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The Rhetorical Landscape of Public Memory in Alabama

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Abstract

Public memory is a complex concept that concerns the events and individuals that are present or important in the minds and lives of groups of people. Public memory can put certain ideas or narratives on display about these events and people that further influence the public mind. For example, there has recently been much controversy surrounding public sites of history, namely those commemorating the Civil War era Confederacy. This has sparked much debate about the way we commemorate histories and how we choose what histories are commemorated. The aim of this project is to examine and understand not only the types of events and people that are commemorated in Alabama's public memory, but also the ways in which these things are portrayed. By examining these aspects of public memory, we can understand what has driven problematic commemoration of old histories and use that knowledge to create more nuanced and informed sites of public commemoration in the future.

Keywords: rhetoric, public memory, commemoration, memory studies, historical markers

1. Introduction

To commemorate something in the public eye is to give it the utmost attention, bringing to light stories that seemingly hold great significance. The stories and individuals that gain this type of public commemoration shape the way onlookers perceive and understand the history of a given place. This phenomena is the occurrence of public memory and it is a vital aspect of understanding events and stories not only in a historical context, but a rhetorical one as well. Kendall Phillips says, "...memory highlights the extent to which these constituted and constituting memories are open to contest, revision, and rejection. Thus...to speak of memory in this way is to speak of a highly rhetorical process" (Phillips).

Rhetorical analysis and the study of public memory are important and growing fields of study. The analysis of sites of

public memory allow us to understand the individuals and events that act as "an memory" (Wilson). The collective memory Wilson discusses serves as the basis of how we understand active presence in our collective imagination and sites of public commemoration, in that these sites are not simply relics of the past, but active purveyors of what certain groups deem important. This is a point that other scholars, like Edward Casey, get at as well. Casey mentions that, regarding sites with a large physical presence, "their very massiveness and solidity almost literally enforce this futurity" (Casey). The social prevalence and enduring nature of sites of public memory are part of what opens them to this kind of analysis and criticism. Part of what this paper engages is known as ideological criticism, a subset of rhetorical analysis which focuses on the ideas being presented

through the use of rhetorical devices. Ideological criticism aims to understand “how ideology and rhetoric work in tandem to create historical ‘truths,’” (Na’puti).

This work aims to examine the rhetorical and ideological qualities of Alabama’s public memory through the types of stories that are told to the public sphere, but most importantly the understanding of how those stories are told. It will examine aspects of Alabama’s public memory through multiple lenses such as its representation of racial/ethnic groups and gender identities. Then, a more condensed timeline of public memory in Alabama will be assessed to understand how the rhetorical landscape of this public memory has changed over time.

This paper also utilizes many examples of historical markers and sites of public memory throughout the state of Alabama. It examines individual sites and uses them to put certain narratives on display that paint a picture of the status of Alabama’s public memory. Each example used was chosen because of its relationship and relevance to the status quo of the given lens through which it is analyzed. For example, a marker that commemorates the history of an Indigenous population that is located on a known site that was inhabited by Indigenous people may have been chosen for analysis over other similar markers that may not have the same rhetorical strength based upon their location. It is important that we understand and analyze sites of public memory, like the ones in Alabama, because it allows us to understand our past in more depth by understanding the biases of the recorders of history and gives us the skills

and opportunities to provide a more diverse and nuanced recording of history going forward.

2. Race/Ethnicity

There are many aspects or qualities that influence the rhetorical methods used by the creators of historical markers, the first of which we will explore is race or ethnicity. Race and ethnicity have traditionally played a crucial role in the history of Alabama and the entire United States and thus, only naturally, also play a large role in the public perception and recognition of that history. As is the case with other forms of history, dominant groups will retain control over what is remembered and what narratives are pushed within the public sphere. Later, this section, and the article as a whole, will explore exactly who those groups are and what narratives they attempt to push. Over time, however, that dominant group has loosened its grip on public memory and the stories of other groups are finally coming into play.

In Alabama, there are only a few key racial or ethnic groups recognized in its historical marker system and public memory: these groups being Indigenous people, White people, and Black people. This section aims to explore the varied history of these groups in Alabama, how they are and have been remembered, and why they are remembered in this way and how that is affected by the rhetorical methodology of historical markers and their creators.

