for exempt research and that the project did not require formal IRB review (STUDY00004428).

² In 1900, North Carolina was tied with Alabama for lowest education spending per student per capita for education at fifty cents per student. At the time, the national average was \$2.84. The average length of the school term in North Carolina was the lowest in the South at 70.8 days, with a national average of 144.6 days. The rate of illiteracy for white North Carolinians was 19.4 percent. This was the second highest percentage in the South and four times the national average of 4.6 percent (Christensen 42).

³ Only thirty school districts in the state collected school taxes in 1900, by 1904 that number had risen to 229 school districts collecting school taxes (Christensen 44).

⁴ Journalist Rob Christensen suggests that Aycock's position was motivated by a paternalistic attitude about white people's responsibility to look after black people and concern for the state's reputation. Denying education to black students across the state would have been blatantly unfair enough to draw criticism from outside the state, and North Carolina was beginning to benefit from being considered a more progressive Southern state (45).

⁵ After two decades of Conservative Democratic leadership in North Carolina, the Fusion ticket (a biracial coalition of Republicans and Populists) swept the 1894 election and began passing a series of progressive reforms. In 1896, the state elected a Republican governor, and there was a surge in black elected officials across the state at all levels of

government. For the election of 1899, the Democrats launched a campaign designed to regain power in the state's General Assembly and diminish the growing political influence of black North Carolinians. Their strategy centered on the intimidation of black voters—and it worked. Two days after the election, violence erupted in the city of Wilmington. The city had a strong and politically active black middle class, and its local government (which had not been on the ballot in the election) was under Fusionist control. A violent mob of about 2,000 white men descended on the city, setting fire to a newspaper office and terrorizing the black section of town with a Gatling gun and two cannons. It is unclear how many people were murdered, but estimates range from nine to as high as sixty. The same day, Democrats sent a delegation to city hall to demand the resignation of local Fusionist officials. Under pressure from armed men at city hall, the mayor and aldermen resigned and a new, Democratic, city council was sworn into office. Democrats forced the exile of six black Republican leaders, and at least 2,100 black residents of Wilmington voluntarily left the city. With this unspeakable violence in their wake, Democrats launched an aggressive campaign to pass a suffrage amendment and elect Aycock as governor in the 1900 election (Christensen 9-30).

⁶ Black men were not granted the right to vote until the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment in 1870 and were therefore not included in this exception.

⁷ Aycock's education reforms did not benefit black and white students equally. In 1915, for every \$1 spent on a black student, \$3.22 was spent on a white student (Christensen 45).

⁸ In Greensboro, the percentage of black men employed in skilled occupations dropped from 30 percent in 1870 to 8 percent in 1910. Black workers employed in factories fell from 16 percent in 1884 to zero in 1910.

⁹ The residence hall at UNC Chapel Hill still bears Aycock's name. In May 2015, the Board of Trustees voted to remove the name of a nineteenth-century Ku Klux Klan leader, William Saunders, from another campus building and to authorize the initiation of a task force to explore how the university might more effectively curate its history across the campus. Trustees also voted to block the renaming of any other campus buildings for sixteen years (Stancill, "UNC-Chapel Hill trustees"). As a result, the name of Aycock Residence Hall has not been changed, despite continuing calls from students to do so (Stancill, "UNC student paper").

¹⁰ While scholars like philosopher Edward S. Casey have drawn distinctions between different kinds of memory, I follow Carole Blair, Greg Dickinson, and Brian L. Ott in using the term "public memory" because, given rhetoricians' attention to publicity, it is best suited to address the field's concerns (6).

¹¹ Rhetoricians who have adopted Powell's work include Gregory Clark in "'A Child Born of the Land': The Rhetorical Aesthetic of Hawaiian Song," Christa J. Olson in "'Racías Americanas': Indigenist Art, América, and Arguments for Ecuadorian Nationalism," Jenny Rice in "From Architectonics to Tectonics: Introducing Regional Rhetorics," Dave Tell in "The Meanings of Kansas: Rhetoric, Regions, and Counter Regions," and Carly Woods, Joshua P. Ewalt, and Sara J. Baker in "A Matter of Regionalism: Remembering Brandon Teena and Willa Cather at the Nebraska History Museum."

¹² While the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s can be considered the height of the civil rights movement, I follow Hall's conception of a long civil rights movement that extends before and beyond that decade. Throughout this dissertation, I use "civil rights movement" to refer to the ongoing struggle for black civil rights in the United States.

¹³ Drawing on a body of public memory scholarship that treats "public sites or public art as instances of (or somehow implicating) communication, rhetoric, and/or performance," Blair and Michel use the term "rhetorical performance" to mean that the performative character of a monument or museum is an essential part of its rhetoric (49).

¹⁴ See also: Kristen Hoerl, "Mississippi's Social Transformation in Public Memories of the Trial Against Byron de la Beckwith for the Murder of Medgar Evers."

¹⁵ Chafe uses "New South" to describe a region "free of old prejudices and ideally prepared to lead the region toward new levels of prosperity and enlightenment" (6).

James C. Cobb, in his study of southern identity, explains that the idea of a New South first developed after the Civil War as the region began to industrialize. Proponents of this vision for the region "vowed to use industrial development to northernize their region's economy while doing their best to restore and then uphold the most definitely 'southern' ideals of the [antebellum] Old South, especially its racial, political, and class hierarchies." By the mid-twentieth century Southern liberals were using the term to imply that the region was "so thoroughly transformed and cleanly disconnected from its past" as to be "fully assimilated and essentially indistinguishable from the rest of American society" (68). The idea of a New South obscures those hierarchies that still exist in the region *and* across the country.

¹⁶ Matthew D. Lassiter and Joseph Crespino argue that “the notion of an exceptional South has served as a myth, one that has persistently disoriented our understanding of American history.” Maintaining that the South has been more unequal, more racist, than the rest of the nation overlooks the prevalence of the same problems in other parts of the country. “In challenging southern exceptionalism,” they argue, “our agenda is not to absolve the South but to implicate the nation” (7).

Chapter 2

Region and Gender: Bennett College Women and the 1960 Greensboro Student Sit-ins

February 1, 2010, marked the fiftieth anniversary of the student sit-ins that were a pivotal moment in the United States civil rights movement. At the center of the celebration was the grand opening of the International Civil Rights Center & Museum at the site of the Woolworth's where the demonstration began. In 1960, as freshmen at North Carolina A&T (a historically black university), Jibreel Khazan (formerly Ezell Blair Jr.), Franklin McCain, Joseph McNeil, and David Richmond were the first to sit in protest at the segregated lunch counter.¹ Fifty years later, the surviving members of the group cut the ribbon placed across the doors of the new museum (McLaughlin, "Five Decades").² A large crowd, including students from A&T and neighboring Bennett College (a historically black women's college), gathered downtown to celebrate the anniversary and the museum. Michael Griffin, an A&T student who attended the opening ceremony, recalls "all of the [A&T] Aggies were screaming 'Aggie Pride'.... Following that, I heard a small group of women screaming 'Bennett Belles.' I looked at my friend and said, 'Why are they attempting to represent their institution, when it's not about them? This is OUR day'" (Barner, emphasis in original).

It *was* their day—but it was Bennett's day too. What Griffin did not know, and what most historical accounts of the civil rights movement do not reflect, is that the women at Bennett College had begun planning the sit-ins on their own in the fall of 1959. A&T students eventually became involved in the discussion, and the four men launched the demonstration early the next semester. News reports never correctly credited the

Bennett students for their role in planning the sit-ins. Instead, the narrative began to solidify with claims that Khazan, McCain, McNeil, and Richmond came up with the idea during a bull session in their dormitory the night before the sit-ins began. Even as it became clear that the Bennett students' leadership was to go unacknowledged at that time, the women did not speak publicly about the extent of their involvement, choosing instead to maintain a cohesive public image of the larger student group. Since 1960, then, the story has centered only on the men who are now known as the "Greensboro Four."

The conflicting voices of the A&T Aggies and the Bennett Belles at the fiftieth anniversary celebration in 2010 echo what has been a complicated process of accounting for and memorializing the Greensboro sit-ins. In this chapter, as I consider how the city's regional identity has shaped and been shaped by the process of remembering the sit-ins, I bring the question of gender to that conversation. This analysis is an answer to Jessica Enoch's call for rhetoricians to study the "rhetorical work that goes into remembering women" and how women's memories "are composed, leveraged, forgotten, and erased" (62). Enoch pursues these questions by exploring the relationships between feminist historiography and memory studies. These two fields, after all, share an important central motivation: to question conventional histories. One of the most pervasive factors in the rise of public memory studies has been an "increasing mistrust of 'official History'" (Phillips 2). Similarly, feminist historiography developed out of an imperative to "look backwards at all the unquestioned scholarship that has come before" and "begin to re-map our notion of rhetorical history" (Glenn, "sex, lies, and manuscript" 78). The commitment to interrogate accepted histories is common ground upon which both fields stand. As such, considering public memory studies and feminist historiography together

offers unique insights about the rhetoricity of history and memory. Scholarly attention to how women are remembered, forgotten, or purposefully elided can contribute to a much richer understanding of the cultural, social, and political forces that contribute to the devaluing of women's places in the historical record or memorial landscape.

As a part of that larger project, I connect public memory studies and feminist historiography by attending to scholarship on silence. Rhetorics of silence and silencing offer productive shared ground since scholars in both feminist historiography and memory studies are concerned with the inevitable and sometimes devastating exclusions that occur in crafting and using both history and memory. Feminist historiographers have explored how silence functions as a rhetorical tactic or choice. Cheryl Glenn's work has countered the assumption that women's silences are always and only indicative of a lack of power and a lack of agency. Such silences can indicate just the opposite. "Like the zero in mathematics, silence is an absence with a function, and a rhetorical one at that," Glenn writes (*Unspoken* 4).

Recognized or documented silences, then, can become exigences for questioning how people, places, and events are remembered or forgotten. Along with the more obvious presence of texts, speeches, museums, and memorials, silences shape the contours of public memory. Recognizing silence as an inevitable but important piece of any public memory landscape can deepen understanding of one of the field's central concerns: the tension between public memory established by legitimated institutions or powerful publics and expressions of public memory among disempowered groups or counterpublics. This tension, which Ekaterina V. Haskins suggests is best understood as a "spectrum of engagements with the past," often results in the chosen or forced silencing

of some perspectives (8). Scholars can work to understand how individuals and groups negotiate this spectrum by analyzing the mechanisms of silencing that operate within processes of commemoration.

As rhetoricians explore instances of exclusion from public memory, it is important to ask not only who has been forgotten but *how* they have been forgotten and how their remembrance functions as a rhetorical practice (Enoch 66).³ Studying silence in the context of the Greensboro sit-ins reveals how the rhetorical values associated with silence can change over time, depending on the rhetorical audiences involved. For example, silence sometimes serves as the cohesive glue that allows social movements to achieve concord and attain public legitimacy. In 1960, the women of Bennett adopted a position of silence about their role in planning the protest in order to avoid internal conflict. But silence is double-edged: it can represent a tactical choice, and it can also reflect the exclusion and erasure of certain voices. As time passed, Bennett women began to recognize the extent to which their contributions remained unacknowledged. Even now that they have begun to speak publicly about their roles, public memories of the sit-ins are tied so tightly to the characters of the Greensboro Four that few have been able or willing to hear the Bennett women's stories. Rather than choosing silence, as they had in 1960, the women have been silenced by public memories that exclude their perspectives.

In this chapter, I engage with feminist historiography and public memory studies to trace how the Bennett College women's tactical silence was transformed through the process of commemoration. First, I survey the historical record of the sit-ins to identify the presence—and absence—of the Bennett women in that record. Second, I use published interviews and oral histories to recover the story of the women's organizational

leadership of the sit-ins. I explain how the rhetoric of the progressive mystique encouraged the white Greensboro community to focus on the participation of black men and white women students, drawing attention away from the Bennett women. Third, I analyze the women's silence surrounding their planning and organizing efforts, reading their silence as a sophisticated rhetorical choice that helped to ensure the success of the demonstration. Fourth, I examine how the power differentials that play a role in the memorialization of the civil rights movement have contributed to the further silencing of their stories. Finally, I consider how that silencing is manifested and perpetuated through memory places in Greensboro.

Bennett College Women in the Historical Record

Like many women who have been integral to the struggle for civil rights in the United States, women students from Bennett College have been overlooked in favor of male leadership. Not only does the consensus memory of the sit-ins overlook the Bennett women's significant contributions that sustained the demonstration, but it also ignores the essential organizational work that they performed. In many cases, the Greensboro sit-ins are described as spontaneous. The simplest accounts claim that the four A&T freshmen came up with the idea one evening and sparked a national movement the very next day. Taylor Branch's Pulitzer Prize winning history of the civil rights movement, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years: 1954-63*, credits the students' lack of foresight as the main reason for the success of the sit-ins nationwide:

Greensboro helped define the new decade. Almost certainly, the lack of planning helped create the initial euphoria. Because the four students at Woolworth's had

no plan, they began with no self-imposed limitations. They defined no tactical goals. They did not train or drill in preparation. They did not dwell on the many forces that might be used against them. Above all, they did not anticipate that Woolworth's white managers would—instead of threatening to have them arrested—flounder in confusions and embarrassment. The surprise discovery of defensiveness within the segregated white world turned their fear into elation. The spontaneity and open-endedness of the first Greensboro sit-in flashed through the network of activists who had been groping toward the same goal. (272)

While this celebration of spontaneity lends a certain romanticism to the history of the sit-ins, Branch's explanation misrepresents what happened. This interpretation devalues the work of the women and men who did carefully organize and plan their actions. Branch easily explains the student's success as a sort of accident and overlooks the most compelling details of this history.

Other scholars, including historian William H. Chafe, sociologist Aldon D. Morris, and amateur historian Miles Wolff, have made a concerted effort to deny the spontaneity of the protests.⁴ Their work explores the forces that motivated the Greensboro Four as they planned and carried out the sit-ins. In attempts to round out the narrative, these accounts have emphasized the individual backgrounds of each student (Chafe 112-13; Wolff 95-105), their involvement with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Youth Council (Chafe 110-18; Morris 198), and their relationship with a white local clothing store owner, Ralph Johns, who had made many attempts to convince the students who frequented his store to stage a nonviolent protest against segregated businesses in Greensboro (Chafe 114-15; Wolff 19-

29). Whether they emphasize or deny the spontaneity of the sit-ins, these histories still overlook the women from Bennett College who were responsible for much of the planning that led to the successful execution of the demonstration.

A small but growing body of scholarship has begun to recover the role of Bennett women in the sit-ins. Deidre B. Flower's 2005 article in *The Journal of African American History*, "The Launching of the Student Sit-in Movement: The Role of Black Women at Bennett College," examines the theories of organization behind the protest, highlighting the participation of Bennett students and the unique climate of the school. Linda Beatrice Brown, a Bennett alumna who participated in the sit-ins and the niece of Willa B. Player, Bennett's president from 1955 to 1966, has written two books that discuss Bennett's contribution in detail. *The Long Walk: The Story of the Presidency of Willa B. Player at Bennett College*, published in 1998, details the methods of Player's leadership, including her approach to the sit-ins. Brown's 2013 *Belles of Liberty: Gender, Bennett College, and the Civil Rights Movement in Greensboro, North Carolina* centers on the question of Bennett's absence from most historical accounts of the sit-ins and, using interviews from alumnae, recovers their stories. Three more sources feature the voices of participants themselves. Eugene E. Pfaff's *Keep on Walkin', Keep on Talkin': An Oral History of the Greensboro Civil Rights Movement*, published in 2012, curates oral history interviews with Greensboro residents about their memories of civil rights action in the city, beginning with the sit-ins movement. He includes excerpts of interviews with Player, former Bennett faculty member Rev. John Hatchett, and others who discuss the actions of Bennett students. Hatchett also published his own piece in *The Freedom Socialist* in 2005. In it, he hopes to "correct a longstanding inequity" by explaining that the idea for

the sit-ins originated with Bennett students. Finally, the John Novak Digital Interview Archive housed at Marygrove College includes audio recordings and transcripts of Marygrove Psychology professor Dena Scher's interviews with Bennett alumnae Gwendolyn Mackel Rice, Roslyn Smith, and Esther Terry. In these interviews, conducted in 2010 and 2011, the women directly discuss their participation and Bennett's place in the legacy of the sit-ins.

Despite these efforts, public memories of the sit-ins have been established without the voices of the Bennett women, as has been the case for many women in the civil rights movement. As Afro-Latin-American literature scholar Paula Sanmartín writes, “a new narrative of black women's history must revise both the silences and the damaging stereotypes that have dictated how black women have emerged in historiography” (2). In this chapter, I join rhetoricians including Maegan Parker Brooks, Davis W. Houck, Kristan Poirot, Jacqueline Jones Royster, and Kirt H. Wilson in recovering the roles of black women in the struggle for civil rights and reconsidering the rhetoric of the movement.⁵ In the following section, I begin the first part of my contribution to that work by turning to those oral histories of Bennett students and faculty to explain their role in the sit-ins, stitching together a narrative from these women's memories as expressed in their own words.

Bennett College Women's Organizational Leadership

Accounts from Bennett echo what scholars of social movements have learned about the significant roles that women played in the civil rights movement. Historical sociologist Bernice McNair Barnett rethinks the “traditional notion of leadership,”

arguing that women acted as more than organizational support for male leadership (176).⁶ Her extensive interviews with civil rights activists reveal that organizing was an important form of leadership, among many other multidimensional leadership roles that pushed the movement forward. Barnett argues that the organizing efforts of black women were devalued at the time due to the triple constraints of gender, race, and class. She further claims that their efforts need to be redefined as valid forms of leadership. Sociologist Belinda Robnett similarly demonstrates that leadership took many different forms throughout the civil rights movement. While women were generally “excluded as formal leaders because of their sex,” they were “critical mobilizers” of activity. “Gender, which operated as a construct of exclusion,” Robnett explains, “produced a particular context in which women participated” (20). It is important to understand how these gendered contexts constrained women’s participation, but this understanding cannot come at the expense of celebrating—and taking seriously as a subject for rhetorical analysis—women’s leadership within those contexts. The story of Bennett women’s organizational leadership directly confronts the misconception that women in the civil rights movement acted primarily as support for men. At the same time, their story demonstrates how their gendered context created the conditions for their initial position of silence.

Bennett students were primed for their role in the sit-in movement. Alumna Esther Terry believes that Bennett College encouraged a sensibility that many women brought with them to campus from their home communities. She argues that their college environment was not the women’s sole source of motivation to participate in the sit-ins: “It did not come out of nowhere and it was not divinely inspired by Bennett, as good as

Bennett was. These young women came from places and had a brush with apartheid that had planted seeds in them that sort of grew into fruition here and they have continued” (27). According to Terry, the women saw themselves “in a tradition of being active and doing the right thing,” and the campus culture fortified that perspective (8). Well before the start of the sit-ins, students at Bennett had been involved in local politics, including a 1937 boycott of local movie theaters and a 1951 voter registration drive (Goldstone 155). Bennett College President Willa B. Player’s educational philosophy emphasized civic engagement. She demonstrated her own commitment to civic responsibility in the decisions she made about the role that the college would play in the community. For example, during Martin Luther King, Jr.’s visit to Greensboro in 1958, she volunteered the use of Bennett’s chapel as a venue for his speech. She welcomed the gathering of the community on campus, strengthening the college’s power as a source of pride and center of action for black residents of Greensboro and ensuring that her students were connected to the national civil rights struggle (Brown, *The Long Walk* 167).

Most immediately, the direct encouragement of Bennett faculty was a catalyst for the students’ decision to address the racist practices of businesses in downtown Greensboro. Terry, Gwendolyn Mackel Rice, and Roslyn Smith (Bennett College alumnae, Class of 1961) credit their professors for their awareness and interest in what was happening outside of the classroom. Smith specifically remembers Edwin Edmonds, a sociology professor and president of the Greensboro branch of the NAACP, for the way he would piece together course content with his community involvement (9). She also remembers Rev. John Hatchett, a philosophy and religion professor, for his ability to “blend his academic teachings with life outside of the college” (9). Terry recalls that the

idea to demonstrate started as a question in their classes; professors spoke to students about becoming leaders, and students wondered, “Why are we in here talking about being first class citizens when we can’t go downtown and we can’t participate fully as citizens?” (2). It was in these courses that the students’ questions began to generate action. Smith says, “I don’t remember specifically at what point we decided to sit down and say ‘Ok, we’re going to tackle this issue.’ But I know it was because of Dr. Edmonds and...Rev. Hatchett” (10).

With the support of these faculty members, the students began to develop a strategy. They asked Hatchett, who had begun teaching at Bennett that semester, to be the advisor of the college chapter of the NAACP. He readily agreed.⁷ From September to November, the students met frequently to discuss their goal of desegregating all public places in Greensboro. According to Smith, the group of students would meet in the evenings on the second floor of the Student Union with Dr. Edmonds and/or Rev. Hatchett (11).⁸ They carefully researched civil rights activities that were taking place in other parts of the country, most notably the successful sit-in demonstrations organized by the youth chapter of the NAACP in Oklahoma City.⁹ The students wanted to implement the same strategies in Greensboro, and they agreed that the Woolworth’s lunch counter would be their first target. Hatchett recounts, “Our decision was rooted in a tactical and practical reality. Woolworth’s was a national chain heavily patronized by Black people all over the country. We had anticipated the real possibility of a boycott locally and nationally. We knew we would need all the sympathy and support we could get” (5). With their target in mind, the group laid out specific plans. They would not cut class to participate in the demonstration. Mirroring the sit-ins they had studied, they decided that

they would dress nicely, and they would remain calm no matter what happened around them. As Smith remembers, “We were told to expect someone to spit on us, someone may douse a cigarette on us, someone may hit us.... We were not ever to strike back or to retaliate” (13). Part of their planning was to discuss the idea with Player. After some initial meetings, Gloria Brown, president of the Bennett student government, approached Player about their developing plans. Player made no attempt to stop them, but she did offer some advice. The winter holiday was fast approaching, and most students would return home for the break. Player was skeptical that the demonstration would succeed if it was interrupted by the students’ absence. She recommended that they wait until the start of the next semester to carry out their plan (Hatchett 5).¹⁰

Black Men from A&T

By the late fall of 1959, men from A&T had become involved in the planning. According to Terry, “at some point...there was an agreement that we should bring into those discussions A&T students” (10). Smith recalls that Player encouraged the women to involve men from A&T so that they would have protection when demonstrating downtown (11). It is not clear exactly how the A&T students were brought into the discussions or how they communicated with the Bennett women throughout the planning phase. Information was likely spread through informal channels. Smith guesses that news traveled between students at both colleges because “somebody was probably dating somebody in the group or you had friends who knew guys or whatever” (17). Students and faculty from Bennett clearly recall the presence and involvement of A&T students, including some members of the Greensboro Four. Smith specifically remembers Jibreel Khazan and Franklin McCain being present at some meetings (14). According to

Hatchett, “Included in the contingent of students were all four of the young men who were destined to become the ‘Famous Four.’ They heard; they participated; they believed; and they accepted” (5).¹¹

The Greensboro Four were the first to sit at the Woolworth’s lunch counter on February 1, 1960. Once the sit-ins began, students on both campuses quickly organized. Gloria Brown and Edward Pitt of A&T became co-chairs of the planning committee for the demonstrations, called the Student Executive Committee for Justice (Brown, *Belles of Liberty* 75). This group developed and set strategy, kept students informed, and recruited new participants. David Richmond, one of the Greensboro Four, remembers, “We did an hour-by-hour job.... We had students to take each other’s places at the counters. We had a carpool to transport everybody. We had a place where everybody would come and register for the whole week” (Chafe 84). As they had planned, students were expected to attend class and join the demonstration in their free time. Many students abided by this policy; Smith was not able to go downtown to picket until the third day because of her work and study schedule (18).

It is unclear how or whether the decision was made that the men would be the first to sit-in. The testimonies from students and faculty at Bennett conflict when it comes to this point. Hatchett indicates that it was decided that students from A&T would begin the demonstration in the early days of the new semester and the Bennett women would join later (5). Rice’s account suggests something similar. She says that she remembers standing in front of Merner Hall on Bennett’s campus the day before the sit-ins began talking with Khazan, McCain, and other students from both schools “about how we were gonna do it. And we were there and they were there.” She says they “had planned it that

the fellas would sit at the counter.” But the men were not the only ones who went downtown on the first day of the sit-ins—Rice says she was also present at the Woolworth’s. She and the men made a purchase at the store so that they could prove they were customers (19). Rice herself does not explain what she did next when the four men sat at the counter and asked to be served, but Terry remembers Rice saying that she was waiting in the store “in the event that the young men didn’t make it. [Bennett students] were going to be the next line and she was there” (13). Linda Beatrice Brown points out that, in this role, the women were serving as potential witnesses should the situation have turned violent (*Belles of Liberty* 74).

Smith remembers a different plan. According to her, the roles were supposed to be reversed. The plan was for the women to go to Woolworth’s, make a purchase in the store, and then sit at the lunch counter and ask for service. The men from A&T were supposed to be present to support and protect the women. She argues, “[T]he strategy was that the A&T guys would be our backs so, if there was any trouble, they would be there to help us out.” Smith contends that the men acted without the knowledge of Bennett students: “Now, so the next day, the four of them go down and we don’t know about it” (16). Bennett alumna Lois Lucas Williams also remembers that “before we could do anything, Ezell and the other three A&T students had gone down to Woolworth.” She suggests that the men might have gone ahead with the sit-in because they “felt that the girls at Bennett would be [physically] hurt,” but she maintains that “they sort of pre-empted” Bennett women’s plans (Pfaff 125). For the moments when these memories conflict, accounts from within the Bennett community consistently attest to the organizing and planning that began at Bennett in the fall of 1959. At some point, the men

from A&T, with the knowledge of some students and faculty at Bennett and without the knowledge of others, decided to take the lead.