Indigenous History

The history of Indigenous groups in Alabama, especially the history publicly portrayed in these historical markers, tells an interesting story. Having been the first ethnic group in the area long before the arrival of White settlers or any other racial group, one might assume that they would have a bountiful history to be recognized in public memory. However, this is not necessarily the case. Though Indigenous people surely had a rich history long before they interacted with newcomers like White settlers, much of the content of the markers that portray their history centers them around their relationship to those White settlers. In this section, I will explore the rhetorical implications of the historical markers that portray the history of Indigenous people through the examination of a few common characteristics or contexts shared by many of the markers, as well as explore an argument as to why there is so little publicly recorded history of these groups.

Many of the few existing public markers dedicated to Indigenous history share one of a few common pieces of context. The first common context that some of these markers share is in that they are often located, and even purposefully concentrated, in a select few places that can be directly linked to Indigenous groups. For example, the marker “The Bottle Creek Site” in Baldwin County denotes the area as being the site of a large Indigenous mound center (Lang, Appendix B). Since the site holds such historical significance, they began to create more markers relating to local Indigenous groups that they could

place in the same location. This practice can also be found being utilized in many other prominent Indigenous sites across the state. Edward Casey purports that this practice is vital, in that the location of a site of public memory “...lends itself to the remembering and facilitates it at the very least, but also...embodies the memory itself” (Phillips). The grouping together of these markers in prominent indigenous locations serves as a rhetorical device in itself, which has interesting implications with the potential reasoning as to why not much public indigenous history remains that will be explored later.

Another shared context that is found in markers regarding Indigenous history relates to their centering around Indigenous relationships with White settlers. This context is that of conflict between Indigenous groups and White settlers. Many markers, such as the “Creek Indian Campaign Memorial” created in 1918 in Calhoun County, tell the history of conflict between the two groups (Lang, Appendix H). Markers such as these do not serve to tell a true or full history of the events, but to praise the winners and condemn the losers, as can be found in the type of language used. This memorial states that the creators “...believe it is our duty to our country to love it...and defend it against all enemies” (Lang, Appendix H). This marker creates an interesting rhetorical situation because in its text, it refers to the conflict between Indigenous groups and White settlers that had just passed its centennial anniversary, while also being created in the era of the first World War. This memorial marker serves as an example of the way in which

contemporary events or sentiments can be used to alter or to create certain perceptions of past events or people.

The third and final context of these markers I will explore is in their connection to the erasure of Indigenous history. By this, I mean the more contemporary, public recognition of older attempts to remove Indigenous people and their histories. Examples of this type of context can be found throughout Alabama, with the most glaring ones relating to the experiences of the Trail of Tears. One “Trail of Tears” marker in Madison County refers to the well-known event, giving some of its general history, how it occurred in the local area, and ultimately passes judgement on it calling it “one of the darkest chapters in American history” (Lang, Appendix AS). This marker, and others like it, display an interesting change in the rhetorical methodology of public memory in the state. Unlike markers created much earlier, this marker passes judgement on a historical era or event, which is a relatively new occurrence in the realm of Alabama’s public memory sites. This is a concept that will be explored in a later section, but is worth mentioning because of its direct impact on how Indigenous history is told and granted a stake in Alabama’s public mind.

Buildings, physical monuments or memorials, and pieces of writing are all methods by which history is located and often preserved. When it comes to Indigenous groups in Alabama, however, there are not many of these forms of historic preservation to be found. This is where the argument for Alabama’s lack of Indigenous historical markers comes into play. Since

historic preservationists do not have much physical history from Indigenous people to gather information and make assertions about, they can not create historical markers for a history that they do not know. The justification for this point of view can even be found in some of the historical markers themselves. The “Words of Resistance” marker in Morgan County relays the story of the creation of “a platform to speak out against removal of Cherokee people from their homeland...” (Lang, Appendix AZ). Also in that marker, there is a clear distinction made that “Oral tradition...long told the history of the Cherokee people” (Lang, Appendix AZ). While it does acknowledge the creation of the Cherokee syllabary, this was a relatively late creation that would have missed much of their previous history. This argument provides an interesting new lens with which to analyze the rhetorical strength and intention of historical markers with regards to the history of Indigenous groups, not only in Alabama, but everywhere else too.