As the sit-ins unfolded, news reports in Greensboro represented A&T students as the driving force behind the protests. At the end of the second day, the *Greensboro Record* printed its first report of the sit-ins, naming A&T students exclusively in its headline: “A&T Students Launch ‘Sit-Down’ Demand for Service at Downtown Lunch Counter.” The article identifies Khazan, McCain (incorrectly printed as McLain), Richmond, and McNeil as the “leaders” of the demonstration and includes quotes from Khazan and McCain (Sykes B1). On February 3rd, the third day of the protests, the *Greensboro Record* reported that “[a]bout a third of the students in the demonstration today were girls.” The article claims that, according to “a spokesman,” these students were all from A&T (“Student Strength”). A *Greensboro Daily News* article from February 4th lists developments from that day of the demonstration. Third on the list is “[p]articipation by Bennett College students in what had been a movement by A&T students only” (“Movement” B1). The Student Executive Committee for Justice is continuously represented as an organization exclusive to A&T students, though Bennett students were involved (Bryant; “A&T Students”). In my review of local reporting of the 1960 sit-ins, I found no evidence that news sources sought out the perspectives of women from Bennett or reported any challenges to A&T students’ claim to leadership.

Bennett women were assumed to have played only a passive role, at most, in the demonstration; as a result, they became peripheral figures in the emerging narrative of the sit-ins. Even if their organizational work had been acknowledged, it likely would not have been understood as a leadership effort worth including in reports of an event that

was quickly gaining national attention. Of course, many women across the country found that their experiences were similarly elided from reporting throughout the civil rights movement. “Race, gender, and class constraints,” as Barnett claims, “generally prohibited [women from] being the recognized articulators, spokespersons, and media favorites” (177). Prathia Hall Wynn, a former leader in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, recalls, “when the press was on hand, who did they interview? They interviewed the men.” She attributes part of that to “the sexism in the culture, in that that’s who the press people considered to be important to interview.” But Wynn also remembers that she and other women “often went along with that, feeling that it was important to our community that Black males be seen as competent, standing up and giving strong leadership” (Robnett 43). Many women saw themselves in a partnership with the men who were expected to take the formal—public—leadership roles, even as their own contributions were diminished.

White Women from WC

Another group of students diverted attention away from the Bennett women: white women from North Carolina Woman’s College (WC) who joined the sit-ins for the fourth day of the demonstration. Though the women only participated for a few hours on a single day, their actions threatened the prevailing sense of white regional identity in Greensboro so that they received outsized attention. Ann Dearsley-Vernon, Eugenia “Genie” Seaman Marks, and Marilyn Lott Merrill were not close friends, but they ended up eating breakfast together on Thursday, Feb. 4, 1960. They had read about what was happening downtown and decided that they should go sit at the lunch counter in solidarity with the Bennett and A&T students. Dearsley-Vernon remembers that the decision to

participate was an altogether obvious one for her and her classmates. She said, “I can’t tell you how spontaneous and innocent it was.... We didn’t give any thought to the ramifications. It was as simple as, ‘Well, that’s just the dumbest thing I’ve ever heard – that you can’t sit down and have a cup of coffee in a public place.’ It was as simple as that” (Ward 14).

When they arrived at the Woolworth’s, they made their way to the counter. Three white men who were holding seats in order to keep black students from sitting at the counter offered their stools to the women. Dearsley-Vernon remembers, “We saw immediately we would have complete success in sitting at the lunch counter. There was sort of a contest for the available seats. And when three white women walked in and asked to be seated, the assumption was that we were there to protest the protest. How could they think any differently? This was the segregated South.” Merrill recalls the same confidence, “As white people, somebody who was stubbornly hanging on to a stool so as not to let a black person get it was certainly going to yield his seat to a white girl.” A waitress approached the women and asked to take their order. Dearsley replied, “I believe there are some people ahead of us who need to be served” (Ward 14).

A white man pulled out a knife and ran it down Dearsley-Vernon’s back. She remembers that she was able to remain calm: “Although it was extremely frightening, maybe my naïveté said I’m not going to get stabbed here surrounded by dozens of people. Even in a situation like that, there is some safety in numbers” (Ward 14). The women worried that they would not have that same safety if they walked back to campus alone, but they had made no other arrangements. As they got up to leave after a few hours at the counter, the Bennett and A&T students made a circle around them and walked them

outside. Someone had called a cab to take them back, and as they waited for it to arrive, the Bennett and A&T students stood in a protective circle around the WC women, reciting the Lord's Prayer. The cab arrived and the women were taken safely back to campus. They never found out who called or paid for the cab.

The WC administration was immediately disapproving of the women's actions. Upon her return, Dearsley-Vernon received a call from Dean Katherine Taylor, who told her she was no longer welcome at the school. "The repercussions – I certainly didn't think about the repercussions," Dearsley-Vernon said. "But Dean Taylor thought about the repercussions. I'm sure we were Dean Katherine Taylor's worst nightmare. I'm sure she did at that moment what she thought was most appropriate for a white, Southern, state-supported girls' school," she reflects. While the expulsion was later lifted, the message was clear: the WC administrators were not proud of the students' participation. They were allowed to remain enrolled at the college, but they were restricted to campus during the time immediately following the sit-ins. The women received intimidating phone calls and hate mail from people on campus and outside of the university community. The situation was severe enough that the school had to monitor their mail and screen their phone calls. Reflecting back on the situation, Dearsley-Vernon is almost understanding of the extreme reaction from the school. "You have to put the repercussions in the context of another time, another culture, another set of expectations," she said. "There were expectations of how young women would act and how they would represent their school" (Ward 18).

That sense of defied expectations characterized most reactions to the women's participation. Their few short hours at the lunch counter received extensive press

coverage. On February 5th, the day after they went downtown, the *Greensboro Daily News* ran a story titled “Aid Given Negroes’ Protest: 3 WC Students Join Sitdown.” The article reported on developments from that day of the demonstration, including the “white teenagers and young men” who were attempting to block black students from taking seats at the counter. But the emphasis was on the WC women. Printed alongside the article was a picture of the three women sitting at the counter with black women and men, all with schoolwork spread out in front of them. Importantly, the article listed the names and hometowns of the women: “The three Woman’s College students identified themselves as Genie Seaman [Marks] of Orlando, Fla., Marilyn Lott [Merrill] of Washington, D.C., and Ann Dearsley[-Vernon] of London, England.” Word of their involvement quickly spread to their hometowns. Marks’s home newspaper reported that she had participated in the sit-ins. As a result, her family received hate telephone calls and her father’s construction business was hurt by the negative publicity. News even spread overseas. Dearsley-Vernon’s parents learned of her involvement when they saw the photo of the women in a London newspaper (Ward 18).

Gordon Blackwell, WC Chancellor, spoke to a student assembly on February 9th, just days after the event. He expressed his dissatisfaction with the WC students who had participated and discouraged others from doing so: “I advise each of you to refrain from any public demonstration in connection with the issue now before the community or any similar issue which may arise in the future. It is only in an atmosphere free from pressure and emotionalism that a fair and just solution may be found.” Blackwell seemed particularly attentive to how the sit-ins threatened perceptions of North Carolina as a place of measured and reasonable progressivism. He cautioned the students, “In a state

proud of its tradition of lawful action and far sighted legislation, it is tragic to move toward open hostility, hatred and conflict as a way of resolving difficult points at issue.” Blackwell, operating under the assumptions of the progressive mystique, failed to acknowledge that the preferred channels for resolving conflict were closed off from subordinated groups, especially black Americans fighting against Jim Crow. “[D]evotion to proper social forms,” writes Chafe, “caused whites to reject as unrepresentative any black who failed to obey the ground rules of ‘correct’ behavior” (99). Of course, correctness was defined by powerful white people. The sit-ins were so upsetting to people like Blackwell precisely because, by communicating outside the norms of correctness, the student demonstrators forced a response. In a place like Greensboro, leadership worried that this kind of highly public and disruptive action would paint the city as a blatantly racist place and, at the same time, as a place that could not pacify its black residents.

In addition to his concerns about how Greensboro might be perceived, Blackwell was acutely aware that the situation threatened WC’s reputation. Each student at WC was given a class jacket—a blazer in one of four colors according to their class. Dearsley-Vernon, Marks, and Merrill wore their jackets to Woolworth’s that day, which became a great point of contention for administrators. Blackwell told the student assembly, “Your responsibility as students of WC goes beyond personal considerations. Your class jacket is a symbol of the College. On and off the campus you represent the institution. Your actions bring credit or discredit to the College.” The three white women already stood apart from the other demonstrators, but wearing their jackets had immediately identified them as WC students and associated their actions with the school. Claudette Graves Burroughs-White was one of about twenty black students enrolled at WC at the time. The

administration gave her permission to participate in the demonstration, but she was not allowed to identify herself as a WC student by wearing her jacket. “I wasn’t as noticeable because I was black,” she said, “and you didn’t know if I was from A&T or Bennett or WC. I sort of melted into the crowd. I didn’t stand out like the white students” (Ward 19).¹²

The attention to the school was especially unwanted because the white women’s presence at the lunch counter exacerbated racist and sexist fears of many white Greensboro residents. Blackwell told reporters the week after the women’s participation, “There’s no question that the participation by our three white women students with the black male A&T students greatly increased the inflammatory nature of the situation among the large redneck element of the community” (Ward 14). Here Blackwell called up fears of “race-mixing,” which were rooted in racist logics and, often, in sexist ideas about white women. White women were white men’s to protect, especially from the myth of the black rapist of white women. That myth has been, as Angela Y. Davis writes, “methodologically conjured up whenever recurrent waves of violence and terror against the Black community have required convincing justifications” (173). In this case, the myth of the black rapist is implied as a justification for segregation.

Blackwell neither outright celebrated nor condemned segregation in his remarks. Instead, he argued that the disruption caused by the sit-ins and the WC women’s participation threatens any hope for progress: “The tensions that have been generated now threaten the good relations that have existed between segments of our population. The good will of substantial elements in the community has been jeopardized to the cause

of improving race relations.” His greatest concern was that civility (which privileges the powerful, like himself) had broken down.

In blaming the presence of the white women with black men for generating additional tension, Blackwell implicitly gave credence to those fears of integration and miscegenation. At the same time, he attempted to separate himself and his “segment of the population” from those fears by suggesting that it was the “large redneck element of the community” that was most upset by the white women’s presence with black men. With this gesture, Blackwell shielded himself from association with ideas that might be perceived as blatantly racist, suggesting that it was only poor uneducated white people who would ascribe to such a viewpoint. However, even while Blackwell held that viewpoint at arms-length, he still used it to justify his admonition of the students’ actions.

By challenging the practice of segregation at the lunch counter, the WC students had (knowingly or not) rejected the idea that they, as white women, could be used as a justification for segregation that qualified as positive “race relations.” In doing so, they threatened the ideal of the white southern lady that was (and still is) a powerful symbol of southern regional identity. Media studies scholar Tara McPherson explains that, after the Civil War, the South was both figuratively and literally feminized, having suffered defeat and having lost a large portion of the male population. White southerners then turned to a “hyperfeminized figure of the southern woman as the discursive symbol for the region” (19). This mythologized southern lady is integral to white southern regional identity, as literary critic Nina Baym argues: “southern women, [as] embodiment of [the] graces [of the region], are what the South as a whole has cultivated; they *are* Southern culture” (qtd. in McPherson 19). Ultimately, McPherson argues that this myth is a “powerful cultural

assemblage” that can limit definitions of regional identity, often serving “to make new modes of southernness more difficult to envision” (11). Of course, the myth of the white southern lady goes hand-in-hand with the myth of the black male rapist, each justifying the other. The WC students directly challenged the expectations for white southern women by participating in the sit-ins with black students, and their rejection of that norm garnered a strong reaction from many white people, even in the “progressive” Greensboro community.

Even for those white Greensboro residents who would insist on the city’s progressive character, its southernness was essential to its regional identity—for it was only in comparison to other Southern places that Greensboro could claim its progressiveness. The image of the white southern lady was one aspect of southernness that the progressive mystique could accommodate. After news of the white women’s actions spread, some Greensboro residents were quick to identify the WC students as “outsiders” because they came from different states and countries. In doing so, it was possible to maintain the myth of the southern white lady, because the women did not qualify as such. A letter to the editor from R.L. Carter in the *Greensboro Daily News* on February 9th, five days after the WC students took part in the demonstration, makes this point clearly. Carter wrote, “The lunch counter strike...only goes to prove two things we Southerners have been knowing for some time: (1) The Negro has constantly tried and is still trying to force himself on the white man and (2) outsiders, who neither really know our problems, nor are in the least bit concerned, are ever-present to solve our troubles for us.” He mentions the three women by name and argues that they, along with the black students asking for equal rights, “want to destroy our [Southern] social customs and

mores, which have evolved over many, many generations.” The following day, the *Greensboro Record* printed a similar letter from “A Daily Reader” who wrote, “If the Negro students at A&T and elsewhere, as well as the girls at WC who sympathized with them do not like our city and our way of life and are unable to adjust themselves, I feel it is high time they moved out and went where living habits and customs are to their way of thinking and liking.” A response to Carter’s letter, signed by “Two Students—White,” ran in the *Greensboro Daily News* on February 13th. They wrote, “Mr. Carter seems to be setting up the Southern white as an ideal. Where value judgments are concerned, he brings fact judgments to hear, implying that the situation in the South is static and that Southern standards and customs are so right and good that they should not be destroyed.” These students demonstrate that Carter’s argument only succeeds if one buys into a prescriptive and limiting sense of regional identity, one designed exclusively by and for white men and ideal southern ladies.

Importantly, these public conversations overlooked the Bennett students and other black women, like Burroughs-White, who participated in the sit-ins. Regional insecurities brought attention to the white women and the black men, pushing black Bennett women further and further into the periphery. I do not mean to suggest that these same racist and sexist prejudices were not present in other areas of the country, only that these ideas about femininity and segregation loomed particularly large in white southerners’ self-definition. For racist white Greensboro residents, it was easiest to see the students as either threatening black men or vulnerable white women—black women did not figure into this formulation as they were neither a threat to white women or in need of protection from white men. They were read as “[n]ot men but not quite ladies,” to borrow

Zandria F. Robinson's words (122). The racist and sexist assumptions that motivated such a strong reaction to the WC students' participation overpowered any notion of the Bennett women's gendered context by attaching questions of gender to the white women exclusively.

Amid all the attention given to the WC women and the A&T men, a consensus memory of the sit-ins began to take hold. As the history of the sit-ins was being written, these accounts featuring A&T and WC students were the foundation for that record. The Bennett women's silence began as a tactical choice and was then perpetuated, past the point of their choosing, as an effect of the processes of historicizing and commemorating the sit-ins. The nature of the Bennett women's silence lies in the space between a choice and an effect, at what Shevaun E. Watson calls "the intersection of silence and silencing" (78). In the following sections, I analyze how the rhetorical values associated with their silence changed, over time, from a deliberate choice to an unintentional effect.

Expected Silence

High school and college students across Greensboro carried out the sit-ins in several phases, amidst a series of negotiations between city council members and local business owners. By July 25th, 1960, this phase of student activism in Greensboro had ended. On that day, three black Woolworth's employees sat down at the lunch counter, ordered, and were served (Wolff 167). By this point the sit-ins had spread throughout the South, and the Greensboro Four were already positioned as heroes. The four men had become the undeniable face of the movement in Greensboro and across the country.¹³

Rev. John Hatchett, advisor to the Bennett College chapter of the NAACP, says that he and the Bennett women were not surprised when the men from A&T took action, nor were they surprised when the Four received sole credit for the idea. He explains why the women remained silent about the extent of their involvement: “In order not to create any confusion at that time centered around what was happening, we agreed that we would not say anything about the role that we played. We just simply became active participants, in order not to create any sort of...conflict between the women at Bennett and the young men at A&T” (Pfaff 75). Although Bennett women themselves have not given a reason for their silence, Hatchett’s account offers an explanation that aligns with the other evidence at hand. Hatchett suggests that he and the students recognized the rhetorical constraints of the situation and chose a position of silence in order to foster concord within the movement and present a united front to their audience: the white business owners and city officials who upheld segregation. The women’s silence, while in part a result of pressures from a patriarchal culture that frequently dismissed the contributions of women, can also be read as a sophisticated choice that demonstrated their commitment to the goal of achieving equality and justice in Greensboro and across the country.

Together, all students who participated in the sit-ins mounted an argument against the hierarchy imposed by racism. Having been excluded from “the formulation, validation, and circulation of meaning” by the dominant group (in this case, racist white people in positions of power) these students constituted a “subordinate or muted group” (Glenn, *Unspoken* 25). By sitting at the counter, these women and men imposed their physical presence where their voices likely would not have been heard. In primarily

nonverbal demonstrations, as Sean Patrick O'Rourke writes, "[p]rotestors place their bodies where they are not supposed to be and, through this juxtaposition of black bodies in 'white' places, offer a vision of a new, different, desegregated South" (688). By using their bodies in this way, the students communicated from their position of mutedness. Although all the students shared the common goal of speaking back to white power structures, the gendered context produced conditions that led the men from A&T to take on formal leadership responsibilities and become the face of the sit-ins. Within social movements, the internal process of negotiating difference within an organization or group often conflicts with the need to project a unified version of a "self" (the organization) to those on the outside. That tension, argues cultural anthropologist Lynn Stephen, results in the essentialization of individuals on the margins of the group: "Organizing requires the projection of 'sameness' to outsiders. Strategically, demands must stem from a coherent social location understandable to those who are the audience for them—often institutions of the state" (66). For demonstrations like the sit-ins, the audience was white society, in relationship to which "Black women's identity was wedded to Blackness and the oppression of all Black people" (Robnett 43). Racism shaped the way that relationships across gender, region, class, or culture operated in the context of the movement so that for many participants "race...superseded other identities" (Robnett 40).¹⁴ Hatchett's statements suggest recognition of these constraints: Bennett women's commitment to fight racist oppression superseded potential concerns about gender inequity within the student group.

Bennett students were faced with a complicated rhetorical choice—they were placed in a double bind in which every possible course of action was disadvantageous at

some level (Jamieson 5).¹⁵ They could use the attention from the demonstration to find a platform to explain their role in the sit-ins, but then they would risk the division (actual or perceived) of the larger student group. Alternatively, they could choose to ensure the cohesion of the group by remaining silent about their role while the A&T students were given sole credit. In their position, some amount of “rhetorical failure” was guaranteed—it seems unlikely that the women could have spoken up about their organizational leadership without weakening the argument of the overall demonstration (Watson 79). By choosing not to challenge accounts of the sit-ins and instead supporting the men in formal leadership positions, Bennett women did not upset the expectation of their silence. Unfortunately, though unsurprisingly, their perspective was not sought out in 1960. Their silence was more or less expected, as reporters (and certainly many others) never assumed that the women might have played such an essential role in the planning of the demonstration. With this in mind, it might be easy to conclude that they were given no option but to remain silent. But as Hatchett states, the women were making a choice in letting the flawed record stand.

Silence was—in this moment—an effective tactic for the Bennett women. The expectations of a patriarchal society certainly contributed to their silence, and I do not mean to applaud those forces that devalue and dismiss women’s voices. Instead, I am suggesting a way to read their absence of voice, acknowledging the contributions these women made to the sit-ins movement from a position of silence. Silence, then, can take on multiple roles, perhaps even multiple roles at once, as in this case. As Kenneth Ferguson argues, silence “has no predetermined structure of power” (121). While their silence was expected because of their perceived lack of power, the Bennett women

nevertheless exercised rhetorical skill in recognizing that their silence was prudent. However, prudence, like silence, “is not a fixed concept.” As Kirt H. Wilson argues, “[w]hat is prudent for a rhetorical culture shifts with time” (“The Contested Space” 131).¹⁶ Over time, as members of the Bennett community began to recognize that their work was not included in public memories of the sit-ins, their judgment shifted. It became prudent to speak publicly about their organizational leadership of the sit-ins.

Unexpected Silencing

“One way to gauge the rhetorical power of silence,” writes Katherine Mack, “is by attending to its effects” (“Hearing” 211). The immediate effects of the Bennett women’s silence were, as I have identified: 1) that a perception of group cohesion remained intact and, 2) that the women were left out of the initial records of the sit-ins. Of course, those records went on to form the basis for the consensus memory that omits their organizational leadership. Analyzing the long-term effects of their silence reveals how the rhetorical values associated with Bennett women’s silence changed over time.

Bennett women did not anticipate how difficult it would be to write themselves back into the history of the sit-ins. Writing from her own experience, Linda Beatrice Brown recalls, “As women of Bennett we did not think about having to validate our role later in history. It is only as the years went on that we realized we were less and less a part of the official story” (*Belles of Liberty* 34). Roslyn Smith also speaks about how their participation has been “reduced and almost pushed aside.” But she and other alumnae like Brown have been working to correct that record now, many years later: “One of the things that we as Bennett students had been trying to convey over the years is that we

were *in* the planning, *at* the planning, *of* the planning, *for* the planning” (23, emphasis mine). Undoubtedly, their accounts have circulated informally through the Bennett College campus and in the Greensboro community since 1960, but public efforts to tell their story seem to begin with the publication of Hatchett’s article in *Freedom Socialist* in 2005. Then, in 2010, the fiftieth anniversary of the sit-ins brought renewed attention to this part of Greensboro’s history. Dena Scher began her oral history interviews with Bennett alumnae that year. During the anniversary celebrations, Bennett College held an event titled “A Retrospective on Bennett Belle Leadership in the 1960s Sit-In Movement.” The program featured alumnae, including Brown, Smith, Gwendolyn Mackel Rice, and Esther Terry, along with other alumnae who had participated in the sit-ins: Rev. Mary Ellen Bender, Roslyn Cheagle, Shirley Dismuke Graham, Desretta McAllister Harper, Jean Neff Herbert, and Dolores Finger Wright (*A Retrospective*). These women shared their perspectives on Bennett’s role in the sit-ins, including the story of their planning efforts (J. Davis). Brown’s book *Belles of Liberty: Gender, Bennett College, and the Civil Rights Movement in Greensboro, North Carolina*, published several years later in 2013, provided a more detailed description of the women’s roles in the demonstration. Despite efforts like these, the Bennett women have not been able to disrupt the consensus memory of the sit-ins on a large scale. Commemorations of the event have relied on the men’s accounts, thereby solidifying a public memory landscape that is difficult to alter.

The mythic character of the Greensboro Four has grown as public memories of the sit-ins have solidified through the processes of commemoration. On the first day of the sit-ins in 1960, *Greensboro Record* photographer Jack Moebes captured a photo of

the men walking down the sidewalk, four across. This was the photo that would become one of the most iconic images of the student sit-ins. The image was used as the basis for the statue of the four men that stands on A&T's campus, it covers an entire wall in the lobby of the International Civil Rights Center & Museum, and it is reproduced in countless historical accounts of the civil rights movement—but it was never printed in any of the paper's original coverage of the sit-ins.¹⁷ The photo remained in the files until the tenth anniversary of the sit-ins. Moebes says that, at that point, the fact that they were “the originators” had taken on more significance (Interview by Jim Schlosser 9). During the sit-ins, no other pictures had been taken that showed the four together, so Moebes's photo was taken out of the files and printed for the first time (Interview by Eugene E. Pfaff 7). This shift in the media representation of the event demonstrates how, as time passed, the sit-ins came to be read through the figures of the young men. In 1960, while they were singled out, the men were seen as four leaders among a large group of organized students. By 1970, as the community began to celebrate the memory of the event rather than report the experience of it, they had become the Greensboro Four. As the Four became synonymous with the sit-ins movement, the Bennett women were made more invisible, and it became increasingly difficult for them to be heard.

Silences must be actively sustained among all involved parties, as Ferguson argues, and the Four have been complicit in the silence and subsequent silencing of the Bennett women (123). The Greensboro Four have never acknowledged that any part of the planning for the sit-ins originated at Bennett or that efforts to organize the first days of the protest were collaborative. Had they acknowledged the extent of the women's work before the women themselves were able to tell their stories more publicly, the men

could have helped to shape a different narrative about the sit-ins. Significantly, in the decade since the Bennett community has spoken out, none of the surviving members of the Greensboro Four have made any efforts to corroborate the women's accounts.

The men have always maintained that they came up with the idea amongst themselves. In a 1979 interview, Richmond says, "We had talked from September [1959] on about segregation, and we went over all sorts of possibilities that existed. That Sunday night we were talking about it again, and about four o'clock that Monday afternoon, we said, 'Let's do it,' and we walked downtown" (Pfaff 65). In an interview also conducted in 1979, McNeil explains that the idea had been developing amongst the four for some time: "The concept was not a seed that was suddenly born in somebody's mind.... What led us to act that particular night was that we had met, we had talked, discussed the need to do something like this." McNeil indicates that they had discussed the idea "in passing" with local storeowner Ralph Johns, but there is no mention of attending planning meetings at Bennett in any of the men's accounts (Pfaff 63).