White History

The public history of White people in Alabama finds itself squarely in the middle of its Indigenous and Black counterparts in relation to time, but not necessarily in relation to public memory or recognition. The events, stories, people, and history of White Alabama are far and away the most represented in Alabama’s public memory. Of the roughly 3200 historical markers, monuments, memorials, and museums in Alabama, an overwhelming majority of them are dedicated to stories and events relating to the experiences of White

people in Alabama. This is no coincidence however, as White people were the group to essentially establish public memory in Alabama. In 1880, the earliest marker recorded in the Historical Marker Database in Alabama was established, commemorating the Confederacy and its soldiers from the Civil War (Lang, Appendix AAN). In this section, I will explore and assess the rhetorical characteristics of historical markers relating to the experiences and stories of White people in Alabama, as well as provide insight into the implications of those characteristics on other racial groups and their public memory.

White history in Alabama, unlike that of Indigenous and Black history, does not suffer from a lack of representation or recognition, but in fact the opposite. As the dominant group, White people were creating a multitude of markers that portrayed the White experience. However, in order to ensure that as much history as possible was preserved and recognized, the markers began to not only recognize extraordinary events, stories, or individuals, but also the more mundane stories of any given area. As we know, historical markers are often found in places of rather critical historical significance such as the “Here Stood Rosa Parks” marker in Montgomery County, but in a way solely attributable to the public memory of White history in Alabama, much more typical stories came to be commemorated (Lang, Appendix AY). For example, the “McCurdy House” marker in DeKalb County denotes the home of a local land and store owner, but the marker does not give any mention about special significance of the house or individual

outside of his business acumen. This is characteristic of many markers that are found all over Alabama, in that many ordinary stories, events, or individuals are commemorated as a way to preserve and portray a certain view or understanding of history as it aims to center, perhaps solely, the White experience.

There may be another explanation, however, as to the seeming pervasiveness of historical markers dealing with the wide span of White history and the White experience. This historical and even rhetorical bias may find some explanation in the racial and ethnic makeup of Alabama itself. According to the 2019 United States Census, the White population of the entire state of Alabama was roughly 69.1 percent, even getting as high as 95.7 percent in some counties such as Cullman County (US Census Bureau). With these relatively high modern percentages of White population, and presumably even higher percentages in the past, it is not necessarily unreasonable to find much higher rates of public historic preservation and discussion of White history. However, this argument’s merit is lessened when you examine the pieces of history that the markers leave out or even alter. As will be explored in a later section, some of these markers paint a vivid picture of White history that very clearly leaves out vital pieces of that history that may have a connection to other groups outside of the dominant White group. Further than that, there are even some markers, memorials, and monuments that may have actively been created to alter public perception and understanding of certain historical events or groups. So, although the relatively high

percentage of White people and history in Alabama may explain some of the disparate rates of commemoration, it does not absolve them from intentional rhetorical alteration of some of those histories.

As a prime example of that intentional rhetorical alteration, one may turn their attention to the multitude of Confederate monuments and memorials all around the state. Although the Civil War, and thus the Confederacy, only lasted for a few years in the mid 19th Century, most of the monuments and memorials dedicated to the Confederacy were not built until the early 20th century. Just as we must examine the language used in these monuments and memorials, the temporal quality of their creation must also be examined. For example, the "Sumter County Confederate Monument" not only serves as a memorial to the Confederacy, but also deems them "Our Confederate Heroes" (Lang, Appendix AAH). This monument aggrandizes the Confederacy after their separation from, conflict with, and eventual loss to the United States Army, but it, like many others, was not built soon after the war, but was built much later in 1908. Therefore this monument, and others like it, are clearly not created solely for the commemoration of the losing side of the Civil War, so then must also serve a secondary purpose. This purpose is that of self-glorification and historical erasure under the guise of historic preservation. The creators of that monument, and those like it, through their language, word choice, and even timing are attempting to stifle negative ideas about the Confederacy and push a White centered, positive history of the Confederacy that fits

their narrative. As Casey established, "public place," "public presence," and "public discussion" are all vital to rhetorical strategy and public memory and being able to control those aspects of a monument can allow you to push an idealized view of history that plays into your narrative, while actively hiding or even changing the actual ways in which that history occurred (Phillips).