Two of the four have, at least, credited the women with their integral role in *sustaining* the protests. Khazan acknowledges in a 1980 interview, "During that time, in 1960 and all through the decade, [Bennett students] were more organized than the students at A&T.... They were involved from the first week of the movement" (Pfaff 163). McNeil, again in 1979, regrets that the women are not recognized for their participation; "The thing that probably disturbs me most is the fact that not enough people get credit for what they did, particularly the females, who were the spirit of this movement" (Pfaff 122). In these instances, Khazan and McNeil celebrate the work that Bennett women did to carry out the sit-ins.

When it comes to the question of Bennett students' participation before February 1st, their attitude changes. In later interviews, McNeil and McCain flatly deny that Bennett women were involved in the planning.¹⁸ McNeil calls the idea "ludicrous." He continues, "It was certainly not implanted in my mind from Bennett College." He explains that, instead, it was similar protests that took place in his hometown of Wilmington, North Carolina, that inspired his actions. Even more pointedly, McCain contends:

Now, I really don't know how this thing got started about Bennett. In fact, between us guys...I doubt if Dr. Player would have permitted her students, at that time, to do what we did. I seriously doubt it. If they had gone to her and said 'Dr. Player, here's something we plan to do,' I think she would have talked them out of it or sent them home. That's my candid feeling. The honest truth is the Bennett girls had no idea what we were going to do and neither did Dr. Player. We never once had a conversation with them.... The truth is, in my heart of hearts, Bennett girls had no such plans ever.

In their comments, McNeil and McCain suggest that the men are the keepers of the true story of the sit-ins, and they attempt to settle the issue by privileging their own accounts over any possible accounts from women at Bennett. Their comments exhibit some of the characteristics of what Krista Ratcliffe calls a "dysfunctional silence." This is a "complex concept of gendered and racialized silence" in which the dominant culture chooses not to hear the voices of those outside the dominant culture, especially the voices of women of color (85). One characteristic of a rhetoric of dysfunctional silence is that it can discourage "simultaneous imaginings of commonalities and differences," often via faulty

either/or reasoning (Ratcliffe 87). McNeil's comments follow this logic. There is no reason to doubt that those Wilmington protests were what "implanted the idea in his mind" before he arrived in Greensboro and met other like-minded students at A&T or Bennett. But rather than recognizing, let alone admitting, the possibility of multiple points of influence, McNeil sets the two ideas (that he was influenced by protests in his hometown and that he was influenced the Bennett students) as binary opposites, suggesting that Bennett women's involvement in the planning was a "ludicrous" impossibility. Ratcliffe also identifies defensiveness as a characteristic of a rhetoric of dysfunctional silence, in which a defensive stance is used to resist an opposing point of view "in order to (1) minimize anxiety, (2) protect the ego, and (3) maintain oppression" (89). McCain's arguments proceed from a defensive stance. He maintains Bennett women's subordinate position by consistently signaling that his account is superior to any other. He offers his opinion to his interviewer, Jim Schlosser, as something that can only be communicated "between us guys," as if only by the virtue of their male-ness can they talk about and understand what really happened at Bennett. By emphasizing his answer with phrases like "my candid feeling," "the honest truth," and "in my heart of hearts," he assures the interviewer of his honesty and trustworthiness, bolstering his ethos and protecting his version of events. These men, speaking decades after the sit-ins as celebrated heroes of the civil rights movement, could have helped incorporate the memories of the Bennett women into public memories of the demonstration. Instead, their disregard for the organizational leadership of the Bennett women maintained a dysfunctional silence that set the stage for the non-reception of the women's stories that remains, even now that they have made their stories public.

Perpetuating Silence Through Memory Places

This dysfunctional silence has manifested itself not only in written records of the sit-ins, but also in the physical representations of public memories of the sit-ins: a statue of the Greensboro Four on A&T's campus and the International Civil Rights Center & Museum in downtown Greensboro. As "material supports of public memory," memory places reflect how public memory has been established at the same time that they contribute to its continued invention (Blair et al. 24). Solely by virtue of their presence, statues and museums have incredible power to direct public memories.¹⁹ As such, memory places can be especially powerful representations and perpetuations of the consensus memory of the civil rights movement and what historian Clayborne Carson calls the "Great Man" myth. Carson suggests that histories tend to focus on the singular individuals whose actions are consistent with deep-seated American values, often at the expense of accounts from people who worked together to affect change (448). This focus extends to memory places. Owen J. Dwyer argues that many civil rights memorials demonstrate "a growing consensus as to what the movement stood for and who the protagonists were. This mainstream narrative is forcing women's, working-class, and local histories to the margins in order to focus on charismatic leaders and dramatic events—public history's customary leitmotif" (7). In part, the difficulty of representing complex events in finite physical spaces requires the simplification of historical narratives. That inevitable process of simplification most often favors the expected actors; in the case of the civil rights movement, this was most often men in formal leadership roles.

In Greensboro, memory places that mark the sit-ins present a consensus memory that, in keeping with the “Great Man” myth, valorizes the Four. A striking 10-foot statue of the “Greensboro Four” stands on A&T’s campus. Unveiled in 2002, for the 42nd anniversary of the sit-ins, the statue boasts the following inscription:

FEBRUARY ONE

These four A&T Freshmen envisioned and carried out the lunch counter sit-in of February 1, 1960 in downtown Greensboro. Their courageous act against social injustice inspired similar progress across the nation and is remembered as a defining moment in the struggle for civil rights. (“Greensboro Four Monument”)

The university aims to celebrate the courageous actions of their students, and rightfully so. However, the argument made by the statue and the inscription implies that the story of the sit-ins must be read through the figures of the four men. The monument to the Greensboro Four, well-known beyond the boundaries of A&T’s campus, sustains the consensus memory of the sit-ins. The iconic statue is a point of pride for A&T students. But for the Bennett community, the statue inevitably becomes a marker of the stories that have been overwritten.

At the site of the Woolworth’s store, just blocks away from where the statue, is the International Civil Rights Center & Museum (ICRCM). The independently owned and operated museum, which opened in 2010, has worked to preserve the site and to commemorate the sit-ins. The museum does important work in connecting Greensboro’s history to a larger and ongoing national and international struggle for civil and human rights. As CEO John Swaine expressed it in the museum’s 2014 Annual Report, “By celebrating an indispensable milestone in the course of racial progress in the United

States and the world, the ICRCM leverages the compelling authority of this landmark site to carry forward to evolution of human freedom and equality” (2). Yet, the museum reflects the same bias in commemorating the sit-ins as most other historical accounts and memorializations—it privileges the role of the men from A&T and does not accurately acknowledge the Bennett women. The ICRCM’s vision statement begins, “We seek to memorialize the courageous stand of the Greensboro Four as they launched, for posterity, the sit-in movement on February 1, 1960” (“About”). The four men are the primary activists being memorialized. A central part of the exhibit is “a filmed reenactment,” set in a dorm room, “of the discussion between the Greensboro Four on the night of Jan. 31, 1960, when the freshmen quartet decided to take action” (“The Museum Experience”). During this short film, which visitors watch in a space called the “A&T Room,” a narrator tells the audience that the students stopped at Ralph John’s store on their way to Woolworth’s to ask to him to notify the local press about their plans. Otherwise, the scene portrays the men as having developed the idea amongst themselves. The narrator mentions that similar discussions had been taking place at other campuses, including Bennett College, but does not indicate that there was any sort of collaboration between the two schools during the planning stages of the demonstration. This aside is the only evidence of the Bennett women’s organizational leadership throughout the museum.²⁰ Despite this oversight, the museum works in other laudable ways to challenge the consensus memory of the civil rights movement, as Marilyn Bordwell DeLaure discusses. The main exhibit emphasizes community organizing and downplays the role of the most familiar national figures in favor of recognizing citizens who worked at the local level. And while the Greensboro Four are the “most obvious heroes of this particular site,”

DeLaure asserts that the museum “stops short of lionizing them” by omitting detailed biographical information or statues of the men at the site (22). She argues: “The way that the ICRCM performs the events of February 1—through video reenactments, the simulated walk from campus to downtown, the interactive lunch counter exhibit—celebrates the *act* of the sit-ins more than the specific agents who performed it” (22-23). I agree with DeLaure, and I commend the museum for their approach. Nonetheless, in explaining what happened in Greensboro in 1960, the museum invites visitors to interpret the sit-ins through the figures of the four men.

Walking through the museum from the dorm room reenactment to the carefully preserved lunch counter does emphasize the action of the demonstration, as DeLaure observes, and even encourages visitors to imagine themselves among the students who participated; however, it is the characters of the four men that guide visitors through this entire section of the museum. On the simulated walk downtown, through the “Hall of Courage,” visitors pass by images of larger-than-life civil rights heroes who inspired the students, including W. E. B. DuBois, Rosa Parks, and Martin Luther King, Jr. Upon entering the lunch counter space, a second reenactment film (featuring the same actors who recreated the dorm room bull session) plays on the back wall behind the lunch counter, as if visitors are watching the students’ reflections as they take seats at the counter. This scene shows the men asking for and being refused service. They are joined at the counter by other students, including black women, as the narrator begins to explain the spread of sit-ins across the country. In a *New York Times* review of the museum, Edward Rothstein suggests that details like the images of civil rights icons “exaggerate the status of the four young men.” But it is this entire sequence, not just the juxtaposition

of the four with other civil rights heroes, that has an exaggerating effect. Visitors experience the start of the sit-ins from the perspective of the Greensboro Four exclusively, which simplifies the narrative and elevates the contributions of the Four at the expense of other participants. The partiality of the exhibit prevents the memory of the sit-ins from being read through a different frame, one that begins with—or at least incorporates—a group of women who worked together to create change.

In Greensboro, the statue and museum are undeniable evidence of how Bennett women have been further silenced through commemorations of the sit-ins. Even now that the women have broken their silence, their story is relegated because of, rather than incorporated into, the memory of the Greensboro Four. Commemorations of the event disproportionately rely on the accounts of the four men. Their invalidation of the women's organizational leadership creates a dysfunctional silence that defines the consensus memory of the sit-ins in Greensboro. As this consensus memory was established (and eventually represented in the physical forms of the statue and museum), the rhetorical values associated with the Bennett women's silence shifted. What began as tactical silence was overtaken by a dysfunctional silencing that has resulted in the inability of the Greensboro community and the world to hear these women's stories.

Conclusion

Over time, the Greensboro Four have become the synecdochal representation of the student sit-in movement in Greensboro and across the country. Their version of the story has been repeated in historical accounts, commemorated in the International Civil Rights Center & Museum, and solidified in their statue on A&T's campus. What is not

represented is a story about a group of women who helped to carefully plan and organize a successful protest, who experienced and dealt with disagreement and conflict within their group, and who demonstrated significant rhetorical skill in their decisions about how to present themselves and their activism. During the sit-ins, the women were, to use Philip Wander's formulation, "negated through silence" (369). Negation operates through "existing social, political, and economic arrangements," forces that can extend negation "to include the ability to produce texts, to engage in discourse, to be heard in the public space" (Wander 370). The Bennett women, knowingly negated through silence in 1960, have been further silenced in their later efforts to engage in discourse and to be heard in public space. What began as tactical silence has been extended and transformed by historical accounts and commemorative efforts that continue to overlook the experiences of Bennett women in telling the story of the sit-ins.

Perhaps the dynamic will change as the Bennett women's stories continue to spread. This chapter is one further attempt to revise the historical record to acknowledge the invaluable role that these women played at a pivotal moment in the civil rights movement. But, as this chapter also demonstrates, consensus memories of the civil rights movement are difficult to change. By drawing insights from feminist historiography and public memory studies, my analysis extends beyond that revision to consider how the Bennett women were written out of the narrative of the sit-ins through the processes of commemoration.

Attention to silence in this case study reveals how rhetorical values associated with silence can change across time and in different contexts. The circumstances of the civil rights movement required the silence of some participants and kept their stories

from coming to light. Even when that silence began as a deliberate choice, the processes of commemoration can become a force that, whether intended or not, silences. Most immediately, this insight offers an avenue for scholars to continue the work of the historiography of the civil rights movement. Considering how once tactical silences have been perpetuated by consensus memories of the movement can lead to a better understanding of this history and its current uses. Present day practices of remembering are often limited by historical biases, as in this case. Tracing the development of silence and silencing over time is one way to identify and interrogate those biases. More generally, rhetorical critics ought to continue to answer Enoch's call to explore the intersection of feminist historiography and public memory studies, not to pursue valuable recovery work, but to consider the mechanisms through which women are forgotten.

This chapter, finally, demonstrates one of the core problems of the rhetoric of the progressive mystique: it sanitizes the memories of racist injustices and the work it took to fight back. While the sit-ins were successful in forcing change from the white community, public memories of the event do not reflect the realities of that change. The February 1960 sit-ins lasted six days until both Woolworth's and the nearby S.H. Kress store, where the sit-ins had spread, closed after a bomb threat on February 6, 1960. City Councilman Edward R. Zane, who was supportive of the students' cause, convinced both the students and the mayor to accept a deal: students would cease demonstrations while a city-wide committee worked on a peaceful solution to the problem. By the end of March, however, it became clear that the committee was not going to reach an agreement, and the sit-ins and picketing resumed. In early April, the local NAACP joined with the students to urge black residents of Greensboro to boycott stores that refused to serve them

at their lunch counters. Both Woolworth and Kress closed their counters. The stores suffered significant financial losses. By the end of July, both stores, along with the Meyer's Department Store downtown, agreed to desegregate (Chafe 85-98). Most businesses in the city did not follow suit. It was not until the early summer of 1963, after 18 marches of over 2,000 people in the city's central business district and the jailing of more than 1,400 (mostly students), that the mayor requested the desegregation of all public accommodations in Greensboro (Chafe 119-147). These details are omitted from the consensus memory of the sit-ins along with the story of Bennett College women's organizational leadership.

Ultimately, this simplification sustains the progressive mystique. By forgetting the planning and organizing that was necessary to launch the demonstration *and* the years of work and thousands of people it took to achieve desegregation throughout downtown Greensboro, the memory of the sit-ins can be made to perpetuate the progressive mystique rather than to challenge it. Hal Sieber attests that such a shift happened in Greensboro. Sieber moved to Greensboro in 1966 and was appointed to the Chamber of Commerce to improve its image and develop programs. From his firsthand knowledge of the operations of city leadership, he describes a change in the way the sit-ins were remembered: "When I first got to Greensboro I heard the white power structure condemning the four sit-in demonstrators as if they were subversive.... Five years later I heard the Mayor of the city brag about the fact that we were the home of the nation's first sit-in, as if we had invented the electric lightbulb. By that time it was a resource, but in 1966 it was a painful memory" (Chafe 203). City leadership would continue to use

memories of the sit-ins as a resource to sustain Greensboro's progressive regional identity for decades to come.

Notes

¹ At the time of the sit-ins, the school was named Agricultural and Technical College of North Carolina. In 1967, it was elevated to university status. It became a constituent university of the University of North Carolina in 1972, and is now named North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University (“History & Mission”).

² Jibreel Khazan (formerly Ezell Blair Jr.), Joseph McNeil, and Franklin McCain (who passed away in 2014) were the surviving members who participated in the ribbon cutting ceremony. The fourth, David Richmond, died in 1990. State Representative Earl Jones and County Commissioner Melvin “Skip” Alston, founders of the museum, also participated in the ceremony, along with several state and national political figures, including Rev. Jesse Jackson, U.S. Assistant Attorney General Thomas Perez, U.S. Senator from North Carolina Kay Hagan, North Carolina Governor Bev Perdue, and former mayor of Greensboro Yvonne Johnson (McLaughlin, “Five Decades”).

³ Kathryn L. Nasstrom’s 1999 article “Down to Now: Memory, Narrative, and Women’s Leadership in the Civil Rights Movement in Atlanta, Georgia” exemplifies this approach. Her essay is both a history of women’s leadership in an Atlanta organizing campaign and, at the same time, “a history of that history” that identifies how their leadership came to be overlooked “as the event itself passed into memory and became incorporated into a narrative of Atlanta’s history” (115).

⁴ Wolff completed a B.A. in liberal arts from Johns Hopkins in 1965 and then earned an M.A. in southern history from the University of Virginia. His master’s thesis became the basis for his book, *Lunch at the 5 & 10*, which was first published in 1970. Wolff is not,

however, a career historian. Since the early 1970s, he has worked as a minor-league baseball manager, owner, and commissioner (Keiger).

⁵ See Brooks's *A Voice That Could Stir an Army: Fannie Lou Hamer and the Rhetoric of the Black Freedom Movement*, Brooks and Houck's *The Speeches of Fannie Lou Hamer: To Tell It Like It Is*, Houck and David E. Dixon's *Women and the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-65*, Poirot's "Gendered Geographies of Memory: Place, Violence, and Exigency at the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute," Jones Royster and Molly Cochran's "Human Rights and Civil Rights: The Advocacy and Activism of African-American Women Writers," and Wilson's "Interpreting the Discursive Field of the Montgomery Bus Boycott: Martin Luther King Jr.'s Holt Street Address."

⁶ Barnett is directly responding to Charles M. Payne's claim from his study of women in the Mississippi Delta that "men led, but women organized" (158).

⁷ Hatchett had helped students at his previous institution, Alabama A&M College, organize an effective campus boycott, and he was eager to work with the Bennett students. As he remembers, "They wanted informed guidance and fearless leadership and felt that I met their strict requirements" (5).

⁸ Other students corroborate this information. In Brown's *Belles of Liberty*, Marilyn Frazier Garner and Betty J. Harley mention planning meetings held at Bennett before the start of the 1960 sit-ins (107-108). In their respective interviews with Dena Scher, Gwendolyn Mackel Rice and Esther Terry both discuss the meetings (G. Rice 17-19; Terry 9-12).

⁹ Though the technique became closely associated with the civil rights movement, sit-ins actually occurred throughout the country long before 1960. The “Hooverilles” of the early Depression and labor strikes during the 1930s employed strategies that can be considered early examples of sit-ins. The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) organized sit-ins in Chicago in 1942 and in Kentucky in the early 1950s (Scher 186-87). Between 1957 and 1960 sit-ins took place in at least sixteen cities, including Oklahoma City and Durham, North Carolina (Morris 188-89). Hatchett indicated that the group at Bennett was in contact with the youth chapter of the NAACP in Oklahoma. They closely studied those sit-ins, using them as a model for their own (5).

¹⁰ Linda Beatrice Brown writes that Player recounted the same story during a 1993 interview for Brown’s book *The Long Walk (Belles of Liberty 76)*.

¹¹ In an earlier interview with Eugene Pfaff, Hatchett did not remember all four of the A&T men being present at the planning meetings. He said, “At least two, possibly three, of the four young men who ultimately went down to sit-in were at some of those meetings. I’m positive that Mr. Blair [Khazan] was there” (75).

¹² One other WC student is known to have participated in the sit-ins, but she never faced the same repercussions as the other white women. White student Elizabeth “Betsy” Toth participated the day after Dearsley-Vernon, Marks, and Merrill, but she did not wear her class jacket and was not pictured in any news coverage.

¹³ Khazan (formerly Blair) said that while his mind was dwelling on reminders from his family that he was not a celebrity, “we knew that people on campus respected us and we respected them. That gave us an advantage in some ways that we were a part of this movement, but there was no advantage any other times.” They were still expected to keep

up with school work, while organizing their fellow students, participating in negotiations with city leaders, and traveling nationally to represent the students as, in Khazan's words, "symbols of the Movement" (Pfaff 83).

¹⁴ My analysis here is informed by work on intersectionality from scholars like Kimberlé Crenshaw. She emphasizes the "need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed" (1245). Specifically, Crenshaw argues that "racism and sexism factors into Black women's lives in ways that cannot be captured wholly by looking at the race or gender dimensions of those experiences separately" (1244).

¹⁵ Cheryl Glenn (5) and Shevaun E. Watson (79) have both written about the connection between Jamieson's double bind and instances of silencing.

¹⁶ Wilson's essay, "The Contested Space of Prudence in the 1874-1875 Civil Rights Debate," which analyzes the 1874-1875 Reconstruction civil rights debate, reveals a long history of civil rights advocates making careful political judgments based on whether or not and how they are able to "occupy prudence's space" (145).

¹⁷ The *Record* sent Moebes out again the next morning, and he was able to get pictures of the students sitting at the counters in time for the afternoon printing of the paper.

According to Moebes, since "we had pictures at the counters, there wasn't much point in using pictures of them walking down the sidewalk" (Interview with Eugene E. Pfaff 7).

¹⁸ These interviews are undated, but they appear to have been conducted later than the 1979 and 1980 interviews. The digital archive where these interviews are featured, sitins.com, was originally launched in 1998 and updated in 2004.

¹⁹ Memory places are perceived as especially credible; they can perpetuate those simplified ideas about who can incite change and how. Because of their “material form, modes of visibility, rarity, and seeming permanence,” memory places are positioned as “*the* sites of civic importance and their subject matters as *the* stories of the society” (Blair et al. 28, emphasis in original).

²⁰ During a visit to the museum in December 2015, I asked our guide if he knew whether or not the A&T students collaborated with the Bennett students in planning the sit-ins. He said that he had heard the claim that the idea started at Bennett, but that he did not think arguments about who came up with the idea were as important as learning about the effects of their activism. Our guide continued to say that, from what he knew, he did not think that A&T and Bennett students had been in contact before the start of the sit-ins.

Chapter 3

Region and Reconciliation: The Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission

On the morning of November 3, 1979, the Workers Viewpoint Organization/Communist Workers Party (WVO/CWP) assembled for anti-Klan march at Morningside Homes, a black public housing community, in Greensboro.¹ The WVO/CWP's goal in the city was to end the exploitation of workers for the profit of textile mill owners, the state's largest employers, by building unions. They regularly faced intimidation from Ku Klux Klan (KKK) and Nazi Party groups that condemned multiracial organizing. City leadership had done little to nothing to help the WVO/CWP's cause or to protect them from the threats and intimidation and, as a result, the WVO/CWP had accused the city government of tolerating and even encouraging KKK activity. What happened that day would convince many people that this was true. By 11:25 a.m., five WVO/CWP demonstrators had been shot by a group of KKK and Nazis who had ambushed the parade site. The question of what happened that day would hang over the city for decades to come—until the conclusion of the Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2006, which attempted to reconcile memories of the “Greensboro Massacre” and how it reflected on the city.

The Greensboro Police Department (GPD) was suspicious of communist activity in the city, and they were especially wary of the CWP's leader, Nelson Johnson.² After some difficulty, the CWP procured the necessary parade permits for their anti-Klan march from the GPD, and a group of officers were assigned to cover the march. Despite their assumption that members of the KKK and Nazi party would attend the march and might have guns, the officers planned to take a “low-profile” approach (*Executive*

Summary 9-10). That morning the GPD received confirmation from their KKK informant that the group was gathering in Greensboro and did have guns; however, this information did not change the GPD's approach.³ The officers were told to be in their assigned positions by 11:30 a.m. When the caravan of Klansmen and Nazis began moving toward the CWP gathering site at 11:05, earlier than expected, commanders could not be immediately reached and the GPD was slow to respond. At 11:22, when the caravan had reached the gathering of WVO/CWP demonstrators, there was only one officer at the scene—in plainclothes and in an unmarked car with no siren or blue lights.

As the caravan approached the intersection at Morningside Homes, one of the cars swerved in what appeared to be an attempt to hit one of the demonstrators. In response, several demonstrators kicked and beat the car with sticks. Shots were fired out of the window of another car in the caravan. Klansmen and Nazis began coming out of their cars, and a vicious stick fight ensued. The driver of one of the cars got out, opened the trunk, and began passing out guns. A reporter who was at the scene recalled, "Several of them stood behind that trunk and fired away. At the time they seemed to be shooting wildly or randomly into the crowd" (*Final Report* 181). Just over three minutes after they had arrived, the last of the vehicles from the caravan left the scene. A tactical police unit finally arrived at 11:25, in time to block the escape of the last vehicle, a van. They arrested the twelve passengers inside. The area around Morningside Homes was sealed off within minutes, but other than the last van, every other vehicle from the caravan had fled the scene before officers arrived. Four television crews had captured the entire incident on film (Foxworth 24).

Five protestors were killed by the KKK and Nazi shooters. Ten others were injured: eight protestors, one Klansman, and a local news photographer.⁴ Nelson Johnson, the CWP leader who had reached the agreement with the GPD to protect their march, was immediately outraged. He recalled, “I stood up, and I actually could see scrolling before my eyes this discussion with [GPD Lt.] Larry Gibson saying that we will protect you in this march, but you have to sign this...and I could hear [Mayor] Jim Melvin saying publicly, in the newspaper, that you are the most dangerous man in Greensboro, and I knew in the depths of my soul that we had been set up and I stood up and started to say so” (188). The police tried to stop him from speaking, but he refused. He was arrested for disorderly conduct at the scene and taken to jail.

In the year after the shooting, five different reports (four of which were commissioned by the city) were issued in an attempt to explain what happened. None of these reports, however, explained that the police had been made aware of KKK and Nazi action before the murders occurred. “The historical record was being written,” writes communication scholar Spoma Jovanovic, “but without the knowledge, details, and depth of the undercover and informant operations, that historical record would be distorted from the very beginning” (9).

Videos from the news crews that were present clearly showed Klansmen and Nazis shooting and killing demonstrators. This evidence, along with the numerous eyewitness accounts, led many to believe that the shooters would be held accountable for the five deaths. Fourteen KKK and Nazis were tried by an all-white jury in the North Carolina State Court in August 1980.⁵ The jury determined that the Klansmen and Nazis had acted in self-defense and found them not guilty of murder, rioting, or any crime.

Many in Greensboro and across the state were outraged and began to advocate for federal intervention. In January 1984, a federal criminal trial began against nine accused Klansmen and Nazis. A secret jury selection again resulted in an all-white jury. This jury again found the accused not guilty.⁶ Finally, in 1985, the survivors pursued a federal civil rights trial that accused sixty-three defendants (nineteen Klansmen and Nazis, thirty-six GPD officers and other Greensboro officials, four Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (BATF) agents, three Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents, and the City of Greensboro) of conspiring to deprive the victims of equal protection to protest and then concealing those actions. The suit sought monetary damages on behalf of sixteen plaintiffs, including surviving spouses and wounded protestors. The jury was composed of one black juror and five white jurors, one of whom was not a native southerner. The jury found three GPD officers, three Klansmen, and two Nazi Party members liable for conspiracy to commit assault and battery leading to the death of one of the victims, Dr. Michael Nathan. The City of Greensboro agreed to pay the full award of \$351,500 to Nathan's estate for his wrongful death.⁷ Injured survivors were awarded \$40,000, but that amount was never paid.⁸ Even with this verdict, the police admitted no wrongdoing, no officers were reprimanded, and no policies were changed (*Final Report* 304-308).

Over twenty years later, the Greensboro community continued to wrestle with the aftermath of the shooting and the trials. In the early 2000s, some of the survivors of the shooting began a grassroots effort to establish a truth and reconciliation commission to study the event, the first such commission in the United States. After several years of development, in June 2004, seven commissioners were sworn in and charged with "the examination of the context, causes, sequence and consequence of the events of November

3, 1979” (*Final Report* 16). The Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission submitted its *Final Report* to the community on May 25, 2006. Following in the tradition of other truth and reconciliation commissions around the world, the report synthesizes the findings of the commission and lays out a new record of the event. The report includes in-depth research into the historical contexts surrounding the event and a detailed timeline of the day of the shooting. Additionally, the report examines responses to the murders and their aftermath. The commissioners carefully studied the role of city leadership in every phase.

After the shooting, while city leaders had taken measures to prevent additional violence, they prioritized protecting the city’s reputation. They were quick to launch an aggressive campaign to combat negative publicity from the shooting and attempt to maintain its standing as a “business-friendly and family-oriented place.” Business and civic leaders demanded that local media “tone down” coverage of the event in order to restore calm to the city (Jovanovic 7). In a *Greensboro Daily News* article from Nov. 23, 1979, reporter Jim Schlosser summarized the concerns of Mayor Jim Melvin and other leaders: “The mayor and others at City Hall are worried about the damage the city’s reputation may have suffered because of massive publicity on the shootings. They are outraged that some national publications choose to portray Greensboro as a racially troubled city” (*Final Report* 229). Their outrage was not over the five people murdered on the streets of their city by hate groups, but that the event might suggest that the city had a problem with racism.

The city’s response was to distance Greensboro from the event, to blame it on outside groups while portraying the city as an innocent victim. After the jury in 1980

returned the verdict “not guilty,” city leadership doubled down on their position. Mayor Jim Melvin told the community, “Fate just dealt us this blow.... It has no relation to our form of government or to social attitudes in Greensboro” (Chafe 252). Lisa Magarrell and Joya Wesley served as advisor and Communications Director, respectively, to the GTRC. They argue that because the conflict was between white supremacist hate groups and militant radical leftists, the city was able to create a “perfect cover story” by arguing that the shooting was “about somebody else” (4). Greensboro resident and GTRC Commissioner Mark Sills believes that the media portrayal of the event helped to absolve the city of blame by framing it as a “shootout” between outsider groups. This narrative, he says, “provided the public with an opportunity to discount the entire event as being at equal fault between two repugnant groups” and created the perception “that these two groups had nothing to do with Greensboro” (qtd. in Magarrell and Wesley 30). Sills argues that this narrative was so dominant that most people across the Greensboro community, black or white, never had the chance to understand what really happened.

This narrative did more than confuse the facts of the shooting, it maintained Greensboro’s progressive regional identity. By continuing to operate through the rhetoric of the progressive mystique, this narrative obscured stark differences in how residents characterized the city. In November 1980, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights and its North Carolina Advisory Committee issued a report that detailed the disparities between residents’ opinions of the city. Titled “Black White Perceptions: Race Relations in Greensboro,” it described “two diverging Greensboro societies: one with economic and political power and one which possesses neither” (*Final Report* 247). In the testimonies given to this commission, white and black residents of Greensboro revealed different

perceptions of the city. The report states, “Greensboro citizens who are white emphasize the progress made. They see the Greensboro glass as more than half full. The city’s citizens who are black focused on the problems that remain, perceiving the glass to be almost empty” (*Final Report* 248). The rhetoric of the progressive mystique that enabled the regional identities of white leadership in Greensboro forced—for decades—a kind of forgetting about November 3, 1979.

The commissioners of the GTRC blame the city’s response for deepening the divide in the Greensboro community and for creating the conditions for decades of confusion and distrust that resulted. The *Final Report* outlines the effects of the city’s response, and it is worth quoting their words at length:

For the majority of Greensboro residents, this response by city leaders reinforced the city's image of civility and distanced them from this event. Likewise, the interpretation of the violence as a 'shootout' between two 'hate groups' who were 'outsiders' is so often repeated by officials and in the media that it has become the dominant community attitude. The rush to find a simple answer for the question, "Why Greensboro?" conveniently kept the community from looking at the complexity and at its own role or responsibility. (*Executive Summary* 19)⁹

The commissioners clearly recognized that the city’s response was designed to protect its progressive regional identity. The report features a written statement to the GTRC from William Chafe (author of *Civilities and Civil Rights*) and uses his language of the progressive mystique throughout. Chafe explains that Johnson “broke the rules” of the progressive mystique throughout his history of activism in Greensboro by challenging the city’s prized sense of civility and public order. Before the 1979 shooting, he was already

considered an outcast by city leadership and was therefore not given the protections to which he was entitled. Chafe states that part of Greensboro's truth and reconciliation process must include disclosing how the progressive mystique has operated to maintain a racist status quo: "[U]nless and until people of all backgrounds are ready to deflate the mystique and examine its consequences, it will be difficult if not impossible to arrive at a fresh start where manners and courtesy operate effectively because people have equal power, not as a means of keeping some people in subservience to others" (*Final Report* 38).

The commissioners had experience that suggested that the progressive mystique was still directing perceptions of the shooting. At a meeting of the Greensboro City Council on April 19, 2005, members of the council voted 6-3 to oppose the GTRC. The council was split along racial lines: six white members voted to oppose the GTRC while three black members voted to support it. The Executive Director of the GTRC, Jill E. Williams, argues that "many residents from all backgrounds who might have been on the fence about the relevance of the process saw the council's racially divided vote as a sign that Greensboro clearly did have racial divisions that needed to be addressed" (148). In his analysis of the *GTRC Final Report*, James Edward Beitler III gives a detailed account of the attitudes of Mayor Keith Holliday and the other white members of the city council who opposed the process. Their comments, as Beitler observes, are consistent with the rhetoric of the progressive mystique. At this meeting, Mayor Holliday and dissenting council members described Greensboro as a "progressive city," one that has not been held back by this episode of violence. They attempted to distance the city from the events of November 3, 1979, arguing that only a small group within Greensboro remained

concerned about the shooting and, overall, it was not an issue that divided the community. They repeated the familiar arguments that the groups involved in the shooting came from outside of Greensboro, and even said that for the commission to suggest that the event had any bearing on present-day Greensboro was “a slap in the face” to those who have worked to make changes in the city. Mayor Holliday outright claimed that race had not been a factor in the violence and that the event had not had an influence on “racial issues and areas of distrust” (Beitler 115-16). In 2005, city leaders used the same strategies to distance themselves from the shooting as they had in 1979.

In this chapter, I ask how the *Final Report*, as the record of the formalized truth commission process, reflects and enacts rhetorical mechanisms through which public memory and regional identity are co-constructed. The GTRC commissioners understood that the regional identity defined by the progressive mystique remained an obstacle to understanding what really happened at the CWP march. The GTRC was a formalized process designed to shape public memories of November 3, 1979. It became important for the commissioners to paint a different picture of Greensboro in their report, to reconcile the city’s regional identity along with, and as a part of, reconciling memories of the shooting. To dispel the misperceptions about Nov. 3, 1979 and to create an effective counter-memory of the shooting, the *GTRC Final Report* had to disconnect Greensboro from its progressive regional identity.

The chapter proceeds in four parts. First, I discuss the development of the Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission. I then review the rhetorical structure of the truth and reconciliation process as a formalized channel to establish public memories that allows for the consideration of regional identity and place. These

preliminary sections are followed by analysis of the text of the report that demonstrates how the commissioners reconciled competing regional identities of Greensboro in order to establish the “context, causes, sequence, and consequence of the events” of the Greensboro Massacre. In conclusion, I focus on the commissioners’ recommendations for rebuilding Greensboro’s public memory landscape and consider how the report is framed as a necessary tool to achieve those goals.

The Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission

In 1991, Nelson Johnson (who had by that time become Pastor of Faith Community Church) and two other Greensboro pastors founded the Beloved Community Center (BCC). The BCC uses “community building, community organizing, advocacy, and other forms of coalition building” to build “an inclusive community that uplifts the dignity, worth and enormous potential of all” (“Our Story”). By 2001, the BCC, along with the Greensboro Justice Fund (GJF) directed by Marty Nathan, another survivor of the shooting, had established community interest in a truth and reconciliation process. Williams explains that the idea for a truth and reconciliation commission developed out of the recognition that “the issues Greensboro was facing in 2000—including institutional racism, poor working conditions and opportunities, and distrust between the police department and African American communities—mirrored the historical context that led to the tragic events of 1979” (144). Additionally, conflicting memories of the shooting had become a lingering problem in the city. According to Carolyn Allen, Mayor of Greensboro from 1993-1999, “discussions surrounding issues of police-community trust nearly always got bogged down when the divisive topic of November 3, 1979, was

inevitably raised” (qtd. in Williams 145). The original advocates for a truth and reconciliation commission in Greensboro believed that the community needed a more accurate picture of what happened in 1979 if they were ever going to move forward.

Truth commissions are a mechanism of transitional justice. The International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), which helped to establish the commission in Greensboro, explains that transitional justice is not “a ‘special’ kind of justice, but an approach to achieve justice in times of transition from conflict and/or state repression.” The transitional justice approach assumes that human rights violations “affect not just the direct victims, but society as a whole” (“What is Transitional Justice?”). In most cases, transitional processes are founded on principles of restorative justice (Uprimny and Saffon 1). Unlike retributive justice that seeks to punish individuals for their crimes, restorative justice “aims instead for reconciliation by highlighting strengths and shared solutions that arise from the interconnections among people” (Jovanovic 47). Rather than limiting the scope of an investigation to only individual perpetrators, the causes and consequences of human rights violations are examined through the much larger context of the society that witnessed the atrocity. Ultimately, mechanisms of transitional justice are intended to “recogniz[e] the rights of victims, promot[e] civic trust, and strengthe[n] the democratic rule of law” (“What is Transitional Justice?”). Truth commissions or Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs) are just one of those mechanisms. Operating separately from government influence, TRCs are temporary bodies that “seek to bridge unjust pasts with more promising futures based on truth, tolerance, and equality” (Jovanovic 48).¹⁰ They are a “means to investigate and report on systematic

patterns of abuse, recommend changes, and help understand the underlying causes of serious human rights violations” (“What is Transitional Justice?”).

While the GTRC followed the patterns of other commissions, the process in Greensboro was unique. As the ICTJ explains, “there is no formula to fit all contexts” (“What is Transitional Justice?”). With the help of the ICTJ, it was decided early on that, while the commission would strive to include “official Greensboro,” the endorsement of the city government was not a requirement and that an independent grassroots-led commission might be more successful.¹¹ The GTRC was, as David K. Androff Jr. writes, “constrained by political context.” Because there had been no political transition in the city, as there is in most transitional justice processes, the political and economic power structure had not changed significantly since the time of the shooting. In other words, the factors that had allowed city leadership to distance themselves from the event in 1979 were largely unchanged. Androff explains that “in absence of a political transition,” truth seeking “is likely to garner opposition.” The GTRC would, indeed, struggle with city leadership’s resistance throughout its process.

In March 2002, twenty-two local, national, and international figures “with standing in the pursuit of justice” held a National Advisory Committee meeting to begin planning for a truth commission in Greensboro. One of the conclusions of this meeting was that the organizations that had developed the initial idea, the BCC and the GJF, would need to relinquish control for the process to maintain legitimacy. A Local Task Force was created. The task force met with the National Advisory Committee in October 2002. In January 2003, they publicly announced their intent to work with all sectors of the city to design and fairly select a commission that would “commit themselves to

seeking the truth amidst all the data and perspectives surrounding this complex situation” (Magarrell and Wesley 48). The written declaration was signed by thirty-two Greensboro civic leaders, but it did not garner much public attention. At that point, no sustained opposition had emerged because few people outside of the process thought the commission would become a reality. The Local Task Force and the Advisory Committee created a mandate for the commission and designed a process by which the commission would be seated. They identified seventeen identity-based sectors of the community, each of which was invited to send a representative to serve on a selection panel that would decide on the seven commissioners from nominations. Opposition to the commission had grown as it became clear that the commission would move forward. The Greensboro Police Officer’s Association and the Chamber of Commerce opposed the process and refused to name a delegate to the panel. Without the input of these two groups, seven commissioners were selected and were sworn in at a public ceremony in June 2004. The work of the commission lasted two years. It used public hearings, community forums, and statement-taking to reconcile accounts of the violence, its causes, as well its aftermath. The *Final Report* (over 500 pages) includes a set of recommendations for moving forward after the commission.

Truth and Reconciliation, Public Memory, and Regional Identity

Kathryn Mack and James Edward Beitler III have both made significant contributions to the rhetorical study of truth and reconciliation commissions and restorative/transitional justice. Building on their insights, I argue that the GTRC’s *Final*

Report uses the rhetorical structure of TRCs as a resource to redefine Greensboro's progressive regional identity and reconcile public memories of the Greensboro Massacre.

TRCs are inherently rhetorical and, as Mack argues, they are a now ubiquitous mechanism for 'dealing with the past.'" As a genre of public persuasion, TRCs both acknowledge and depend upon the power of public memory. Mack characterizes TRC participants' and respondents' arguments about the past as expressions of public memory (*From Apartheid* x). She contends that the arguments put forth throughout a truth commission are engagements with the past—memories—that have been inevitably informed by the present, "born of individual perceptions but also of shared social processes." Throughout a TRC those memories are expressed within a "contingent public" that is engaged in the act of remembering, "be it contentious or harmonious, unifying or divisive" (*From Apartheid* xi). During public hearings, TRC participants, including victims and perpetrators, "find ways to mold the commission's process to suit *their* needs and to tell the stories *they* feel need to be told." Thus, Mack argues, the rhetoric of a particular commission is not exclusively determinant of how participants will express their memories about the past (*From Apartheid* 6). However, "[t]he mandate of a truth commission prioritizes the investigation and acknowledgement of certain 'truths' over others" (*From Apartheid* 7). In their written final report, commissioners must interpret the memories that participants expressed throughout the process. A TRC's final report, then, is not simply a recitation of facts, but it is the product of an exercise in memory-making, an argument about how a human rights violation should be remembered.

The GTRC *Final Report* self-consciously presents the commission as an effort to reconcile public memory. The introduction opens with a quote from legal scholar and human rights expert Martha Minow on the ethical importance of memory: “Failure to remember, collectively, triumphs and accomplishments diminishes us. But failure to remember, collectively, injustice and cruelty is an ethical breach. It implies no responsibility and no commitment to prevent inhumanity in the future. Even worse, failures of collective memory stoke fires of resentment and revenge” (qtd. in *Final Report* 9). Beginning with this quote from Minow, the commissioners proclaim the importance of their public memory work. With no legal power, the GTRC could not prosecute or punish those who they determined were at fault for the murders. Instead, memory was at stake. The commission was designed to overcome what, to many, had been a failure of the Greensboro community to remember the events of Nov. 3, 1979. By the mid-2000s, deeply entrenched resentment threatened the Greensboro community’s ability to prevent further injustices.

By taking a restorative justice approach, TRCs are designed to consider the larger contexts in which human rights abuses occurred. They are particularly suited to attend to the contexts that shape public memory—notably, TRCs can directly address questions of national or regional identity. Thus, the final report can present arguments about regional identity alongside and as a part of arguments about public memory. As Beitler’s analysis demonstrates, the format of the GTRC positioned the commissioners to challenge Greensboro’s progressive regional identity.

As a grassroots TRC, the GTRC faced challenges in developing the commission’s ethos within the community. The commission needed to be perceived as a legitimate truth

commission, but it also needed to maintain the trust of the survivors who were key to the commission's investigation. Beitler writes that "at every stage of its operation, from its conception to its conclusion, the GTRC...constructed its institutional ethos as both representative and unrepresentative of the Greensboro community" (96). The commissioners had to hold these two positions in tension with one another in order to both identify with constituencies across the community and to maintain the critical distance necessary to determine what happened in 1979. With this carefully constructed "measure of political and moral authority to act," the commissioners could assert their authority in the face of opposition from the city, which allowed them to "present a different view about Greensboro" (Beitler 116). Their distance from white city leadership empowered the commissioners to disarticulate Greensboro from the progressive mystique, enabling their counter-memory of Nov. 3, 1979.

Articulating Regional Identity in the GTRC Final Report

Building on Douglas Reichert Powell's critical regionalism, Dave Tell argues that regions can be understood as articulations. For Tell, articulations are "the rhetorical forging of temporary and contingent links." There are no "objective connections awaiting discovery." Instead, rhetors constantly create connections—articulations—according to their vested interests (229). Tell argues that the process of region-making, "a spot of land being given meaning by its placement in a broader network of institutions and ideologies" is a process of articulating, of building "contingent bridges" and forging "tenuous links" between "people, places, institutions, and ideologies that would not otherwise coexist in the same formation" (215). I would add memories to that list.

Region-making and the forging of regional identities can be profoundly influenced by the connections that are made between places and public memories.

In the case of the Greensboro Massacre, memories of the event have been articulated differently by different people in different places and times. In order to reconcile public memories of the shooting, the GTRC had to manage this complex web of articulations—the various ways that residents had linked memories of the murders to, or delinked those memories from, their ideas about Greensboro as a place. In the aftermath of the shooting, white city leadership attempted to disassociate Greensboro from the event to maintain the preexisting association between Greensboro, progressivism, and civility. The shooting threatened white leadership’s regional identity, and the only way to preserve that powerful identity was to absolve the city of any responsibility for or association with the event or its contexts. As a result, city officials maintained that the shooting was the fault of “outsiders.” To connect the city to memories of the shooting and the problems of systemic injustice that created it, the GTRC had to disconnect Greensboro from the progressive regional identity promoted by city leadership. Knowing that they faced opposition from the city even before the process began, the commissioners had to craft a report that could withstand potential rebuttals from the city: they had to take on the rhetoric of the progressive mystique that had allowed city leadership to distance Greensboro from the murders and memories of the event.

I have identified four main arguments that the commissioners deploy in their *Final Report* in order to disarticulate Greensboro from the progressive mystique and articulate it to problems of systemic injustices. Each of these arguments draws on the truth and reconciliation genre. First, as part of their investigations into human rights

violations, TRCs must determine who is to blame. The GTRC report clearly explains the city's and GPD's responsibility for the shooting and its aftermath. The wealth of evidence dismantles any sense that Greensboro leadership were innocent players in 1979 and in the years since. Second, because transitional justice assesses not just the specific crime but the society as a whole, the *Final Report* explains the larger contexts that played a role in the shooting and in the suspicion and distrust that followed. In doing so, the commissioners demonstrate how Greensboro was never unaffected by inequality or injustice, as the city's progressive regional identity would suggest. Third, because restorative justice searches for solutions that arise from the interconnectedness of people, the report emphasizes the diversity of the Greensboro community by identifying residents' wide-ranging points of view. By detailing how some residents' lives have been shaped by the inequalities that the city's progressive regional identity denies, the commissioners make it clear that that identity could never encompass the range of lived experiences across the city. Finally, TRCs conclude by offering recommendations for actions to be taken beyond the commission. The GTRC's report identifies lasting issues of inequality and injustice that the city must address after the work of the commission has concluded. The commissioners thereby protect against the argument that the GTRC itself was the only necessary solution to the injustices they identified. In what follows, I analyze the use of these four arguments throughout the report, demonstrating how the commissioners articulated Greensboro's regional identity to memories of Nov. 3, 1979. While I separate my discussion into distinct sections, these four arguments are interdependent and are deployed together throughout the report.

City Responsibility

The City of Greensboro made the argument that the shooting was perpetrated by outsider agitators, on both sides, and that the conflict had nothing to do with the Greensboro community. Throughout the *Final Report* the commissioners unequivocally deny this claim and explain the city's role in the event and its aftermath. This line of argument is perhaps the most direct way that the report rejects a progressive regional identity for Greensboro. By redefining the role of city government and the Greensboro Police Department before, during, and after the shooting, the commissioners challenge perceptions of the city's neutrality.

The report implicates the city in the tensions that ultimately led to the shooting. The commissioners note that the Greensboro Association of Poor People, an organization with which many WVO/CWP members worked, had been active in the Morningside Homes neighborhood for more than a decade and that their programs had been supported by black communities in Greensboro. Suggesting that local government was to blame for the living conditions in the neighborhood, the commissioners write, "The economic and social injustices against which [residents of Morningside Homes] struggled amounted to failures of government to meet humane standards of living adequate to basic human needs" (*Executive Summary* 21). The report states that Greensboro leadership had not provided equally for all residents and implies that the WVO/CWP presence in the neighborhood was directly related to the city's failings. Of course, the report acknowledges the long history leading up to the shootings, and the commissioners certainly do not believe that local government attention to one neighborhood alone would have solved the complex web of problems that resulted in the shootings. However, this argument does emphasize that Greensboro in 1979 was marked by injustices that local

government had a hand in creating and maintaining. As Chafe writes, “even if most CWP members did not come *from* Greensboro, they came *to* Greensboro because the issues of class and race were present there with such clarity” (252, emphasis in original).¹²

In assigning blame to the various groups involved (including KKK and CWP members, though to different degrees) the commissioners found that “the single most important element that contributed to the violent outcome of the confrontation was the absence of police” (*Executive Summary* 7). The report forcefully argues that the GPD shouldered significant responsibility for what happened on Nov. 3, 1979. The sheer volume of evidence included in the report is damning.

Chapter 5 of the *Final Report* is dedicated to the GPD’s attitude toward communists and Nelson Johnson, in particular. Even though the chapter is only four pages long, separating this topic into a distinct chapter draws attention to it, suggesting the importance of the GPD’s attitude to the commission’s overall findings. The chapter demonstrates that the department’s misperceptions about the WVO/CWP stemmed from their dislike of Johnson, their misunderstanding of communist causes and inability to differentiate between different organizations, and their involvement with security officials at Cone Mills, where the WVO/CWP was involved in union organization. The commissioners conclude, “While the WVO used confrontational and hyperbolic ‘revolutionary’ rhetoric about ‘overthrowing the capitalist system’ as part of their message, the level of concern and police resources devoted to the WVO was disproportionate to their actual actions and the threat they posed” (*Final Report* 123).

This misperception had serious effects on the department’s intelligence gathering and planning process leading up to the anti-Klan march, as detailed in the next chapter of

the report. The GPD had made it difficult for the WVO/CWP to acquire a parade permit, had placed unusual weapons restrictions on the parade, and had spread rumors that encouraged the church, where a rally was planned for the end of the parade, to withdraw the use of the site. The commissioners do acknowledge that both KKK and Nazi Party members and the CWP/WVO activists increased the hostility of the situation leading up to the march. At the same time, they carefully identify how the actions of the GPD escalated rather than neutralized the growing tension:

While animosity between the WVO and the Klan was ratcheting up, WVO members were increasingly enraged at the police for the delays in obtaining their parade permit from the GPD and what they believed was intimidation of the church where their conference was to take place. They openly accused the GPD and city officials of collaborating with the Klan, which served to further increase the enmity between them. In turn, the GPD became increasingly suspicious of 'Communists.' Coupled with pre-existing suspicion of Nelson Johnson in particular, the GPD was more interested in collecting information on WVO activities." (*Final Report* 154)

Throughout the report, commissioners emphasize when and how the GPD pursued their obsession with a multiracial organization with little recorded criminal activity instead of tracking the actions of known white supremacist hate groups with whom the police had embedded informants.

Chapter 7 of the report details the sequence of events on Nov. 3, 1979. Using GPD records, documents from previous trials and investigations, as well as statements given to the commission, the commissioners find that the GPD's "lack of critical thinking

about the intelligence they had received about the Klan and Nazi's plans demonstrates extremely negligent regard for the safety of all concerned" (*Final Report* 198). In compiling all evidence, the commissioners are clear in their judgment that the police, who failed to be present at the parade site, willfully left the CWP protesters vulnerable to an attack they knew was imminent. By insisting on the responsibility of the police, the commissioners directly contradict the city's claims that the only people responsible for the shootings were Greensboro outsiders.