Black History

Black history and its stake in Alabama's public memory provides some of the most interesting dynamics in terms of both its rhetorical capabilities and historical implications. Although it is the racial/ethnic group that has been around for the shortest amount of time of the three groups being examined here, Black history is certainly some of the most turbulent of them. Black history in Alabama began with the slave trade and later evolved, spanning the Civil War and its end bringing about their freedom, to educational advancement for Black Americans, to the Civil Rights movement, and so much more. Black Americans have so much stake not only in the history of Alabama, but its creation as well. However, this vital impact is not always clearly seen in the events, stories, and individuals that are recognized in Alabama's public memory. In this section, I will explore the state of public recognition of Black history in Alabama's public memory by examining the rhetorical and practical methods through which Black stories and individuals are shown to the public. I will also examine the ways in which Black history was at times

intentionally stifled to make room for a different narrative of history, as well as how that aspect of the telling of Black history has improved over time.

As established, sometimes these historical markers often portray a view of history that minimizes and is even sometimes completely devoid of the impact of Black people in Alabama. The “Working on Walnut Street” marker in Dallas County serves as an example of the glossing over of Black history and impact in an area. This marker describes a street in the local town’s business district that operated as the district’s “working backside” where lower class citizens and “enslaved laborers” worked (Lang, Appendix X). Instead of actually acknowledging or understanding the conditions of those workers, the street itself, or examining the reasons that street became that way, the marker focuses on the story of an upper class, White woman who published a successful story set in the area. Coincidentally, the marker does acknowledge the irony of that story because “this dirty back street was not a place frequented by fashionable young ladies like Anna” (Lang, Appendix X). A prime example of the extreme end of this is the “Chantilly Plantation” marker in Montgomery County that commemorates a large plantation in the area (Lang, Appendix AY). The marker recognizes the owner of the plantation and how the plantation received its name, but does not acknowledge the impact, importance, or even existence of the slaves held there. Though this marker was created in 2015, this is often characteristic of much older markers, which makes its more modern occurrence even

more interesting.

Regarding that more common older practice of historical markers being devoid of or minimizing the impact of Black history, it is worth exploring the ways in which this has changed over time. From the appendix of historical markers, a clear distinction is made between the years when Black history began to gain traction and positive recognition in Alabama’s public memory. This positive recognition began around the 1980s, several years after the events of the Civil Rights Movement. As public perception and opinion of Black history began to spin more positively, so did the rhetorical methodology of their stake in public memory. For example, compared to the markers in the previous section, the “Smithfield” marker in Jefferson county accomplishes a strikingly different goal. The marker recognizes a local community that “was carved from the Joseph Riley Smith plantation,” and was a prominent Black neighborhood that “provides an exceptional view of the emergence of a Black white-collar class in the city” (Lang, Appendix AK). This marker directly and positively attributes the Black community’s influence on history in the area through the story of the creation of a burgeoning new neighborhood on land that was once home to enslaved people and showing the successes and contributions of the Black families that lived there. These types of stories and markers are more characteristic of more contemporary creation as they center strong Black experiences through their words and decisions of what stories and individuals to commemorate.

Although Black stories have gained

much more traction over time, there still remain very clear differences between Black history and the other histories we have previously explored in the realm of public memory. One of the main differences that can be observed is that, regarding Black history, the only stories that get told are those of rather extraordinary events, individuals, or circumstances. Compared to White history, as we have established, Black history does not have room in the public sphere to tell relatively mundane stories and are thus relegated to only commemorating things that have extraordinary qualities. For example, compared to the “McCurdy House” marker explored above, many markers telling Black stories are much more involved, such as the “Africatown” marker in Mobile County. This marker tells the story of a community that was created in the county by ex-slaves who came in on the last documented slave ship in the country as a “haven to continue practicing their traditional African culture” (Lang, Appendix AW). For the most part, many markers dealing with Black history must tell these extraordinary stories because they have been neglected for so long, both intentionally and unintentionally, that we do not have information on other, perhaps more mundane yet still important, Black stories.