Not only was the GPD responsible for the violence because of their absence from the parade gathering site, but the department, along with city leadership, was also responsible for misrepresenting their actions in the aftermath of the shootings. The commissioners conclude "that both the GPD and key city managers deliberately misled the public about what happened on Nov. 3, 1979, the planning for it and the investigation of it" (*Final Report* 223). The commissioners discredit Greensboro's exceptionalist regional identity by demonstrating how it enabled to most damaging elements of the city's response to the shooting. In the days after Nov. 3, 1979, one of city's greatest concerns was protecting the city's reputation. As leadership scrambled to respond to national portrayals of the city as "racially troubled," they portrayed the shooting as incongruous with the city's history. U.S. Rep. Richardson Preyer assured members of Congress that the violence was "entirely out of character for the Greensboro community." "The city has had a proud history of nonviolent demonstrations during the civil rights era," he told them (*Final Report* 229). Relying on an image of Greensboro's progressive past, leadership attempted to deflect blame and attention away from the place itself.

The *Final Report* argues that the city's response had the effect of alienating vulnerable Greensboro residents. The city claimed to be protecting the stability of the community with their actions immediately following the shooting (including barring additional public protests and placing limitations on the funeral services for the five people who were murdered) but, as the commissioners write, "[s]tability is not the same as justice" (*Executive Summary* 25). The city's response may have reassured the (largely white, wealthier) residents of Greensboro who were further removed from the shootings, but it was damaging for those communities who had been directly affected and could clearly see that their voices would not be heard by the city. In other words, the "stability" that the city sought to protect was the kind of stability valued by the rhetoric of the progressive mystique. The city's overall response, the commissioners argue, "served to reinforce in the minds of citizens either that 1) the Communists were the real danger, or that 2) the City did not wish the real facts to be known and did not intend to protect its most vulnerable citizens" (*Final Report* 252).

Finally, the commissioners argue that the city's refusal to take part in the GTRC was an extension of their larger responsibility for the shootings. By suppressing the history of Nov. 3, 1979 and resisting accountability, the city revealed the limits of its civility and progressiveness. They write that the city's unwillingness to participate or support the GTRC proves "that a pattern of resisting change and suppressing the efforts of those who seek it continues in Greensboro" (*Executive Summary* 25). The commissioners felt that this resistance revealed that many elected city leaders were still, in the mid-2000s, "either horribly out of touch with, willfully blind to, or simply unconcerned about the lingering pain and the stifling workings of power in this

community" (*Executive Summary* 20). The mayor at the time of the GTRC, Keith Holliday, told the commission that he found the process "unappetizing," and they assumed that many others in the community "share his distaste" (*Executive Summary* 25).

Of course, confronting these issues—historically or currently—would be most threatening to those whose sense of regional identity is challenged by such a conversation. If you believed that you lived in a city that was exceptional for its civility and progressiveness, you felt pride in that narrative, and nothing in your lived experience contradicted that idea, then the GTRC might have been "unappetizing." But for those individuals and communities who continue to live with the aftermath of Nov. 3, 1979, engaging with and working to overcome issues of inequality and injustice is a necessity. The rhetoric of the progressive mystique allowed city leaders to misrepresent what happened in 1979 and later blinded them to its far-reaching effects. By including this full scope of city leadership's and the GPD's responses in their report, the commissioners demonstrate the city's responsibility to the survivors of the shooting and the communities affected, thereby dismantling the city's progressive regional identity.

Context and Causes

By design, the truth and reconciliation commission process examines the broad context of an event. Part of the goal of restorative justice is to take a larger view of an issue than retributive justice processes would. The truth and reconciliation process resists the exceptionalism embedded in the rhetoric of the progressive mystique by considering wide-ranging influences and effects of the events under question. For the commissioners of the GTRC, this aspect of their mandate was essential: "To look at the events of Nov. 3, 1979, without an understanding of its context and causes would not contribute to the

‘truth’ of the event” (*Final Report* 23). The GTRC, then, needed to resist the idea of an exceptional progressive Greensboro. The first chapters of the final report explore several important historical contexts, including racial disparities that motivated black liberation activism and multicultural organizing, labor issues and unionization in North Carolina textile mills, and the resurgence of the KKK in North Carolina. Cumulatively, this information demonstrates that Greensboro was deeply affected by the intertwined prejudices of racism and classism that challenged many other cities in the state and across the country. The commissioners dismantle Greensboro’s progressive regional identity by emphasizing its connection to larger contexts and its similarity to other places.

The commissioners tie their research of the contexts and causes of the shooting to the larger South and to the nation, explicitly rejecting the notion that Greensboro was an exception to the worst problems of the South by virtue of its progressivism. Directly addressing the disbelief on the part of some Greensboro residents that racism played a role in the violence, the commissioners write, “We have been constantly asked during our process, ‘Was Nov. 3, 1979, really about race?’ Labor organizer Si Khan offered a clear answer when he said in our first hearing, ‘Scratch the surface of any issue in the South and you will find race.’” (*Executive Summary* 22). Throughout the report, commissioners investigate the problems of racism and inequality that shaped the circumstances of the South. Greensboro is presented as a part of, rather than apart from, those circumstances. As they write, “The South’s relationship to unions, workers, and the pressures of race and class are integral parts of the story of what led up to and shaped the events of Nov. 3, 1979” (*Final Report* 92).

The Diversity of the Greensboro Community

The commission shapes a new regional identity for Greensboro by asserting that there will never be *one* regional identity for residents of the city. The city's progressive regional identity is pernicious in part because it only ever benefitted part of the community—namely, white leadership. The commissioners are careful to assert that there will never be one characterization of Greensboro can accurately encompass every resident's experiences. Instead, the *Final Report* emphasizes the heterogeneity of the community and the importance of recognizing different points of view.

The report details the systemic inequalities that affect the lived experiences of many Greensboro residents. In doing so, they emphasize the past and present injustices that make it impossible for one regional identity to define an entire city. For example, in their review of the criminal trials of KKK and Nazi Party members that resulted in acquittals by all-white juries, the commissioners argue that the verdicts were a result of a flawed justice system that “is not just randomly imperfect; rather, it tends to be disproportionately imperfect against people of color and poor people” (*Executive Summary* 16). This and other evidence of systemic inequality explains the structures that constrain the lives of “disempowered communities” in Greensboro (*Executive Summary* 19).

The commissioners write that polarization in Greensboro over interpretations of Nov. 3, 1979, is due, in part, to these important differences: “Those in our community whose lived experience is of government institutions that fail to protect their interests are understandably more likely to see ‘conspiracy.’ Those accustomed to reliable government protection are more likely to see ‘negligence,’ or no wrongdoing on the part of law enforcement officers” (*Executive Summary* 10). In this statement, the commissioners

demonstrate an understanding that public memory is never monolithic, never coherent, but is inevitably shaped by individual and group experiences that are certain to vary across a community. Conceptions of regional identity are one of those factors that shape interpretations of the past, and the *Final Report* demonstrates the power of that connection. The commissioners argue that those residents whose experiences supported the city's progressive regional identity accepted the city's decision to distance itself from the event. But for those residents who could not accept the notion of a civil and progressive Greensboro in the first place, the city's response exacerbated their existing suspicion and mistrust of local leadership (*Executive Summary* 19).

Among the few positive consequences of Nov. 3, 1979, the commissioners include "a clearer view for many privileged residents of concerns about the justice system held by many poor and minority residents" (*Executive Summary* 24). They suggest that in coming to terms with this part of Greensboro's history and its far-reaching aftermath, some residents have learned to recognize how differently other people's experiences can be, even living in the same city. In their recommendations, the commissioners emphasize the importance of this integrated perspective. They write that it is the responsibility of individual community members to "engage in study and dialogue with diverse groups to understand various ideologies or other beliefs present in the community, especially unpopular ones." Importantly, individuals should also "seek to understand their own part in community problems as well as their potential role in finding workable solutions" (*Executive Summary* 37). With these recommendations, the commissioners argue that the community must not encourage unwavering support for only the most prominent or popular point of view, but that it is

imperative that the city understand itself as a heterogeneous community where a range of perspectives must be amplified.

Lasting Challenges

The *Final Report* not only recasts Greensboro's historical regional identity in light of memories of the shooting, but it shapes a contemporary regional identity by insisting that the city continues to face issues of inequality. The commissioners deny that the city has moved on from Nov. 3, 1979, and no longer faces the same challenges. Instead, they maintain a characterization of the city as a place with work still to do to live up to its progressive ideals.

The commissioners explain that many people in Greensboro are still living with the aftermath of the shooting. They remark that the commission is one step toward the larger goal of healing "what *currently* are deep divides of distrust and skepticism in our community" (*Executive Summary 2*, emphasis mine). The commissioners emphasize that justice "must be established if the city hopes to restore trust and to heal" (*Executive Summary 25*). The need to restore trust is presented as a current need, a lasting effect of the city's response to the shooting. Those lasting effects are obvious in the commissioners' description of the "fear surrounding these killings" that lingers in Greensboro. "In our process," they write, "we have had many citizens who insisted on confidential statements—not because of the content of their statements, but because they feared economic or social retaliation simply for talking to us" (*Executive Summary 20*).

Throughout the report, the commissioners are concerned that the Greensboro leadership's rejection of the truth and reconciliation commission process reflects a troubling stubbornness and a gross failure in self-evaluation. "[A]s a grassroots citizen

effort that challenges the status quo,” the commissioners write, “we have learned firsthand that a pattern of resisting change and suppressing the efforts of those who seek it continues in Greensboro” (*Executive Summary* 25). They directly connect the city leadership’s reaction to the GTRC to the city’s conduct surrounding the shooting. The commissioners create a sense of an ongoing timeline of the city’s reluctance to admit and address wrongdoing. The city’s “repressive response” in 1979 raised suspicions about the city’s involvement in the shooting and it gave “disempowered communities in Greensboro” the impression that “city officials were unwilling to undertake good faith investigation into wrongdoing.” The commissioners agree that the city’s dismissal of the GTRC was the latest example of “a larger pattern that persists today,” dismissing the notion that the city might have recovered (or maintained) an agenda of progressive action. In response to a city council member who called the commission “a big yawn for the community,” the commissioners write, “[s]uch a statement leads us to believe many of our elected leaders are either horribly out of touch with, willfully blind to, or simply unconcerned about the lingering pain and the stifling workings of power in this community” (*Executive Summary* 20).

Finally, the commissioners subtly acknowledge the possibility that Greensboro could face this sort of conflict or violence again. In discussing the role that aggressive speech played in bringing about the violence of Nov. 3, 1979, the commissioners conclude that both the KKK and the WVO/CWP used violent rhetoric but that “the cultural context of the time made the intent and effect of the rhetoric inherently unequal,” putting the white supremacists more at fault. At the same time, the commissioners acknowledge that both groups had the constitutionally protected right to express their

opinions—and still do. They write, "The Klan and Nazis *have* the right to express these views. Opponents of those views share the same rights" (*Executive Summary* 14, emphasis mine). This verb tense serves as a subtle marker that the basic contours of this situation, opposing groups escalating violent language against one another, are replicable. Greensboro leadership, then, cannot assume that this conflict excuses the city from future conflict. Understanding this reality, the commissioners offer recommendations for future action.

While the report obviously works to explain the present and past, it is also a forward-looking document. At the start, the commissioners explain that they see their report not as the end of a conversation about Nov. 3, 1979, but as "the beginning of a citizen effort toward investigation and dialogue" (*Executive Summary* 3). In their final recommendations chapter, the commissioners emphasize the work that the Greensboro community must continue to pursue. After the conclusion of the commission, Greensboro cannot wash its hands of the issues connected to the shooting but must continue to take steps to heal the community. The commissioners are clear that the report should not be misconstrued as a means to relieve the city or community of responsibility. Instead, they outline work that remains to be done: "Recognizing that there is no way to undo the harm caused to individuals and communities on Nov 3, 1979, we believe there are positive steps toward reconciliation, justice and reparations that can be undertaken" (*Executive Summary* 28). The recommendations they offer are directed across sectors of Greensboro, including recommendations for institutional reform, criminal justice and civil remedies and citizen transformation and engagement.

Together, these four argumentative strategies anticipate how the rhetoric of the progressive mystique could be deployed in response to the GTRC. Considering that city government had demonstrated resistance to the project, it was especially important that the commission's *Final Report* be able to withstand their most likely defenses. First, the commissioners condemn the city's paternalism, or "sense of responsibility" to black communities, by demonstrating that white leadership had failed to care for those communities—on a large scale *and* in the events leading up to and during the attack on Nov. 3, 1979. Second, the report rejects Greensboro's perceived exceptionalism by explaining how the city was affected by the same injustices and shaped by the same prejudices as the rest of the South and the nation. Third, by insisting on the range of perspectives necessary to understand this episode of violence and its aftermath, the commissioners dismantle the ideal of consensus, showing instead that disagreement is both inevitable and necessary. Finally, in insisting that the hard work of healing from the wounds of Nov. 3, 1979, must continue after close of the GTRC, the commissioners deny the impression that the fight against racism was won with the sit-ins in 1960.

Conclusion: Rebuilding Greensboro's Public Memory Landscape

The *Final Report* is a public memory text that does the work of disarticulating Greensboro from its progressive regional identity—but the commissioners argue that that work needs to be extended to the larger public memory landscape in Greensboro. Such a powerful articulation as Greensboro's progressive regional identity will not be dismantled in one step. The commissioners, recognizing the public memory work inherent in the truth and reconciliation process, urge the Greensboro community to make changes to

their public memory landscape so that it reflects the significance of the Greensboro Massacre to the city's history. Because regional identity is sustained in part by public memory, the material objects and discursive norms that direct public memory bear some responsibility for shaping ideas about place. As the commission crafts a regional identity for the Greensboro community that fits their narrative, they argue that additional measures ought to be taken to sustain that perception through the structures of public memory.

The first set of recommendations the commission makes are for greater acknowledgement of Nov. 3, 1979. They argue that in order to repair the community by facing "the truth about the past," measures must be taken "to incorporate the information about Nov. 3, 1979, into the city's official history and collective memory" (*Executive Summary* 29). They suggest that the city government, community members, local museums, and local schools all take efforts to weave Nov. 3, 1979 into the fabric of public memories of Greensboro. Their first specific recommendation is that the "City should formally recognize that the events of Nov. 3, 1979, provided a tragic, but important occasion in our city's history; it should make a proclamation that lifts up the importance of that date in the history of the city" (*Executive Summary* 29). They offer no additional details about what this proclamation might include or how the date should be observed, but they are clear in suggesting that the City of Greensboro ought to play an important role in encouraging the community to continually acknowledge the event (rather than assuming it is a closed issue). The commissioners believe that Greensboro Massacre should become a permanent aspect of Greensboro's self-conception and that the work of the commission does not mean that the community no longer needs to

grapple with this aspect of its history. They suggest several more specific, and highly visible, changes that would keep this history above the surface.

The commissioners recommend that a “public monument should be built on the site of the shootings to honor those killed and wounded on Nov. 3, 1979” (*Executive Summary* 30). The monument should be planned and a design decided upon by a committee that would be formed through the City’s Human Relations Commission. They specify that this committee should be made up of a cross-section of the community and those groups most affected by the shootings by including “representatives from the surviving demonstrators and their children, former residents of Morningside Homes, neighborhood associations, and other grassroots groups” (*Executive Summary* 30). The commissioners suggest building a public monument because it would serve as a permanent, physical reminder of the event. Such a permanent fixture would elevate memories of the shooting, as it would join other moments in Greensboro’s history that have been memorialized with public monuments (the statue of the Greensboro Four on A&T’s campus, the statue of Nathanael Greene in Downtown Greensboro, and the Revolutionary War battlefields).

Commissioners imagine that the committee would be responsible for fundraising as well as design, but they make a significant suggestion about another source of funding for the monument. While they ask for formal apologies from the KKK and Nazi Party members, the Greensboro Police Department, and the City of Greensboro, they encourage “[o]thers who were involved in the shootings on Nov. 3, 1979 and who regret the role they played” to “offer restitution to the victims by making contributions in their name to support the public monument commemorating this tragedy” or by donating to other

relevant initiatives (*Executive Summary* 30). In this way, the monument would not only serve to commemorate the event, but contributing to the monument fund would become a way for members of the community to make reparations for any role they might have played. The commissioners imagine that, at least in its planning phase, the monument would serve as an active site of apology and healing.

In addition to a physical monument at the site of the shooting, the commissioners recommend that the story of the shootings be incorporated into the city's museums. They write, "The Greensboro Historical Museum and the International Civil Rights Museum should work either collaboratively or independently to create exhibits commemorating the tragic shooting on Nov. 3, 1979" (*Executive Summary* 30). (At this point, the ICRCM had not yet opened, but it was underway and the community was well aware of plans for the museum.) Significantly, they do not suggest that the event be commemorated in its own separate museum. Instead, they recommend that the story be incorporated into the narratives about Greensboro told in the Historical Museum and to be told in the ICRCM. Doing so would place the shootings on a continuous timeline of the history of the city, making it just as important a point as the famous student sit-ins. It would ask visitors to see those events *next to each other* and to form a perception of Greensboro as a place by considering the highest and lowest points of its history together. By asking that the shootings be incorporated into existing museums, they suggest that museum visitors ought to confront this difficult and violent episode in Greensboro's past alongside more celebratory aspects of its history.

Finally, the commissioners recommend changing Greensboro's public memory landscape by incorporating the history of the shootings into the curriculum at local

schools. Echoing the goals of their own report, they suggest that this curriculum would focus on the "context, causes, sequence, and consequences of the events of Nov. 3, 1979." They explain that the report itself could be made part of the curriculum, suggesting one way that their document might work to direct public memory in the community.

Specifically, they imagine that "this curriculum could include the following topics: the actual event of Nov. 3, 1979, the history of many civil rights organizations, labor movements and white supremacist organizations; and related legal issues (definitions, roles of prosecutors and defense, jury selection, the importance of jury duty, retributive vs. transformative justice, etc.)." They also suggest that the curriculum could create opportunities to move beyond the topic of the shootings and its immediate contexts to "include segments and open discussions that address related context issues including anti-racist education about slavery and respecting diversity" (*Executive Summary* 34). They imagine a wide-reaching initiative that would not only teach students about the specific history of Nov. 3, 1979, but would also engage in the kind of anti-racism training that they suggest be implemented in other institutions in Greensboro. Essentially, then, students would learn to see their home as a complex place, with moments in its history to celebrate and moments that ought to continue to spur change.

For decades, the perspectives of those whose lives were most affected by the murders were silenced by city leadership obsessed with protecting their reputation and a justice system that prevented the fair prosecution of their case. As a formalized process designed, in part, to establish public memory, the GTRC claimed authority in the face of opposition from the formal city government. In order to reconcile public memories of

Nov. 3, 1979, the commissioners dismantled city leadership's progressive regional identity that prevented many residents from understanding the event. Using the genre of the truth and reconciliation commission final report to challenge the rhetoric of the progressive mystique, the *Final Report* amplified the voices of the survivors.

Notes

¹ The WVO was part of the New Communist Movement that was growing in the United States throughout the 1970s. The organization began with the merging of two small Asian American collectives based in New York City and Philadelphia in 1971. The group published a paper arguing that racist discrimination grew out of a deep history of national oppression. The paper drew other revolutionaries to the WVO, and it grew into a larger multiracial organization. Throughout the decade, the WVO grew closer to other groups who shared the belief that a Marxist-Leninist theoretical foundation was necessary for a successful revolutionary political party. In October 1979, these groups merged together as the CWP. The shooting in Greensboro took place the next month, just as this transition was taking place. As a result, the organization is often referred to as the WVO/CWP (Waller 30-32).

² GPD officers were convinced that Johnson had a “propensity for violence.” He had a long history of organizing and activism in the city, starting from his time as an A&T student, and he had become a central figure for white leadership in Greensboro that was determined to suppress Black Power activism in the city. In March 1969, Johnson led the A&T Cafeteria Workers Strike, deliberately bringing together student and community concerns. The strike ended in a violent confrontation with police, though evidence now suggests that the violence was incited by an FBI provocateur posing as a member of the Black Panther Party. Later that same year, Johnson also played a role in the Dudley High School Revolt. A black student ran for and was elected student government president based a platform that drew attention to the inequality of Dudley, a majority black school, compared to the majority white high schools in the city. After the administration denied

his election and declared the runner-up to be the new president, students began a protest. The protest escalated and grew, ultimately resulting in the still-unsolved shooting of an A&T student amidst violence between the police and the largely black community of protesters. For many white residents of Greensboro, these events were evidence of the “potential dangers of black activism,” and Johnson was painted as the main instigator. Jim Melvin, mayor of Greensboro in 1979 was a main proponent of the idea that “Greensboro had no race-relations problems except those that Johnson manufactured” (*Final Report* 49-54).

³ Bernard Butkovich, an undercover agent for the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms had attended earlier meetings of the KKK and Nazi group to gather information on their violent actions. He was fully aware of their plans to attack. But the BATF did not share their intelligence with local police (*Executive Summary* 12).

⁴ César Vicente Cauce, 25, was a Cuban immigrant. A graduate of Duke University, he had been a campus leader in the anti-war movement. Rather than attend graduate school, he chose to stay in North Carolina to organize strike support for union workers across the state. William Evan Sampson, 31, held a Master’s degree in Divinity from Harvard. He had left medical school at the University of Virginia to work and build a union in a Greensboro textile plant. The only black victim, Sandra Neely Smith, 28, was a former student body president of Bennett College in Greensboro. She became a worker at a textile mill and helped to form the Revolution Organizing Committee that unionized the plant. James Michael Waller, M.D., 36, had spent much of his career in medicine organizing medical aid for underserved groups. He left medicine to organize in a rural textile plant. Cauce, Sampson, Smith, and Waller died instantly. Michael Ronald Nathan,

M.D., 32, survived two more days in a hospital before he died. Nathan was dedicated to improving health care for people living in poverty. He was the head pediatrician at Lincoln community Health Center, a clinic that largely served poor black children in Durham, NC (Magarrell and Wesley 14-15; Jovanovic 5).

⁵ CWP survivors refused to participate in the trial because they were convinced that it was designed to protect the GPD and not the protestors. Eddie Dawson, the GPD informant from the KKK, and Butkovich, the BATF undercover agent, were deemed hostile witnesses and was not asked to testify (Jovanovic 10-11).

⁶ Unlike the first trial, survivors did participate in this investigation, and Dawson also testified. This time, the not-guilty verdict was handed down because prosecutors had relied on law that would prove that racial hatred was the prime motivation for the crimes, but the jury believed that hatred of communism was the cause. Additionally, the jury believed that there would not have been any violence had the CWP protestors not begun to hit the cars in the caravan as it passed through (Jovanovic 12-13).

⁷ In paying the full amount of the settlement, the city was essentially “settling on behalf of both itself and the Klansmen and Nazi Party members who were also found liable for the Nathan murder.” The written agreement, however, states that the city does not accept any responsibility for wrongdoing and the settlement should not be construed as conferring any liability on the city. The city chose to settle in order to avoid the additional time and expense that additional litigation would require (*Final Report* 307).

⁸ Four Klansmen and Nazi Party members were found liable for the these damages. Since GPD officers were not liable, this amount was not included in the city’s settlement. No serious attempt was ever made to collect from the Klansmen or Nazi Party members,

likely because the expense of the collection process would have cost more than the amount of the award (*Final Report* 308).

⁹ The *Executive Summary* is a shorter document, also written by the GRTC Commissioners, that summarizes the information from the *Final Report* for easier use by the public. I use both documents in my analysis.

¹⁰ The ICTJ advocates for a comprehensive transitional justice policy which includes, but is not limited to, truth commissions, criminal prosecutions, reparations, and institutional reform (“What is Transitional Justice?”).

¹¹ There are two types of truth commissions, those that have “quasi-judicial power” from their governments (like the South Africa Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which could grant amnesty, seize evidence, subpoena witnesses, and operate a witness-protection program) and those that rely on “voluntary participation and collaboration” (Beitler 11). The GTRC fell in the latter category: the process was entirely reliant upon voluntary participation from Greensboro residents.

¹² Here, Chafe is drawing on an argument made by the Greensboro Human Relations Commission, a city council-appointed group, in their October 1980 report about the shooting.

Chapter 4

Region and Tourism: The International Civil Rights Center & Museum

The International Civil Rights Center & Museum (ICRCM) in Greensboro memorializes “the courageous stand of the Greensboro Four as they launched, for posterity, the sit-in movement on February 1, 1960.” The museum opened in 2010, on the fiftieth anniversary of the sit-ins, at the site of the original Woolworth’s store. Founded and managed through the independent, black-owned Sit-In Movement, Inc., the ICRCM has preserved the lunch counter and “transformed this historic landmark to serve as an exhibiting, collecting, and educational institution.” The museum’s ambitions reach beyond memorializing the sit-ins. Ultimately, its leaders hope that the story will “inspire the vigilance and fortify the spirit of all oppressed people to step forward in the ongoing struggle for human freedom” (*2014 Annual Report* 3).

Yet the museum had a shaky start. When the F.W. Woolworth Company closed its Greensboro location in October 1993, First Citizens Bank, which owned the building, had no use for the structure. The bank reached an agreement with the city to demolish the building to make the space to expand a nearby parking lot. Hearing of these plans, Melvin “Skip” Alston and Earl Jones decided to step in to preserve the building where the famed sit-in movement began. In Nov. 1993, they created the nonprofit organization Sit-In Movement, Inc. “for the specific purpose of transforming the abandoned Woolworth Store into the International Civil Rights Center & Museum.” In their words, “It was our dream to restore and renovate this historic site into something that even our children’s children would one day visit to visualize and appreciate the struggle of African Americans who had fought so valiantly for change on their behalf” (*50th Anniversary*

Gala 5). From the beginning, the founders promised that the museum would be a boon for tourism in Greensboro, and many city leaders were enthusiastic about the project at the start. The museum was initially scheduled to open as early as 1997, but the fundraising, planning, and construction process, marked by suspicion and mistrust across racial and institutional lines, ended up taking 16 years. Since its opening, questions surrounding its financial status have led to tension with the City of Greensboro, which loaned money to the museum.¹ On the surface, the debates between city and ICRCM leadership are financial. But looking deeper, the two groups disagree about the museum's purpose and its depiction of Greensboro.

Memory places are often controversial, and, through this chapter, I propose attending to differences in regional identity as one way to understand these controversies. I ask how public memory and regional identity are co-constructed through debates about the museum. My question here is bigger than "How are the sit-ins remembered in Greensboro?" Instead, I ask how a public memory place, the ICRCM, is valued as a tourist site. Museum leaders and city leaders diverge in imagining how the museum should contribute to tourism in Greensboro. As I will demonstrate, these differences in perspective can be identified and understood according to ideas about regional identity.

This chapter proceeds in three main parts. First, I describe my approach to the co-construction of regional identity and public memory through the study of tourism, and I explain the important historical development of black heritage tourism in the South. Civil rights museums like the ICRCM seem commonplace today, but there has been a decades-long struggle for black heritage sites to claim their space in the memorial landscape of the South. Second, I identify the specific constraints of place that affect the ICRCM. I

describe how the museum adapted to the constraints of place throughout its development. Additionally, I describe the city's efforts to develop its tourism identity, which has further constrained the museum's relationship to place. This section considers the museum's and the city's divergent attitudes toward the museum's representation of Greensboro as activism and boosterism, respectively. These two perspectives are not given equal attention in the public forums where this debate is carried out, as I demonstrate in the third section of this chapter. In an analysis of newspaper coverage of the debate, I argue that the city's boosterism, through the process of racial capitalism, frames the museum's activist perspective as a risk for both the city and the museum. Finally, in conclusion, I consider the future of this debate and its consequences for the ICRCM.

Heritage Tourism

The demands of tourism define the relationships between memory places and regional identity in important ways. Heritage tourism, in particular, dually shapes representations of public memory and perceptions of a sense of place. Heritage tourism is "knowledge-based" rather than "leisure-based," meaning that the tourist is motivated to visit a location based on the knowledge that might be gained through the experience (as opposed to a theme park or campground, where the tourist seeks out leisure activities) (Franquesa and Morell 169). In their study of public memories of urban slavery and rebellion in Charleston, South Carolina, Kristan Poirot and Shevaun E. Watson urge rhetoricians invested in the study of public memory and place to more carefully consider the role of heritage tourism. By "monetize[ing] memory," they argue, tourism shapes the

narratives portrayed in heritage tourist sites. “Place-making rhetorics” that shape heritage sites are “inseparable from the tourist economies that enable their proliferation” (96). Despite how it may appear to visitors, Poirot and Watson explain, the rhetorical process of “learning” history is not a neutral act. Heritage sites are products *made* for tourist consumption. And the narratives expressed through these sites can shape the complex relationships among city, region, and racialized pasts (92). Following Poirot and Watson, I recognize tourism’s influence over memory places by attending to tourism as both a “constitutive component of memory environments” and as a “place-making technology” in my analysis (93; 100).

Tourism inevitably relies on a perceived sense of place, and that sense of place must be created and sustained within a heritage site.² An experience of place in heritage tourist destinations, as Poirot and Watson argue, is reliant on complex narratives that construct the place *both* as historically significant and as distinctive from other destinations (100). These productions of place “coordinate narratives, ideologies, and material characteristics of a locale to attract tourists and invite them to participate in a fantasy that propels a visitor’s escape from his/her ordinary preoccupations” (Poirot and Watson 98). Of course, tourism can define perceptions of place for residents as well as visitors—dual perceptions of place are built into the tourism environment. The “place-ness” that is constructed from tourism narratives can support regional or national identity for those residents who already claim connection to the tourist destination (Richards 1). The presentation of heritage in tourist sites can function as a form of “public information” that shapes what residents and visitors alike understand about a location or site (Franquesa and Morell 171). A 2004 survey determined that 40% of visitors to heritage

tourist destinations are locals, while less than 20% are tourists visiting from another country. As tourism expert Greg Richards argues, this statistic “emphasizes the point that apart from a select few sites or events where the majority of visitors come from abroad, the domestic market is of vital importance for most cultural tourism attractions” (15). Heritage tourist destinations craft a sense of place for outside visitors while simultaneously constructing elements of regional identity for locals.

Constructing a distinctive place-ness for both outside visitors and locals has become more challenging with increasing globalization. Local communities struggle against widespread homogenization that erases a strong sense of place identity. The tourist industry across the globe has tried to emphasize the “local identities and distinctiveness [that] can provide the basis for tourist products” (Richards 3). As a result, the tourism environment is increasingly competitive in cities “clamoring to promote their cultural distinctiveness” in the face of the “destruction of a specific place identity that threaten[s] their future development and promotion potential” (M. Smith 92). In this environment, tourist destinations have to promote their uniqueness, but that requirement can be particularly challenging for cities in the South. The region relies on tourism; it is one of the three top economic activities in every former Confederate state (Starnes 1). But for many Southern places, the most distinct features are often connected to or a product of the most shameful aspects of its past.

In this climate, the pressures of place shape heritage tourism sites, including the ICRCM. The museum’s location in Greensboro and, more specifically, in the Woolworth’s building where the sit-ins began assumes a powerful connection to place that creates a set of constraints. These constraints include the ideas about regional identity

and place that are attached to the legacy of the sit-ins, but they also include the larger context of constructions of the City of Greensboro as a tourist destination. The debates about the ICRCM in Greensboro are sustained by different regional identities and, more particularly, different tourism identities. Reading this conflict through the demands of tourism reveals that different groups, particularly the ICRCM leadership and city leadership, have incongruous expectations for the relationship between the museum and Greensboro's tourism identity. The push and pull of these different expectations threatens the museum's ability to craft a coherent tourism identity for itself. Poirot and Watson argue that "[t]he successful creation of a tourist destination relies on the coordination of a variety of community stakeholders' interests as both public and private entities work together to present a coherent and attractive vision of the locale" (98). In the case of tourism in Greensboro, there is a disconnect between city leadership's tourism identity for the city and ICRCM leadership's vision for the museum. City leaders want to fold the museum into its carefully coordinated tourism identity, but museum leaders want to retain ownership and control of their space and the story that it tells.

The stakes for this black-owned museum cannot be properly understood apart from the history of black heritage tourism in the United States. The memorial landscape, especially in the South, has never been equal. Sites that memorialize aspects of black heritage are met with demands and constraints that sites dedicated to white heritage likely do not confront. G. Mitchell Reyes writes that "differences in mnemonic practice frequently emerge along racial and ethnic borders" (1-2). A long history of systemic inequalities has given the power of public memory over to white people, making whiteness the "invisible hand of official public memory" (2). White people have been

able to determine which sites ought to be preserved and celebrated, and their memories have been presented as “official” public memories within these sites. The South’s tourism identity was defined by those places that were deemed worthy of preservation, including plantation homes and Civil War battlefields. What results is the “moonlight and magnolias” perspective of region that is still prominent in many Southern tourist destinations, especially cities like Charleston that promote its white antebellum and Civil War histories (Kytte and Roberts 151). Narratives of the “Lost Cause” of the Confederacy, “replete with faithful slaves, southern ladies, and genteel patriots” do important work for the tourist South by helping to define it as a distinct place. But this kind of place-making rhetoric produces a limited understanding of the region: it privileges a distinct sense of place-ness while it “forestall[s] critical engagement with so-called ‘southern heritage’” (Poirot and Watson 96). The power of whiteness to direct public memory has resulted in a limited and problematic Southern tourism identity.

Black people in the United States, and especially in the South, have never had the same resources to publicize their memories as white people have. Between 1957 and 1968, the “Bulldozer Revolution” resulted in the elimination of many historically black neighborhoods and the historically significant sites contained within. During this time, “federally funded renewal projects destroyed more than 300,000 housing units as highway builders and downtown redevelopers joined in a national frenzy of urban clearance, in the name of eliminating ‘blighted areas,’” writes historian W. Fitzhugh Brundage (228). This destruction of black neighborhoods was taking place alongside ambitious campaigns to preserve historically significant locations in white neighborhoods. In attempts to revitalize Southern cities, white planners and city officials

could make choices about which areas would be preserved and which would be destroyed, reimagined, and rebuilt in the name of civic improvement. Ultimately, there were stark differences between “the landscapes inherited by southern African Americans and those handed down to whites” (Brundage 229). In black neighborhoods, it was not just homes, shops, and churches that were destroyed—these places were the “‘raw material’ for collective memory” (Brundage 228). While many black people faced the demolition of their neighborhood landmarks, white people across the South were able to “protect the landmarks that met their conception of cultural importance, aesthetic merit, and historical significance” (Brundage 267). It is not that black people had no collective memories; families and communities, of course, developed their own ways to remember. But the most *public* memory practices—establishing permanent heritage sites, memorials, and museums—were unavailable to black Southerners for generations. These inequalities ensured that whiteness controlled public memory in the South.

It was not until the late twentieth century than an expansion of heritage tourism took place that “substantially broadened the historical past on display in the South,” (Brundage 307-08). These changes, however, did not come about without issue. Recognizing black people’s memories presents “alternative versions of the past that illuminate the present in new ways,” (Reyes 2). These alternative narratives raise questions about the legacies of slavery and discrimination as well as current manifestations of racism, threatening the perception of the South upon which many of its tourist destinations rely. “Incorporation of black heritage,” writes Brundage, “risks shattering long-nurtured associations of romance and nostalgia with many of the region’s tourist attractions, which in turn may dissolve the separation of the past and present that

is so appealing to contemporary tastes” (307-08). In other words, the “moonlight and magnolias” image of the South only survives by ignoring the repercussions of that past on the region’s present for all its residents, but especially for black people. A growing number of black heritage sites, including the ICRCM, have been redefining the South’s tourism identity over the last forty years.

By the 1970s what Brundage calls a “new museumology” had begun to shift the narratives presented at many heritage sites across the country. This generation of historians and museum specialists “brought with them a commitment to social history,” which led them to challenge “the tradition-bound aesthetics and patriotism” that had characterized many heritage museums up to that point in time (296). A museum could be a “provocative” and “liberating force,” the experience of which would sharpen visitors’ skills as social critics (297). During the 70s, many Southern museums, still largely designed and staffed by white people, began to revise their programs with these goals in mind. Many sites worked to incorporate histories of slavery and class privilege into their exhibits. But the effects were limited, and black history remained underrepresented at many museums. “The new approach to history,” writes Brundage, “ultimately could only revise, not remake sites founded by the architects of white historical memory at the dawn of the twentieth century” (301).

Museums devoted entirely to the history of black people in the United States were slow to emerge before the 1980s. Of course, there was a desire for black heritage sites, but most activists lacked access to the kind of funding that enabled the organization and exhibition of permanent collections, unlike those white activists who had succeeded in establishing countless heritage sites throughout the twentieth century. But by the 1980s

and 90s, the tide had turned. The new museumology continued to encourage attention to previously overlooked histories. More significantly, the civil rights gains of the previous decades meant that more black people were in positions of political power, and black citizens could exercise their political rights to encourage elected officials to support the creation of black heritage sites (Brundage 301). Many of these new museums focused on the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 60s. Through these sites the founders made “self-conscious efforts to institutionalize the links...among historical awareness, black identity, and social change in the South” (Brundage 302). The characterization of the South in these museums and heritage sites was centered on the region’s potential for change, not a romanticization of its past.

A number of prominent civil rights museums opened their doors in the 1990s, including the National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel, where Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated, in Memphis in 1991; the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, located between Kelly Ingram Park and the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, in 1992; the National Voting Rights Museum in Selma, the city where a voting rights march became known as “Bloody Sunday”; the Ralph Mark Gilbert Civil Rights Museum in Savannah, named for a significant NAACP leader, in 1996, and the Albany (Georgia) Civil Rights Museum, which memorializes that city’s nonviolent campaigns, in 1998 (Brundage 302). At these sites, the civil rights movement is often memorialized not as a completed project, but it is presented as an ongoing struggle for racial justice. The museums themselves are framed as part of that struggle wherein historical awareness is seen as an “agent of social change.” Many exhibits attempt to “inspire visitors to activism,” asking them actively take part in current civil rights initiatives (Brundage 303).

This overall trend has continued, with several new high-profile black history museums opening or scheduled to open in the 2010s, most of which maintain that activist orientation. Atlanta's National Center for Civil and Human Rights opened in 2014, the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture opened on the National Mall in September 2016, the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum will open in Jackson in December 2017, and the International African American Museum in Charleston is planned for late 2018. These and other projects continue to change the landscape of heritage tourism in the United States, but challenges remain. Public funding is of great importance to the development of black history sites—very few of these museums have come into being with the cooperating and support of government officials. This can mean that these museums “are hostage to shifting local priorities.” Access to resources has, and continues to, dictate who is “able to enshrine their version of history” (Brundage 326). Once these museums have successfully opened, they face another challenge: they must develop a unique identity within a memorial landscape that has grown dense with civil rights sites over the last several decades. Directors of these museums say “the idea is to create a network of institutions that enhance one another rather than detract” (Severson). But each of these museums still needs a specific focus that contributes to that whole. One of the most obvious ways to differentiate between these sites is by drawing from their location. For example, the National Center for Civil and Human Rights in Atlanta emphasizes the work of Martin Luther King, Jr., who was born and raised in Atlanta, and John Lewis, former chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee who has represented the Atlanta area in Congress since 1987.

In light of this history, the International Civil Rights Center & Museum in Greensboro presents an interesting case. The site was first imagined during the initial boom of civil rights and black history museums in the 1990s. When it finally opened in 2010, the ICRCM joined the later cohort of civil rights museums which faced the new challenge of developing a sense of specificity among the growing number of sites across the country. This shifting context made it increasingly necessary for the museum to emphasize Greensboro's unique civil rights history. Here is where the ongoing debate between the museum and the city begins.

Constraints of Place

From museum leadership's perspective, the ICRCM is an institution that is designed to celebrate the success of the sit-ins while it holds its visitors accountable to recognizing the harsh realities of segregation and encourages them to continue to fight injustice where they see it. To honor the legacy of the sit-ins, museum leadership believes that it must challenge visitors to look critically at the world around them—including present-day Greensboro. At the same time, city leaders argue that the story of the sit-ins, as one of the highest points in the city's history, is ultimately a story about Greensboro and that public memories of the event should be under the city's control. These two perspectives are perhaps most easily defined as activism and boosterism.³ ICRCM leadership believes that memorializing the sit-ins should motivate visitors to take action in their communities (whether or not they are Greensboro residents), while city leadership believes that memorializing the sit-ins should celebrate the city and boost its image. But their perspectives were not always so divided.

From the beginning, the museum founders have emphasized the potential tourism boost that the museum would bring the city. Like many city centers in the early 1990s, Greensboro's downtown was struggling. The Woolworth's site is located prominently on Elm St., the area's main thoroughfare. In the first year after purchasing the building, Earl Jones, one of the founders, promised that the museum was "expected to be a tourist attraction, bringing hundreds of thousands of visitors into downtown each year" (Barstow). City leaders were eager to hear ideas to revitalize the downtown. They were enthusiastic about the museum project and made efforts to help the founders develop the space. In June of 1994, City Council unanimously voted to use some of its federal government funds from community development block grants to help convert the store into a museum.⁴ The Greensboro Area Chamber of Commerce also formally endorsed the project. In 1995 the museum was described as the Chamber's "top legislative priority." The project was quick to garner support from the broader community. Within its first year of fundraising, the museum gained notable corporate funding from companies including Jefferson-Pilot, Cone Mills, Guilford Mills, and Koury Corporation. The *News & Record* anticipated that increased pedestrian traffic in the downtown area because of the museum could offer a much-needed boost to nearby businesses. Jones called the museum "a very important piece of downtown revitalization" and anticipated—"by the most conservative estimates"—that the museum would draw 250,000 to 300,000 additional visitors to downtown Greensboro (Ahearn).

The stakes were high for Greensboro leaders who began to see the museum as an essential part of their larger goals for downtown. The promised tourism boon became a central issue in early conversations over whether local public funds should be given to the

museum project. The stakes were just as high for the museum leadership. The city's support was essential, especially since it gave the project credibility that increased its potential to raise money from corporate and private donors. *News & Record* editorial writer Kathy Coe suggested that since the sit-ins "helped put, or keep, Greensboro on the map" that Greensboro then might be obligated to support the project. The museum's relationship to the city—financially as well as figuratively—was solidifying in the first few years of development, though both party's expectations for that relationship were already beginning to diverge.

To understand contemporary debates between the ICRCM and the City of Greensboro, it is necessary to distinguish the roots of each group's perspective about how the museum should fit within the city's tourism identity. In what follows, I examine how museum leadership has had to adapt their activist goals to meet tourism's constraints of place. Then, I analyze the city's recent development of its tourism profile, which motivates their boosterish vision for the ICRCM.

Imagining the International Civil Rights Center & Museum

From the early conceptions of the project, the museum that would be created in the Woolworth's store was intended to memorialize much more than just what happened in Greensboro in the early 1960s. A 1999 Sit-In Movement Inc. newsletter explains that the organization was founded to correct what they call a "glaring oversight." The newsletter states, "Despite the worldwide appreciation of black America's struggle for freedom and the progress achieved to date; there is not an institution in our land, museum or library devoted solely to the entire civil rights struggle nationally and its effects internationally." By their characterization, other sites only tell part of the story, and that

story is usually framed “as a segment of the larger African-American experience” (*Sit-In Movement, Inc.* 1). But the International Civil Rights Center & Museum was envisioned as a different kind of site—one that would offer a focus *and* scope unmatched by other museums or libraries. The name, which appears to have been chosen by 1994, reflects that goal.⁵

The museum’s location in Greensboro made this international vision for the project difficult to achieve. Housing the museum in the old Woolworth’s store creates a strong tie that binds the site to the particular event of the 1960 sit-ins and to the city of Greensboro. This immediately shifts the emphasis of the site, privileging the sit-ins over other civil rights events and marking the museum as a space that commemorates what happened in Greensboro more than it might be able to commemorate a national civil rights struggle. This association was especially challenging because so many Greensboro residents felt a sense of ownership of the Woolworth’s space. Upon announcement of the store’s closing in 1993, thousands of people signed petitions to preserve the site. Woolworth’s officials reported that they had received “29 proposals for the future of the building.” This was not a space that Greensboro residents felt detached from or ambivalent about. The store and lunch counter were seen as part of “a downtown tradition,” a space that helped to define Greensboro for many who lived there and visited (Khoury). After Sit-In Movement, Inc. acquired the building and began to publicize their plans for the museum, the *News & Record* published an anonymous letter that voiced the feelings some community members held about the Woolworth’s location. The letter describes the sit-ins as the event that “placed Greensboro on the national historical map.” “Greensboro citizens of all races and political persuasions take pride in the kind of

courage displayed by those four young freshmen,” the writer claims. The mythic figures of the Greensboro Four and the Woolworth’s space were fixtures that helped constitute regional identity for this resident and many others. The writer continues, “Through the years, Greensboro citizens derived a particular pride in being able to walk in and sit down at that very counter where history was made. The personality of the place was as appealing as its history.” Finally, the writer asks that the leaders in charge of the store’s transformation into a museum “keep in mind that their children and grandchildren deserve a chance to experience that distinct Woolworth’s flavor” (“What would”). By opening the museum in the Woolworth’s store, the founders were made responsible not only for the space but for some residents’ sense of regional identity.

By 1999, the start of renovations and the opening for the museum had been pushed back several times. A description of plans for the museum from that year illustrates the museum’s struggle between accomplishing their goal to memorialize the entire civil rights movement and meeting the constraints of place. Four main exhibits were planned for the museum. First the original lunch counter would be preserved, “encased in glass,” with “wax figures of the Greensboro Four and counter protestors.” Sound effects would be played into the room that project “the sounds of the time of the demonstration” (*Sit-In Movement, Inc.* 2). Initially, the founders planned to re-open the lunch counter itself as a café (Swinson). But by 1999 they instead planned to open a restaurant attached to the Woolworth’s building that would replicate the original counter and serve foods that would have been popular in February 1960, acting as an additional source of revenue for the museum (*Sit-In Movement, Inc.* 3). The second exhibit, to be called the “Hall of Civil Rights Leaders” (modeled after the Hall of Presidents at

Disneyland) would feature “robotic animations” of significant civil rights leaders who would “rise, walk to a podium, introduce themselves, and deliver speeches.” Individuals represented were to include Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Nat Turner, John F. Kennedy, W.E.B. DuBois, Nelson Mandela, Ghandi, and Mother Teresa. This list represents the national and international aspirations of the museum. None of the suggested leaders are directly connected with Greensboro, and several (Mandela, Ghandi, Mother Teresa) are known for their activism in other countries and were not directly connected to the United States civil rights struggle. However, the third exhibit, the “Hologram Exhibit,” was to feature Greensboro voices exclusively. The founders hoped to display three-dimensional images of individuals who participated in the sit-ins describing their experiences. They planned to feature opponents of the sit-ins as well, “for historical purposes.” Finally, the fourth exhibit was planned as a space for rotating exhibits from “anywhere globally where the non-violent ideals of Mahatma Ghandi and Dr. King were practiced to achieve civil and human rights” (*Sit-In Movement, Inc.* 2). This section was envisioned as a space to feature international perspectives, all under the umbrella of nonviolent protest.

These plans demonstrate the difficulty—if not impossibility—of the task that museum leadership set for itself. Here we begin to see the impracticality of commemorating the entire civil rights movement in a museum with the ICRCM’s size and budget.⁶ Their planned representation of the overall movement lacks depth, as it is limited to only the most recognizable figures and their most familiar speeches. They are especially stretched by their attempts to include international perspectives. The most in-depth commemoration of the movement offered in this plan is in the two exhibits that

were to focus on Greensboro. The power of place enabled a specificity that would extend beyond the most obvious representations of the movement. At the same time, it would circumscribe the scope of the museum so that it ultimately offered the same limited perspective that the founders lamented about other museums and memorial spaces.

When the museum opened in 2010, it looked quite different from the plan that was proposed in 1999. The permanent exhibition, “The Battlegrounds” weaves together the story of the Greensboro sit-ins with elements that memorialize the injustices of segregation and the most iconic events of the larger movement. The exhibit concludes at a gallery that quotes President Barack Obama’s speech in Berlin in July 2008, reminding visitors of the work that is still to be done: “The walls between old allies on either side of the Atlantic cannot stand. The walls between the countries with the most and those with the least cannot stand. The walls between races and tribes; natives and immigrants; Christians and Muslims and Jews cannot stand. These now are the walls we must tear down” (DeLaure 13). The lunch counter itself is impeccably preserved—but visitors are not invited to sit at the counter, and there is no restaurant or café attached to the museum to bring in additional revenue. There is a small gift shop/bookstore. A space in the lower level is reserved for rotating or traveling exhibits, and the museum is now beginning to use part of the second-floor office spaces for additional exhibits as well (Swaine). Some of the museum leadership’s goals have shifted and changed, and some have not yet been realized due to funding limitations. But the main exhibit demonstrates their attempt to address larger contexts while satisfying the expectation that the museum should celebrate Greensboro. The challenge of designing the museum, however, was only the beginning.

Now that the museum is open, but still struggling financially, its relationship with the city and the community has grown even more complex.

Imagining the City of Greensboro

Museum executives today still maintain the museum's importance for Greensboro's tourism industry and the health of the downtown area (Swaine).⁷ But the museum is not a central feature of Greensboro's tourism image. Greensboro does not market itself as a particularly "Southern" location and does not define its tourism identity by its heritage, unlike many other cities in the South. Take Charleston, for example. In 1924, the mayor proclaimed Charleston to be "America's Most Historic City," and its tourism industry has grown around celebrations of the city's antebellum and Civil War history ever since (Kytle and Roberts 138). Or consider Birmingham, Alabama. The city's "Civil Rights District," built around the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, features prominently in its tourism marketing (*Birmingham*). Instead, the identity Greensboro casts for itself is leisure-based: Greensboro is marketed primarily as a city with great options for entertainment, shopping, and dining. Knowledge-based sites of cultural and heritage value are extra features rather than the central focus of the city's tourism identity.

According to the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina, Guilford County ranks third in the state in travel and tourism expenditures (behind Mecklenburg County, which includes Charlotte, and Wake County, which includes Raleigh).⁸ The Greensboro Area Convention and Visitors Bureau is responsible for "marketing [the] community's assets." The central paragraph on the homepage of the organization's website describes the city as "the perfect place to relax and be entertained," a place where

“the fun never ends,” emphasizing the wide range of leisure activities available to residents and visitors alike. The paragraph boasts that Greensboro is “[c]entrally located in North Carolina’s picturesque heartland,” which calls to mind the city’s physical landscape (and the leisure activities it makes available) more than any particular ideas about the character of the state or the region (“Welcome to Greensboro”). The sixty-eight-page *Greensboro, North Carolina, 2016 Visitors Guide* includes only four mentions of the South as a region and uses “Southern” as a descriptor only seven times (most often associated with food).⁹ Associating Greensboro with the South based on a sense of hospitality and the region’s food traditions are relatively weak ties, loose associations with what can be perceived as the most benign aspects of southern regional identity. Ideas about civility and the history of Southern foodways are, in reality, complex topics, but both appear in this publication without conjuring more divisive associations with the South. A four-page spread about Greensboro’s history and the historical sites includes mention of its Civil War and civil rights movement past, but the guide does nothing else to characterize the city as a distinctly Southern place (8-11).