3. Gender

As with race and ethnicity, gender also plays a key role in the understanding of history, and most importantly for our needs, how history is portrayed or represented in public memory. The historic theme of a

dominant group that controls and interprets history in a way that fits its own narrative also extends into the idea of gender as a factor of history. In the same way, with time that dominant group has loosened its tight grip on their single portrayal of history and have allowed for more stories to come to light. However, there still remains to be seen a lot of histories that exist outside of the binary of our understanding of gender in Alabama, which will be explored later.

In this section, I will explore the representative histories of different genders in Alabama’s public memory. This spans from male dominated, or masculine history, to women’s history, and even, as previously stated, histories of groups that may exist outside of the binary understanding of gender. These histories will be evaluated through the rhetorical qualities of their public commemoration in an attempt to understand both why and how these histories are and have been portrayed in certain ways.

Men’s History

Men’s history in Alabama nearly mirrors the growth and representation of White history throughout the state. This is because, as White history is the dominant group regarding racial or ethnic histories and representation, such is Men’s history with that of gender representation. Histories regarding or relating to the stories, experiences, and individuals of men or masculinity make up an overwhelming majority of the history represented in Alabama’s public memory through the historical marker system. There are a few reasons as to why this is the case, which will be discussed later. In this section, I will

discuss a variety of reasons explaining the dominance and fortitude of male centered stories as well as the way in which these stories are portrayed rhetorically and the types of implications those rhetorical devices can have on the portrayal of the histories of other genders.

Like that of White stories, the stories of men and masculine ideas span from the mundane to the extraordinary. This is because, as established, the dominant group of any category, in an attempt to control the narrative, must adopt a storytelling method that overwhelms the market of public history. To do this, stories of that dominant group, though they may be of relatively little public significance, gain a stake in the public memory of the area in which they reside. For example, the “McMahon House” marker in Lawrence County denotes the home of “a Virginia-born cotton factor who divided his time between Courtland and New Orleans” (Lang, Appendix AN). This is a characteristic of many markers throughout the state, as they tell the story of seemingly arbitrary local men, with the justification of other external factors such as the “architectural significance” of the building style, while centering the narrative around the homeowner instead of the home itself. This is not to say that the markers do not represent extraordinary men’s history, as there are plenty of markers that recognize exceptional achievements or experiences of men, such as the “Fitzgerald Home” marker in Montgomery County that recognizes the home of nationally acclaimed author F Scott Fitzgerald (Lang, Appendix AY).

Perhaps even more important than the mundanity of stories told, is the

masculinity of those stories. Though some markers may not be explicitly related to the male gender, such as stories of certain male individuals, there are many markers that represent strikingly masculine stories and styles of history. Throughout the entire state, there are many markers that represent classically masculine events or themes such as war, military exploits or sites, and other instances of violence. A prime example of the commemoration of this masculine style of history can be found in the “Ogley-Stroud Massacre” marker found in Butler County. This marker recounts an attack on a local family by the infamous “Savannah Jack” in which he attacked the home of a local family and killed all but two people there (Lang, Appendix G). Although an argument could be made about the relative importance of the public recognition of this story, there is no doubt that it takes on and, whether intentionally or not, perpetuates traditionally masculine historic themes that give credence to the pervasiveness of male dominated history throughout the entire state of Alabama. Through the rhetorical decision to commemorate the stories and experiences of men, both normal and extraordinary, throughout the state’s history, as well as the overrepresentation of traditionally masculine themes, the public memory of Alabama is undoubtedly skewed towards the remembrance of men and that can affect what histories of other genders are represented and the ways in which those histories are perceived by the public.