Instead, the city is portrayed as a historically forward-thinking place that presents some interesting opportunities for heritage or cultural tourism, and many options for shopping, outdoor activities, leisure activities, craft beer, dining, and events. Heritage tourism plays a role in its tourism profile (and it is the first section in the guide), but it does not define the tourism profile in the same way that it does for many other Southern cities, like Charleston or Birmingham. In the pages of its visitor’s guide, Greensboro is a characteristic “New South” city, one that can gesture toward some of the less consequential cosmetic associations with the “Lost Cause” South (friendly people and

great food) while simultaneously defining itself against the South's most troubling histories. Greensboro is portrayed as *in* the South, but not exactly *of* the South. By promoting leisure more than heritage, the city distances itself from associations with the slave-holding or segregated South, becoming instead an uncomplicated city that offers a wealth of leisure activities.

Activism versus Boosterism

Selling a tourism destination is not so much an effort to sell the place as it is an effort to sell what marketing scholar Athinodoros Chronis calls a “place narrative” (qtd. in Poirot and Watson 100). Those narratives are constructed through many diffuse elements that must come together to create a seemingly coherent image of a place for visitors (Poirot and Watson 98). The range of parties involved must contribute to that place narrative, or at least find their place within the narrative. In Greensboro, debates about the ICRCM are sustained because the museum does not seamlessly contribute to the narrative that the city sells to tourists and residents alike. This disconnect leads to disagreements about the museum, who should control it, and what its role should be in the larger community.

City leadership certainly recognizes the museum's potential to shape perceptions of Greensboro—to influence its place narrative. As Poirot and Watson write, “heritage tourism destinations as rhetorical formations...provide the resources and rationales for public judgments about the present that are grounded in strategic animations of the past” (112). In other words, the story that the museum tells about Greensboro's past can motivate judgments about its present. In the ICRCM, where the museum explicitly connects the history of the sit-ins to current issues of injustice and inequality—present

judgments are encouraged. While museum leadership seems to have set their sights beyond Greensboro, city leadership seems well aware of the museum's power to reflect back on the city.

The debate about the museum, on the surface, centers on questions of its financial stability. But the debate is laced through with questions about public memory and regional identity. These deeper issues have raised the stakes of the debate, making it more volatile and more lasting. Under the guise of working to find a way to make the museum more financially sound, museum and city leadership are arguing over how the sit-ins should be remembered and what that legacy should say about the city. Paradoxically, the persistence of this debate is part of what keeps the museum from meeting their financial goals. The remainder of this chapter develops these two perspectives further through a study of this debate as it plays out in the pages of the Greensboro *News & Record*.

The Debate

The *News & Record*, the Greensboro area's most prominent paper, and the third largest paper in the state as measured by print circulation, has become the discursive frame for the debate about the museum ("About Us"). The paper distributes information about the museum, but, as Kent A. Ono and John M. Sloop argue, contemporary mainstream media more than "produce information." These sources also "provide a specific locale, a space, where social issues collide, where political issues are struggled over and subject positions...are constituted." It is important to recognize that this locale, this space, is constructed. Despite the ideal of journalistic objectivity, media sources have the power to select and control how an issue is presented to the public, including what

arguments are represented as “dominant truths.” An audience’s perception of “the politics of their communities...may be based on, among other things, how these representations appear” (2). The articles, stories, and letters that appear in the pages of the *News & Record* have inevitably influenced the community’s understanding of the museum’s financial status and its relationship to the city. The words and images in the newspaper “fundamentally shape what issues become salient, the way issues come to have meaning, and the audiences who participate in learning about issues, as well as what responses ultimately become possible” (Ono and Sloop 6).

Expanding on Ono and Sloop’s premises, Rona Tamiko Halualani argues that dominant news media discourse can be a vehicle through which the racial state can “frame and reify social issues in a way that proffers the dominant status quo perspective and carries social and political consequences for individuals” (251). The racial state is the “structural apparatus” that includes governmental, legal, political, military, educational, and media structures and institutions that shapes “which groups—by race and class—will occupy specific contexts” (250). The racial state “promotes its hidden and unspoken power interests...underneath a cloak of neutrality, fairness, and racelessness.” Halualani ultimately argues that “mainstream regional newspaper discourses are extensions of the racial state and promote dominant state interests of hegemonic capitalism, nationalism, and ‘colorblindness’ to the general public” (251). The *News & Record* is a party to and a voice for the racial state. The newspaper is a primary voice for the government of the city of Greensboro, which has repeatedly argued that racism has no role in the conflict over the museum. Overall, the city and the newspaper adhere to a color-blind rhetoric wherein

attention to racism as unreasonable and unwarranted. Of course, the city stands to gain a lot by appearing not to be bothered by racism.

The city's position is a result of what legal scholar Nancy Leong calls racial capitalism, which she defines as "the process of deriving social or economic value from the racial identity of another person" (2153).¹⁰ Her work focuses on the most prominent and pernicious form of racial capitalism "in which a white individual or a predominately white institution derives social or economic value from associating with individuals with nonwhite racial identities" (2154). In the United States (a country founded on capitalism), the preoccupation with and presumed virtuousness of diversity transforms nonwhiteness into a valued commodity that can be "exploited for its market value" (2154). Affiliation with nonwhite individuals or institutions can be especially valuable for white people and predominately white institutions who can "acquire social and economic benefits while deflecting potential charges of racism and avoiding more difficult questions of racial equity" (2155). A white person or predominately white institution can, through their affiliation with nonwhiteness, signal to observers that they are not racist.

Greensboro's progressive regional identity depends, in large part, on the city being perceived as a place that is not racist. That identity is maintained in and extended through the city's tourism profile. In order to attract visitors to this "New South" city—and to make money from those visitors—Greensboro must draw selectively from its complicated civil rights past. The history of the sit-ins, when told through the rhetoric of the progressive mystique, presents the city's civil rights past in its most palatable form. Therefore, the ICRCM becomes valuable to the city as it develops its tourism industry. By affiliating the city's tourism identity with a museum that celebrates the triumph of

black students in the civil rights movement, the city benefits—symbolically and financially. Through the *News & Record* coverage, the city repeatedly argues that the museum should celebrate Greensboro and the museum's connection to place should be formalized by giving the city ownership. By continually casting doubt on ICRCM leadership, city leadership creates the perception that the museum will fail without the city.

Museum leadership, without such an effective mouthpiece, has struggled to counteract this perception. Racial capitalism's instrumental view of nonwhiteness harms nonwhite individuals and institutions by reinforcing their inequality to white people.¹¹ This has serious economic implications for nonwhite individuals and institutions. In uncertain economic climates, institutions are less willing to enter into relationships with partners who are perceived to have lower status or to be less stable (Leong 2210). Ultimately, racial capitalism “inflicts economic harm by placing nonwhite people at the greater mercy of the market” (Leong 2204). The ICRCM has been put at risk by the city's narrative about its financial status and its leadership as reported in the *News & Record*. The publicity given to the city's perspective has raised doubts about the museum, which drives potential visitors away from the independent, black-owned organization. The city and the newspaper have locked the museum in a cycle that is driven by racial capitalism—by the city's desire to conform the museum to its tourism identity.

The following sections analyze significant moments from the *News & Record* coverage of the museum's financial difficulties in 2014 and 2015.¹² I analyze four key moments in this debate when questions about the museum's relationship to Greensboro as a place come closest to the surface. First, I examine coverage that questions the ICRCM's

name, casting doubt on the museum's attempts to connect the legacy of the sit-ins to larger contexts. Second, I analyze coverage of the city's proposal to take over operations of the museum in the fall of 2014. These reports reveal that city leadership and museum leadership hold different positions about the purpose of the museum and their motivations for memorializing the sit-ins at all. After the question of the takeover had passed, coverage focused on the status of the city's loan to the museum, my third point of focus. The *News & Record* reporting portrays the museum as subordinate to the city, signaling the presumed superiority of the city's vision for the ICRCM.

The International Civil Rights Center & Museum Name

On May 19, 2014, after a national search, Lacy Ward, Jr. took over as executive director of the ICRCM. *News & Record* coverage of his hiring emphasized his ideas for change at the museum. One of the first ideas he expressed went right to the museum's relationship to Greensboro. Ward told the newspaper that, while he was impressed with his initial tour of the museum facilities, he felt that the exhibits did not express a strong enough connection to place. Ward said, "I didn't know for sure, for sure, for sure—in all portions of the museum—that I was in Greensboro." Ward suggests that the museum ought to remind visitors of their location in every portion of the museum, implying that the museum would be more successful if it would better emphasize its relationship to place. Ward suggests that emphasizing place could draw more people to the museum from outside Greensboro *and* could "make the community more fully embrace this historical landmark." Ward cites his previous experience in heritage tourism to support his position.¹³ He said, "Heritage tourism is a great business because you can't lose it.... One of the lessons we've learned from textiles is plants can move, jobs can move—

except in heritage tourism. People come to the place because that is the place” (McLaughlin, “Sound finances”). Of course, the museum is in Greensboro—already in “the place”—and there was no threat of relocating the museum. But Ward suggests that museum visitors expect a strong connection to place, and he accuses the museum of falling short of those expectations.

In her story on Ward’s hiring, reporter Nancy McLaughlin doubled-down on the issues of the name, asking, “No Greensboro—not even ‘sit-in’—in the name?” She explains that a name change would have to be approved by the museum’s Board of Directors, but suggests that the idea might take hold, citing Mayor Nancy Vaughan’s support of Ward and admiration of “how he thinks” (“Sound finances”). The idea of a name change was picked up the next day by *News & Record* editorial writer Doug Clark in his blog post titled, “A new start for Greensboro sit-in museum.” He writes that his initial impressions of Ward were positive and that he appreciates Ward’s willingness to consider the “sensitive subject” of the museum’s name. Clark agrees with Ward that the museum should craft itself around a sense of place. He writes, “The museum has a powerful story to tell—the birth of the sit-in movement. So why obscure that with ‘international’ ambitions? It should create its identity from the inside out, beginning with Greensboro.” Clark implies that the museum has not already created an identity—or at least not a successful or acceptable one. He suggests that connecting the story of the sit-ins to international contexts dilutes the power of the story that the museum can tell—meaning that the most powerful version of the sit-in story begins (and ends?) with Greensboro. “People know about the Greensboro sit-ins,” he continues, “The museum can only benefit by broadcasting its association with that historic event.” Clark neglects

the significant portions of the museum that do focus on that historic event, and he also fails to consider that knowledge of the sit-ins does and would continue to lead potential visitors to the museum, regardless of its name. His conclusion finally reveals the real crux of the issue. He thinks Ward's attitude and skills "offe[r] a good opportunity for a new beginning and the hope that, if the museum really embraces Greensboro, Greensboro will embrace it." Here it is not a matter of whether or not anyone outside of Greensboro thinks to come to the city and visit the museum. It is not a matter of the success or failure of the scope of the museum's exhibits or programs. It is that the museum has dared to reach beyond Greensboro. By neglecting to define itself according to the city, Clark implies, museum leadership has offended the sensibilities of the city—or at least of those in power in the city, those whose embrace or rejection of the museum is a high-stakes question that could determine the museum's financial future.

The Proposed Takeover

In November 2014, Lacy Ward, Jr. was fired from the ICRCM due to allegations of inappropriate actions toward a female museum employee (Killian, "The last days"). His firing set off a chain of events that resulted in the City of Greensboro making an offer to the Board of Directors to take over operations of the museum. City leaders cited skepticism about the museum's financial status and doubt in the ICRCM's ability to raise enough funds to meet the terms of their loan from the city *and* successfully maintain operations. The ICRCM Board immediately rejected the offer, but the proposal ignited a powerful debate in the pages of the *News & Record*. The debate revealed that these stakeholders held different ideas about the role of the museum in the community, the purpose of memorializing the sit-ins, and what constitutes qualified museum leadership.

The proposal was first reported in the *News & Record* on November 17, 2014. Mayor Vaughan, who is white and a Democrat, held a press conference to announce that City Council had agreed to propose a takeover and that she had presented the proposal at a meeting of the ICRCM Board of Directors. (Vaughan and the city manager sit on the board as part of the conditions of the city's loan to the museum.) In her remarks at the press conference, Vaughan makes a case for why the city is best suited to operate the museum. She argues that the "heritage" and "story" of the sit-ins "is extremely important to the City of Greensboro," assuring the public that the city was motivated by a desire to protect the museum. Vaughan says, "We, as a City government, are attempting to take what we consider to be responsible steps toward making the museum sustainable, viable, and transparent." This line suggests two things: first, that it is the city government's responsibility to ensure the success of the museum; second, that the city is acting sensibly, in contrast to the ICRCM leadership. Building her case in this way, Vaughan asserts the ethos of the city government and undermines the ICRCM Board. She argues that this is a move that "makes sense" because of the city's experience with the tourism industry: "The City of Greensboro has demonstrated success in the travel and tourism arenas. And, we already have a fully functioning Historical Museum that tells the story of our great City—which means we have resources in-house to manage museum operations." She suggests that the city is better suited for participation in the tourism industry (an important industry for Greensboro). She also subtly signals that the city would be able to run the museum without the involvement of the current Board—they already have "resources in-house" (Moffett, "City").

As she continues, Vaughan explicitly questions the ability of the current ICRCM leadership: “I think I speak for many when I suggest that we have concerns about the operations and management of the museum on both a short and long-term basis.” She directly suggests that the museum is not credible under its current leadership: “The proposal for the City to operate and manage the Museum is a result of our focus on keeping the Museum open, making it successful, and restoring its credibility as an organization that can be trusted by maintaining public meetings and records and striving for fiscal accountability” (Moffett, “City”). She assures the community that the city government is committed to the success of the museum, as they demonstrated through their loan.

Vaughan’s remarks at the press conference also began to reveal her perspective about the purpose of the museum. She echoes the ICRCM’s official mission statement in saying, “The mission of the Civil Rights Center & Museum is to ensure that the world never forgets the courage displayed by four young North Carolina A&T State College students in February of 1960” (Moffett, “City”). She does not, however, include that the museum also aims to demonstrate, “why, in the current context, such inherently evil, institutionalized oppression has no place in the human race” (“About the International Civil Rights Center & Museum”). It is perhaps telling that Vaughan neglected to include “International” in the saying the name of the museum. She concluded her remarks by saying, “Our City—our country—is better for the actions of the Greensboro Four. We want to ensure that the story that is told about February 1, 1960 remains based in the City where those actions took place. That legacy is important to all of us, and we want to do what’s right in trying to make the Museum a sustainable destination for years to come”

(Moffett, “City”). The city clearly envisions the museum as heritage tourist destination that can benefit the city by bringing in revenue *and* promoting a positive vision of the city for residents and visitors alike. This is an understandable position from the perspective of the city government. But it is a position that undermines the independent black museum leadership and cuts short their goals for the museum.

The same day, editorial writer Doug Clark published a blog post called “City to the rescue” that celebrated the “bold offer by the city of Greensboro.” He writes that this “landmark of the civil rights museum should preserved and maintained,” suggesting that only under the city’s control will the site survive. Clark argues that the museum board should agree to the takeover, but he “imagine[s] there are those who would never give up control.” Here, he suggests that the right thing to do is for the independent black-owned Sit-in Organization, Inc. to give up control of the museum that it built from the ground up. Clark echoes Vaughan’s when he writes that the museum “represents the most historically significant event that ever occurred in Greensboro,” suggesting that the museum’s main purpose is to celebrate the significance of the event *for the city*. He repeats his earlier support of a name change, arguing that the city should change the name if they gain control of the museum. “The facility lacks a clear identity,” he writes, “No one can tell from its name where it is or what it means. Calling it the Greensboro Sit-ins Museum will put it on the map.” Because the museum does not conform to the city’s boosterism, Clark and Vaughan accuse the museum of having no clear identity at all.

Museum co-founder and Board Member Earl Jones was quick to reassure the public of the museum’s sound financial status and to denounce Vaughan’s offer. In an interview with the *News & Record* about the city’s offer (video of which was published

on their website the day after Vaughan's press conference), he says, "It's my speculation that there's a part of the mayor's group that would like to see the museum taken over so the history and integrity of the civil rights movement can be undermined and whitewashed." He describes an "old Jim Crow segregationist mindset minority group" in the city that has "always" tried to take over leadership of the museum. He aligns the museum leadership with students who led the sit-ins, saying, "the same type of problems that the young men had are the same type of problems that we face from some modern Jim Crow elements." He explains that the group of city leaders who have a problem with the museum leadership because of its "stand against inequality" is a minority group, but that they are in positions of power. He suggests that this group wants to "diminish the horrors of segregation" and does not want the story of segregation told "in honest terms" (Staff Reports). The museum is meant to cast a critical eye on current instances of injustice, a perspective which Jones suggests is threatening to some city and business leaders.

Jones argues that it is essential for the non-profit to maintain control of the museum because its leaders' experience in social justice work is central to the purpose of the museum. He explains that, from their perspective, "The museum is a symbol of a struggle for justice and equality and a fight against oppression [that used] the sit-ins as a strategy of civil disobedience, not only in Greensboro and the nation, but throughout the world" (Staff Reports). This statement reveals Jones's assumption that part of the purpose of the museum is to connect with ongoing struggles against injustice and to demonstrate how the sit-ins are linked to systemic issues that reverberate nationally and internationally. He also argues that he and other leaders of the non-profit are the only

rightful leaders of the museum, as they are equipped to carry out its social justice mission in a way that the city government is not.

The Greensboro NAACP held a press conference to announce their support of the museum and opposition to the city's proposed takeover. In his remarks, Alphonso McGlen, president of Greensboro's NAACP chapter, calls the offer an attempt at a "hostile takeover." Like Jones, he asserts that the museum was "relatively stable" financially and that, from a financial standpoint, there was no reason to consider the offer. He says that the NAACP supports the museum's decision not to go into the "receivership," as he characterizes it, of the city. His perspective on the purpose of the museum aligns with Jones's. McGlen says that the museum represents the city's "storied past," but not for the sake of the city alone. He argues that the museum represents that past "in terms of the struggle for equality and justice within this city, within this state...throughout this nation and even throughout the world, throughout the diaspora." Because the museum was "born out of the impetus of the community," he argues, it ought to stay under the control of the independent non-profit (Staff Reports). This phrasing pits the city against the community, suggesting that Mayor's offer is a rejection of the desires of her constituents.

In response to Jones's and McGlen's characterization of the City's offer as an attempt to undermine the mission of the museum, Mayor Vaughan claims (in a video interview posted at the same time as Jones's) that city leadership had no reason to whitewash the history of sit-ins—if they don't want that history to be told, she said, "We could just let it fail, and then there would be no story" suggesting that the fate of the museum is in the hands of the city. She continues, "But we do think it's an important

story. I think Greensboro behaved very well, and that's something that we do want to showcase. Many communities around the country didn't behave so well. I'm not afraid of that message" (Staff Reports). With these comments, Vaughan further reveals her assumption that the story of the sit-ins is important for what it reveals about the Greensboro community and that the purpose of the museum is to showcase the city's accomplishment. This perspective disconnects the sit-ins from the larger goals of the civil rights movement and, instead, assumes Greensboro's superiority as a place that could settle its civil rights problems neatly and, at least in 1960, without violence.

At the end of December 2014, after nearly two months of difficult debate about the museum's future, Deena Hayes-Greene, Chairwoman of the ICRCM Board, published an editorial in the *News & Record* defending the museum's financial status and condemning the reports from the newspaper and the city government. She argues that the recent coverage from the *News & Record* must have "intended to mislead" and she characterizes the coverage as "ignorant of the facts, oblivious to the history and arrogant in response to those who hold opinions different from the mainstream." She implies that the city government is calculating in its attitude toward the museum, writing, "It has become politically advantageous to espouse the museum's importance and undermine its foundations at the same time." Much of her piece is dedicated to laying out the museum's financial history, explaining the nature of its debts, and assuring the public that the founders have not mismanaged the organization. She emphasizes their struggle to create the museum and their dedication to its mission. Overall, Hayes-Greene characterizes opposition to the museum in terms of opposition to its activist project and its portrayal of Greensboro. She writes, "It is far easier to discredit [the museum's founders] than to

publicly oppose the story the museum tells and the horrors of our history in Greensboro and across the nation.” She suggests that by discrediting Alston and Jones, the mayor and the *News & Record* are damaging the museum’s reputation without having to express their real concern: the representation of Greensboro as implicated in a racist past and present. Hayes-Greene accuses Mayor Vaughan of paternalism, of taking the attitude that she and the city government can step in to save the museum and that the museum ought to be grateful for the offer. Hayes-Greene connects that attitude to what she sees as an attempt “to wrest the story told at the museum from the hands of those who experienced and continue to experience it.” She argues that the story is not the city’s to tell—instead it belongs to the black communities in Greensboro whose lives were and are shaped by racism.

The Status of the Loan

The ICRCM did not accept the Mayor’s offer, despite the pressure from the city to do so. The debate quieted down in the pages of the *News & Record*, only to pick up again when the city was scheduled to deliver the last installment of its loan to the museum. In late August 2015, the paper began reporting on a 2014 audit of the museum that identified “mounting debt, near-empty cash reserves, and record-keeping weaknesses.” Alston, of the ICRCM founders, emphasized that “the bottom line is, it’s a clean audit” (Moffett and Killian). The next week, as the scheduled date of the final \$250,000 payment approached, the paper reported that Mike Barber, a white city councilman, believed that the museum might have breached some of the terms of the contract was calling for a public debate over whether or not to pay the final installment. Vaughan supported an open session of the council to discuss the issue (Moffett,

“Barber”). Such a session was never held, but the museum went ahead with its scheduled payment, “despite concerns about the museum’s finances and its compliance with the loan agreement.” Ultimately, Vaughan explained that if the city did not make the final loan payment to the museum, the situation might have been worse for the city. The museum would have been at risk of defaulting on its tax credit payments without that last loan installment. If that were to happen and the museum was forced to close, then it would have been difficult for the city to collect any of their loan back because the museum would first owe money on its tax credits. Jamal Fox, a black city councilman, agreed with the Mayor’s position, but he expressed his reasons for moving forward with the repayment in more emotional terms: “I’m an Aggie, and the A&T Four have a special meaning for me.... But really, this is a history that belongs to the entire city. Yes, there needs to be more transparency and accountability from the museum. But if we want to get to the point where we have that, we need to look at the big picture, the long term and do what we can now as a city to help it survive” (Killian, “City”).

This coverage set off a string of letters to the editor that revealed how some members of the public were interpreting the debate based on reporting from the *News & Record*. A letter from Charles A. Jones published on August 26, 2015, expressed his dismay at the news that the city would continue with the scheduled loan payment to the museum. He wrote that he read, “with gross disbelief” that the city will “loan taxpayer money to that vortex called the International Civil Rights Center & Museum.” He cites headlines from the *News & Record* as evidence of the museum’s “mismanagement” and suggests that the city might as well dump their \$250,000 in a landfill. He derides the city for their decision to make the payment, but he also blames them for the entire situation:

“The biggest mistake was the city not buying Woolworth’s in the first place and incorporating it into Greensboro’s Historical Museum so money spent on it would have some accountability rather than constantly disappearing into ‘The Twilight Zone’ via ‘record-keeping weaknesses.’” He essentially argues that the city was the rightful owner of the Woolworth’s space all along and that they never should have allowed the space to come into the hands of an independent organization.

Three days later, Richard Koritz, a member of the ICRCM Board, responded with a letter of his own. He blames the *News & Record* for distorting the image of the museum, pointing out that Charles A. Jones’s attacks appear “reasonable in light of the *News & Record’s* unrelenting attacks on the International Civil Rights Center & Museum.” He argues that the newspaper has portrayed the museum leadership as irresponsible when, in fact, the city was obligated to fulfill its contract with the museum as a result of its clean audit. He wrote, “this black-led institution, like everyone else, deserves to have its city contracts honored.” He certainly suggests that racism plays a role—if an implicit one—in the museum’s treatment from the city and the newspaper. He also argues that the city made no “mistake” in not purchasing the Woolworth’s building, pointing out that the city had plans to use the space to extend a parking lot—not to open a museum. Of course, the city government was made up of different people at that time, but his point stands: that the city was not in competition with Sit-In Movement, Inc. for control of the space. The nonprofit organization was the only major contender to purchase the building. He ends his letter by reiterating the activist orientation of the museum and arguing for its necessity in the community: “Today, when police murders of unarmed African American citizens across the US have produced the ‘Black Lives Matter’

movement, ICRCM's inspirational and educational role is more needed than ever” (“N&R”). He implies that a museum under the city’s control would not be able to play such a necessary role.

Koritz was again compelled to criticize the newspaper’s coverage after the publication of several articles in October 2015. Eleven months after his firing, reporter Margaret Moffett published an article about Lacy Ward. Moffett writes that Ward still “figures prominently in most discussions about the museum” and that Ward has moved on from the episode, even if Greensboro “may not have.” There is very little news to report, other than Ward’s new job with the USDA’s Rural Development Agency in southern Virginia. But Moffett uses the piece to rehash the questions surrounding Ward’s firing, claiming that he angered the founders of the museum: “He achieved an almost mythical status for standing up to the old-guard museum leaders, who found his frankness about the museum's shaky finances insulting.” Ward is quoted expressing his hope that the museum leadership will continue to make the changes to improve its performance, saying, “Take the advice given. Correct the path. It’s not hard” (Moffett, “Ward”).¹⁴

The same day Moffett published another piece featuring Vaughan and City Manager Jim Westmoreland’s impressions following a meeting of the ICRCM Board of Directors. They report that the museum “sits on more stable ground” than it had the past year. The article includes a review of the museum’s financial status from Vaughan and Westmoreland’s perspectives. Vaughan said that she is “cautiously optimistic” about its future, “based on information we are aware of.” While Vaughan is congratulatory about the museum’s progress, she and Westmoreland clearly communicate hesitance and skepticism. Vaughan reported that the museum was doing a good job with special

programs, exhibits, and other events. “There hadn’t been a whole lot going on in the museum” in that respect, she said, but “[t]hey’re making the museum more of a destination than it had been before” (Moffett, “Greensboro mayor”). This suggests that by implementing changes that are favored by city government, (such as those recommended in the Haas Report) the museum is shaping itself into a more successful tourist destination (see note 15).

Moffett’s articles were followed by a piece from the *News & Record* editorial staff that characterizes the ICRCM Board’s treatment of Vaughan and Westmoreland as cautious, saying they are regarded as outsiders. The article suggests that the two are “in a sense, sitting in at the sit-in museum.” This comparison would imply that Vaughan and Westmoreland are taking a stand against some sort of injustice, which is a particularly distasteful tangle of ideas, especially because their presence on the board is due entirely to the museum’s financial debt to the city. The piece echoes some of Moffett’s reporting about Vaughan and Westmoreland’s satisfaction with the museum’s progress, but it is extremely critical of the public silence of the museum board, specifically for their collection of financial documents at the end of meetings (preventing Vaughan and Westmoreland from entering those documents into public record) and for Chairwoman Deena Hayes-Greene’s reluctance to comment on most press stories. The editorial puts Vaughan in a position of power over the museum leadership, almost in a watchdog role. She is quoted as saying, “I don’t have that luxury of saying, ‘No comment.’ . . . We’ve made it clear that we’re there in a very different role. We represent the taxpayers and we will not defer.” The editorial suggests that the museum does not share even its good news, and again cites Vaughan’s disappointment: “I think they have a good story to tell,”

the mayor said, “and they are hurting themselves by not telling it.” This is an extension of the paternalistic attitude that the mayor displayed during the debates the previous year. She assumes that the city leadership knows better than the museum how to manage its success and regrets that the museum does not fall in line with their suggestions. The editorial writers take the same stance in closing out the piece: “It seems especially odd that an institution that needed the public’s help to stay alive wouldn’t want to keep those taxpayers constantly informed about its progress. And it’s ironic that an institution built on a struggle for equal access for all seems to want, in some ways, to be an exclusive club. Please let us in. We’d like to help” (N&R Editorials).

The next day another letter from Koritz, titled "Museum's progressing in spite of newspaper," was published. He criticizes Moffett for her “relentless...attacks on the museum’s leadership” over the previous year. He is especially angered by her story on Ward, writing that, counter to Moffett’s suggestion that Ward is still a major topic in conversations about the museum, “the *News & Record* seems the only entity still stuck on Ward." Koritz points out that Moffett connects the museum’s growth exclusively to the changes made by Ward. “In reality,” he writes, “the outstanding leadership of current Executive Director John Swaine, with the support of the museum's board, is responsible for the success.” He subtly criticizes the fact that the reporting placed so much emphasis on Vaughan and Westmoreland’s perspectives, closing out his letter with, “The mayor and city manager's approval is welcome.”

Conclusion

The debate continues in Greensboro. The ICRCM's first repayment of their loan from the city was due on June 30, 2016. The payment was stalled because museum and city leaders disagreed about the amount of the loan that should have been forgiven (the loan was forgivable for every dollar that the museum raised between 2013 and 2015). The amount due was eventually settled at \$800,000. Some in Greensboro called for the City of Greensboro to write off the loan, but City Council refused. In August 2016, the council voted to give the museum eighteen more months, until February 2018, to repay their debt and lets the museum use the building as collateral (Moffett, "Greensboro council"). Undoubtedly, the debate will continue to play out in the pages of the *News & Record*.

Amid the initial controversy over the city's offer to assume control of the museum, Jeff Gauger, one of the few *News & Record* voices that was sympathetic the museum, published a column that dissected competing perspectives about "what role the museum should play in Greensboro and the wider world. He writes that the "squabbles" over control of the museum revealed two "starkly different views of what the museum should be." As he describes it, "One view is that the museum is a symbol of struggle for racial justice in an age when the Jim Crow mindset that embraced segregation remains a living evil." This view holds that the museum must continue to fight oppression and act as a "counterweight to the power vested in formal authorities such as government." This means that, for the museum to fulfill its mission, it must remain separate from the city government and maintain a critical distance. "In this view," Gauger writes, "the museum belongs to the victims of inequality and oppression. No others can be trusted to tell the

movement's story honestly." According to this view, all of those who are not the victims are "the descendants of yesterday's racists or are today's bigots." For these people, the museum "must be a scolding, uncomfortable reminder, a scab that never will heal, because they have much for which to answer and atone."

The other perspective, as Gauger summarizes it, "sees the museum as a symbol of how far the struggle for racial equality has come." Proponents of this perspective believe that the sit-ins can be presented as "a triumph of Greensboro's better self" where "despite the ugliness, the movement played out across that late winter and spring without life-threatening violence, making Greensboro a role model across the South then and for other people in other places today." The museum becomes "a pivot around which the descendants of heroes, screaming bigots and those who practiced quiet sympathy can engage in a figurative embrace." In this version, the museum exists "for all Greensboro people" to learn about "a time of profound difficulty but also of laudable change" and to have their minds opened to injustice today.

Gauger contrasts the two views by suggesting labels for each. Their "neutral labels" might be "Keeping the Activist Flame Alive" and "Telling the Whole Story." But the "less-sympathetic" labels for each side might be, instead, "Blaming and Shaming" and "Whitewashing the Past." Gauger does not advocate for one view over the other. Instead he emphasizes the importance of "[b]ridging this chasm." But he warns that this will never happen until "we see the end of name-calling and race-baiting and can put distrust behind us." Gauger is right to identify that both city leadership and museum leadership are often speaking past one another in this debate. But the problem is much more complicated than "name-calling" and "race-baiting."

The City of Greensboro and the ICRCM both want to draw in residents and visitors. From the early development of the museum, both groups recognized what they stood to gain from one another. The museum needs financial and symbolic support from the city to keep its doors open and attract visitors. And the city needs the museum to draw people downtown and contribute to the area's revitalization. However, the challenges of the financial arrangement between the city and the ICRCM have led to a debate that, as I have argued, is sustained by disagreements over more than money. The two groups hold fundamentally different ideas about how tourism operates generally (what attracts visitors to a city/site or what visitors expect from heritage sites) and within Greensboro specifically (the appropriate relationship between the city and the public memories of the sit-ins). The conflict cannot be fully understood apart from these issues of tourism, regional identity, and public memory.

When city leadership attempted to settle the museum's financial debt by offering to take over its operations, they revealed their failure to understand the importance of the museum's ownership. Considering the history of black heritage tourism in the United States, it is symbolically, historically, regionally, and economically significant that a museum designed to commemorate the sit-ins is owned by an independent black organization. Until the City of Greensboro can come that realization, these conflicts will remain.

Notes

¹ In 2013, the City of Greensboro agreed to loan the ICRCM a total of \$1.5 million, paid in three installments. The first \$750,000 was paid in 2013, the next \$500,000 in 2014, and the final \$250,000 in 2015. The loan was forgivable one dollar for every dollar that the museum raised (outside of money from its day-to-day operations) from September 3, 2013 to July 1, 2015. As a condition of the loan, the Mayor and City Manager of Greensboro sit on the ICRCM Board of Directors.

² Erve Chambers distinguishes tourism from travel activities more generally as those activities that involve “the self-conscious experience of place” (qtd. in Poirot and Watson 97). This distinction is especially true of knowledge-based heritage tourism.

³ This distinction is inspired by Carly S. Woods, Joshua P. Ewalt, and Sara J. Baker’s analysis of boosterish regional rhetoric at the Nebraska History Museum.

⁴ The Community Development Block Grant program, which began in 1974, is one of the longest running programs at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The program awards annual grants to state and local governments to address a range of community development needs (“Community Development Block Grant Program”).

⁵ Editorial writer Kathy Coe suggested in 1994 that one reason for the name is that the sit-ins tactic that was popularized in Greensboro eventually became “a trademark tactic of civil disobedience not only for other causes in the United States, but around the world.”

⁶ The ICRCM has 30,000 square feet of exhibit space. Compare this to similar regional civil rights museums: the Center for Civil and Human Rights in Atlanta has 42,000 square feet and the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute has 58,000 square feet of exhibit space (“Plan A Visit”; “Our History”; “Overview of Visit”). The ICRCM is the only one

of these museums that is housed in an existing historical structure instead of in a building constructed for the museum, which limits the amount of exhibit space.

⁷ The museum has been consistently rated as one of the top attractions in Greensboro by users on the popular travel website TripAdvisor.com (it is currently rated at #1). The museum has been awarded a Certificate of Excellence from the site (“International”).

⁸ In 2014, the most recent year for which statistics are available, tourism generated over \$1.25 billion for Guilford county and more than 12,760 people were employed in travel-related jobs (“Economic Impact Studies”). Of all visitors to the Piedmont region (which includes Mecklenburg, Wake, and Guilford Counties) during the year, 8.3% visited historic sites or churches sometime during their stay, and 7.5% visited museums at some point during their stay. These statistics, however, do not necessarily represent the primary motivation for travel (*2013 North Carolina Regional Travel Summary*).

⁹ The back of the guide includes a list of the “Top 10 Reasons to Visit Greensboro.” First on the list is “Southern Hospitality” because visitors will be “welcomed to Greensboro with a smile from everyone you meet.” Seventh on the list is “Farm to Fork Southern Cuisine,” including barbecue, local craft beer, Cheerwine, and Krispy Kreme (the latter of which can hardly be described as “farm to fork”) (61).

¹⁰ Thank you to Jo Hsu for sharing Leong’s work with me.

¹¹ Under racial capitalism, whiteness is the unquestioned top of the racial hierarchy, and nonwhiteness is “a highly specific and contingent form of value that is defined in relation to the higher status of whiteness, ultimately leaving the baseline value of whiteness untouched” (Leong 2207).

¹² The debates extend before and beyond this time period, but these two years mark the height of the conflict.

¹³ Ward had previously worked for the Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site and the Robert Russa Moton Museum in Farmville, Virginia.

¹⁴ Here Ward refers to a 2014 report from consultant Alexander Haas that recommended measures that the museum could take to improve its financial status.

Conclusion

Challenging Exceptionalism

This dissertation has told the story of city that is struggling to celebrate its successes and reckon with its failings. How does a city acknowledge the best—and worst—of its past without being incapacitated by it? While I have not attempted to answer that question outright (nor do I think that one answer is possible), my study of the co-construction of regional identity and public memory in Greensboro offers one way to better understand the challenges of reconciling public memory. Greensboro’s powerful progressive regional identity remains an obstacle on the path to a more inclusive memorial landscape in the city.

During the summer of 2011, CNN traveled the country reporting stories about changing demographics for a project called “Defining America.” In early June, the project featured coverage from North Carolina, including a story about Greensboro with the headline: “After 50 years of racial strife: Why is Greensboro Still So Tense?” Data from the 2010 census showed that people of color outnumbered white residents for the first time in the history of the city, due in part to a 31% increase in Greensboro’s black population in the previous decade. Some residents hoped this shift would start to make a difference in the political and economic power structures that had maintained racist divisions in the city, while others denied that racism was a problem. The story quotes William H. Chafe, author of *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Struggle for Freedom*, who theorized Greensboro’s progressive mystique in the late 1970s. While the city has continued to present itself as progressive and moderate in the nearly four decades since the publication of his book, he said, “the realities of it are that

[Greensboro] has not changed that much because the underlying issues of seriously listening to black concerns have not really infiltrated the political process.” The CNN story pictures Greensboro as a city that, despite making great strides, is still “coming to terms with its history of protest”—from the sit-ins to the Greensboro Massacre—and continues to face serious issues of inequality (Patterson).

Four days after CNN’s story was posted, Greensboro *News & Record* columnist Jeri Rowe published a response. “Racial strife. Tense. Really?” Rowe asked. His column oscillates between disbelief at the accusation and thoughtful acknowledgment of Greensboro’s problems. While he concedes many of the points in the CNN story, including a geographic divide that separates wealthier majority-white communities from poorer communities of color and a City Council divided over the significance of racist inequality, Rowe argues that those are not Greensboro’s problems—they are America’s. Rowe has a point. Every city and state in the country faces the challenges of racism, classism, and inequality. But rather than using that argument to incriminate the country, Rowe tries to clear Greensboro of blame. More than he takes seriously the concerns of the story, Rowe offers a familiar defense of the city. He recites lines from Greensboro’s progressive history, including its Quaker roots, historically better opportunities for business and education, and—of course—the sit-ins. “For generations, Greensboro has questioned the status quo, tackled the thorny issue of race and created a progressive mystique that has attracted a population hardly found anywhere else in the South. That’s why we’re called the ‘alternative South,’” he writes. Even though he explains that the problems of inequality in Greensboro are problems everywhere, Rowe cannot resist the exceptionalist arguments of the progressive mystique—a concept that he misunderstands

in these statements. While the perception of Greensboro as a city that exists apart from the problems of the rest of the South does, of course, attract people to visit and choose to make their lives there, Rowe does not understand (or at least does not acknowledge) how the rhetoric of the progressive mystique upholds the persistent inequality that he himself recognizes.

Chafe is correct in saying that the progressive mystique continues to define politics in Greensboro. Many well-meaning residents, like Rowe, can recognize how the city needs to change to address racism and inequality, yet they remain caught up in their attachment to a progressive regional identity. That attachment limits understanding of the ongoing struggle for civil rights in the city. The rhetoric of the progressive mystique is, in part, a mechanism of the consensus memory of the civil rights movement in Greensboro. Jacquelyn Dowd Hall argues that when the national civil rights movement is confined “to the South, to bowdlerized heroes, to a single halcyon decade, and to limited, noneconomic objectives” it is simultaneously elevated and diminished in damaging ways. A limited understanding of the problems that the civil rights movement was designed to address and the strategies that activists used to address those problems simplifies the history. Important complexities as well as important participants are erased.

At the same time, this simplification makes the movement easier to coopt into the larger narrative of American progress, which can then suggest that the problem of racism was solved in the mid-1960s. As Hall writes, this version of the story “prevents one of the most remarkable mass movements in American history from speaking effectively to the challenges of our time” (1234). Greensboro’s progressive mystique is a kind of extension of that American progress narrative. It is the city’s strategy for maintaining association

with civil rights successes (the sit-ins) and distancing themselves from injustices (the Greensboro Massacre) and ongoing problems.

This dissertation has examined how the progressive mystique and ongoing attachment to Greensboro's progressive regional identity has shaped the city's civil rights memorial landscape. Public memories of civil rights events have been limited in two especially important ways. First, memories of civil rights in Greensboro focus on only the most obvious participants. Most significantly, public memories of the sit-ins are defined by the four men from A&T who were the first to sit at the Woolworth's counter. The more complicated story of women from Bennett College who originally planned the sit-ins is absent from memory places throughout the city. The statue on A&T's campus and the exhibits at both the International Civil Rights Center & Museum and the Greensboro Historical Museum fail to mention their leadership. Bennett students and alumnae are working to keep their story alive by writing and speaking publicly about their roles in the sit-ins. But as it stands now, there are no permanent memorials to their participation. As I explained in chapter 2, the legacy of the sit-ins can be more easily manipulated to extend Greensboro's progressive regional identity when public memories of the event do not include the Bennett women.

Not only does this limited understanding of the sit-ins prevent Greensboro residents from understanding the collective effort that was necessary to challenge segregation in the city, but it also prevents Greensboro's story from speaking back to national consensus memories of the movement. As Rep. John Lewis (a former leader of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) said recently of women in the civil rights movement, "They did all of the work, they did the heavy lifting." But they were

not the public leaders of the movement. “They were kept back,” Lewis said (qtd. in Sands). While they were not in the national spotlight, many women were—like the students at Bennett—shaping the movement on the local level. Histories and commemorations of the movement that are more focused geographically, on specific states, counties, or cities, are much better positioned to realize the significance of women’s work because they examine local activism.¹ Memory places in Greensboro are missing an incredible opportunity to write women back into public memories of one of the most iconic civil rights events.

Second, Greensboro’s progressive regional identity limits public memories of the struggle for black civil rights to the “classical” phase from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s (Hall 1234). College students may have successfully desegregated businesses in downtown Greensboro, but the goals of the movement were always more complex. It was about equal opportunity in all areas of life—equal opportunity to work, fair treatment and pay, *and* desegregation. The Workers Viewpoint Organization/Communist Workers Party interracial organizing in Greensboro’s textile mills in 1979 was another effort to achieve the same set of goals, and the KKK and Nazi resistance was another effort to deny the humanity of people of color. Trying to protect the city’s progressive regional identity by associating Greensboro’s image with the sit-ins and simultaneously distancing it from the 1979 murders, city leaders have limited the scope of memories of civil rights activism. Because the 1979 murders of five Communist Workers Party protestors by KKK and Nazi members was a violent crime motivated by racism, not a triumph of civil disobedience like the sit-ins, the event could not be incorporated into Greensboro’s progressive identity. As a result, city leadership has and continues to discourage and

delay memorialization of the violence. If one believes that the concerns of the civil rights movement were solved with the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the Voting Rights Act in 1965, then it is possible to disconnect the triumphant story of the sit-ins from what happened in 1979. But with a more nuanced understanding of the fight for justice and equal rights in the United States, the two events are closely connected.

Recent efforts to shape public memories of civil rights in Greensboro have been more inclusive of the story of Nov. 3, 1979, but significant limitations persist. The Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission worked against the rhetoric of the progressive mystique to connect these parts of Greensboro's past and bring the civil rights timeline up to the present. But many of their recommendations about keeping that conversation above the surface have not been implemented. In May 2015, after much controversy, a historical marker was unveiled near the site of the murders. It reads: "Greensboro Massacre: Ku Klux Klan members and American Nazis, on Nov. 3, 1979, shot and killed five Communist Workers Party members one-tenth mile north." Sandi Osterkatz, the daughter of one of the survivors of the shooting, said, "It's a big deal to have something in writing that everyone will see" (Battaglia). Of course, the marker will serve as a reminder to the residents who were already more directly affected by the murders, those living in and around the Morningside Homes (now Willow Oaks) neighborhood, more than it will to speak to the city at large.

A small display at the Greensboro Historical Museum, opposite their display about the sit-ins, does commemorate the shooting, the commission, and the debate over the historical marker. This display is the most comprehensive public commemoration of the shooting in the city, but it is significantly smaller and less detailed than other

elements of the museum's main exhibit, which includes detailed displays about a Revolutionary War battle and the development of Greensboro's textile industry. Other measures recommended by the GTRC have not been put in place. Most surprisingly, the International Civil Rights Center & Museum does not include mention of the event. Given the museum's forward-looking activist stance, including the story of the murders might have been a natural extension of their message. But perhaps the museum does take some pride in the fact that the violent images used in their main exhibit to illustrate the realities of racism do not picture Greensboro. Their heroes, the A&T Four, made it through their protests without physical harm. Inviting in a story about violence in the city might cast a shadow over the exceptional figures of those four young men.

Though museum leaders, in their recent disagreements with the city, have had to push against the cooptation of their institution into the city's progressive regional identity, they are not immune to all aspects of it. That Greensboro's sit-ins remained nonviolent is significant—spectacular, even. But to separate it from the violence of 1979 is to circumscribe important aspects of Greensboro's history and to stunt the ability of the city's memorial landscape to encourage residents and visitors alike to recognize and act to solve civil rights challenges that persist today.

Through this study of Greensboro, I have provided evidence for the rhetorical co-construction of regional identity and public memory. Following Carly S. Woods, Joshua P. Ewalt, and Sara J. Baker, I have used critical regionalism to analyze public memory and its relationship to place. As they point out, not only does this approach recognize that regions are ways of understanding places in relation to other places, but it also assumes that regions are constructed in relation to political discourses (357). A sense of regional

identity, the awareness of how one's cultural traits are like those living in similar conditions around you or are different from people in other places, is crafted in large part from discourses about race, class, gender, sexuality, etc. And while I have attended to the construction of regional identity through memory places, as Woods, Ewalt, and Baker do, I have extended my analysis to the larger rhetorical ecology of public memory.

An ecological approach to public rhetoric, as Jenny Edbauer [Rice] advocates, considers the larger affective field that shapes public discourse, rather than beginning with a fixed sense of context, exigence, or audience. "Rather than imagining the rhetorical situation in a relatively closed system, the distributed or ecological focus might begin to imagine the situation within an open network," she writes. This ecological approach is essential for the analysis of the co-construction of regional identities and public memories. Rice argues that "a rhetoric emerges already infected by the viral intensities that are circulating in the social field" ("Unframing" 140). Understanding how regional identity and public memory are constructed together requires attending to the historical, political, and cultural discourses moving through and around places.

Cumulatively, the case studies in this dissertation have imagined an open network of public discourse about regional identity and public memory. All three rhetorical situations—Bennett alumnae's struggle for recognition of their participation in the sit-ins, the GTRC Commissioner's efforts to redefine Greensboro's regional identity in order to shape memories of the 1979 murders, and the complex debates about the role of the ICRCM for tourism in the city—have been, and continue to be, enacted through a larger social field. While it is impossible to carefully consider every relevant context, every possible exigence, and every implicated audience, I have considered each case as it

emerges from the open network of public discourse surrounding civil rights in Greensboro. Regional identities and public memories make and remake each other over time, as my analyses have shown, so that it is necessary to consider the larger affective field that shapes these public rhetorics.

This project points to other important areas of research as conceptions of Greensboro's and North Carolina's regional identity are changing in the state's current political climate. A calculated Republican takeover of the state government was fully realized with the election of Governor Pat McCrory in 2012 (Mayer). His administration has been defined by the passage of House Bill 2, better known as the "Bathroom Bill," that requires people to use the bathroom that matches the biological sex reflected on their birth certificate, among other limiting provisions. The bill has resulted in the loss of millions of dollars in business and tourism and has made the state the subject of derision from the left for what is seen by many as a concerted effort to limit North Carolinian's civil rights. McCrory was narrowly defeated by Democrat Roy Cooper in the 2016 election. However, Donald Trump won the state by four points and Republican Richard Burr was reelected to the Senate after a competitive race. What effect this changing political reputation will have for cities like Greensboro remains to be seen, but—undoubtedly—regional identity and public memories of civil rights in the state will remain a fascinating case.

This dissertation also speaks to the larger relationship between regional identity and public memory, not just in the state of North Carolina. There are many avenues for further research to explore that relationship. Other cities, like New Orleans before Hurricane Katrina, constructed a progressive regional identity that shaped their memorial

landscape (Thomas). But progressive or not, regional identity comes together with public memory to define perceptions of civil rights and racism in cities across the country. Place and memory work together to form identity in ways that shape perceptions of racism—whether or not a place has a well-known history of civil rights activism. How do regional identities and public memories shape perceptions of racism in places best known for civil rights atrocities like Neshoba County, Mississippi, the site of the Freedom Summer murders? In places that have seen themselves as outside of the struggle for black civil rights, like cities and states in the North or the West? In places that have entered the national conversation because of recent episodes of racist violence or recent civil rights protests, like Ferguson or Baltimore? Regional identity and public memory also shape perceptions of other problems of inequality, as this dissertation has indicated. Issues of sexism, classism, labor rights, and economic inequality have been present in my analysis, but further research that takes up these or other issues of inequality as a central focus could deepen our understanding of the powerful relationships between place and memory.

Finally, throughout this dissertation I have demonstrated that a narrative of exceptionalism is a key strategy in maintaining Greensboro's progressive regional identity. My critique of Greensboro's narrative of exceptionalism contributes to a larger critical project: challenging the larger mythology of American exceptionalism. Matthew D. Lassiter and Joseph Crespino argue that exceptionalist narratives about the South “reinforce a selective historical consciousness” about civil rights in the country (5). The myth of Southern exceptionalism poses a “simplistic dichotomy between southern backlash and American progress, an intractable region alternately deviating from and

dominating an otherwise liberal nation” (7). In other words, the South is often regarded as the center of the country’s problems with racism, which has the effect of absolving the rest of the nation of any guilt. Thus, the narrative of American progress remains intact. Lassiter and Crespino argue, “Discarding the framework of southern exceptionalism is a necessary step in overcoming the mythology of American exceptionalism, transforming the American Dilemma [of racial inequality] into a truly national ordeal, and traversing regional boundaries to rewrite the American past on its own terms and in full historical perspective” (7). Greensboro’s progressive regional identity operates similarly, by maintaining the idea that the South is responsible for the problems of racism. But rather than drawing solely on the South’s negative exceptionalism, the rhetoric of the progressive mystique also draws from a positive idea of southern exceptionalism. Greensboro is selectively associated with the most palatable aspects of “southernness” while the city is simultaneously separated from the idea of the racist South. Only by untangling this web—in Greensboro and across the country—can we begin to understand how powerful ideas about place have shaped our public memories.

Notes

¹ For example, Carolyn Thomas Calloway and Thurmon Garner's "Daisy Bates and the Little Rock Crisis: Forging the Way"; Christina Greene's *Our Separate Ways: Women and the Black Freedom Movement in Durham, North Carolina*; and Kathryn L. Nasstrom's "Down to Now: Memory, Narrative, and Women's Leadership in the Civil Rights Movement in Atlanta, Georgia" focus on specific cities in order to examine women's participation in the movement.

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