All of this representation does not go without some explanation though, as one of the key reasons why men’s history is so well represented in Alabama’s public memory is

because for a long time, men were the only ones allowed to participate in much of society. For much of America, and thus Alabama's history, men were solely in control of many aspects of society, especially publicly recorded society, ranging from military service, to governmental representation, to things like education as well. This quality is very explicit in many of the war memorials found throughout Alabama. For example, the "Armed Forces Tribute" memorial marker in Chambers County specifies its recognition and commemoration of "the men...who have served in the armed forces of our country" (Lang, Appendix I). This specification makes sense in a way, however, because men were the only ones allowed to participate in active duty or combat in the military. This alone, however, cannot completely account for the overrepresentation that men's history has throughout the state. As established, the above marker shows an interesting rhetorical choice because although women were not allowed to serve in combat for the military, women have long played a vital role in the successes and operations of the military. Clearly, this historical bias does not absolve the creators of these markers for their rhetorical choices of ignoring, sometimes partially and other times completely, the impact and influence of the stories of other genders.

Women's History

Women have undoubtedly helped shape Alabama and its history, though their recognition in the public mind may not always be representative of that. Women's

history, under the hand of the dominant male group, has been largely underrepresented and even intentionally misrepresented in public memory. Many stories of women and their experiences, for a large period of time, were either missing from public commemoration or purposefully minimized by those in the position to commemorate them. In this section, I will discuss the changes that occurred in the public representation of women's history in Alabama over time. Through this, I will examine the particular ways in which some of these stories are represented, and how that has affected the way women's stories have historically been understood as well as the ways in which that impacts more contemporary representations of similar histories.

In a similar manner to the stories of other groups subjugated by the dominant, narrative shaping group, Women's history has expanded as time goes on in both scope and count. As previously established, men's history is wildly overrepresented as a result of a few causes, but namely because they have long been the only ones able to participate in much of publicly remembered society. Recently, however, much higher rates of markers regarding women's history have been cropping up and portraying a slice of history that has been relatively inert. Some particularly minute and nuanced examples of this also relate to war memorials, as explored in the previous section. Once, memorials referred to "the men" who served, but in recent history, many of these memorials have opted for a change of language that is now more inclusive of all those capable of serving the

military. The “Veterans Monument” marker in Wilcox County that was constructed in 2010 serves as a good example of this more inclusive change as it signifies its honor of “all persons who have served in the nation’s armed forces” (Lang, Appendix AAN). A shift to more inclusive language signifies an interesting and intentional rhetorical change on the part of these marker creators. Not only does this noticable change come in the form of inclusive language, but also through the stories and experiences of more women in the public sphere than in the past.

As women were more freely allowed to participate in different facets of society, the types of stories and experiences that could be publicly commemorated that related to women grew as well. The normalization of things like the more frequent and higher education of women as well as their admittance into more prominent positions like government officials gave them a greater stake in public memory than ever before. The “City of Florence Walk of Honor” provides an amazing example of the growing surge of recognition of women’s history and the new ways in which that history is portrayed publicly. The Walk of Honor is a set of markers that are dedicated to numerous popular and important individuals and among the group are many women. There are markers dedicated to women like Lynn Middleton Sibley, who “developed a 21st century community-based model for maternal and newborn health in low-resource countries,” as well as Fran McKee, “the first woman line officer promoted to Rear Admiral in the U.S. Navy” (Lang, Appendix AAN). These stories and more encompass the new commemoration of

women and their stories and experiences that is unlike any other marker before. They fully portray those women and their accomplishments as wholly theirs, ensuring that the public who sees those markers attain the full gravity of those women’s achievements.

Unfortunately, as we know, markers that related to or told the stories of women have not always been so widespread, inclusive, and all-encompassing. In many older markers, the slight representation of women that did exist often portrayed them in relation to their role at the house or to their husbands. One example of this is found at “The J.D. Holman House” marker in Dale County (Lang, Appendix W). The marker briefly mentions Holman’s wife, Susan Dowling Holman as she relates to her husband, their children, and their home. Granted, there may have been no significant history or portrayal of her, but this marker simply serves as an example of the scattered, and usually simple, representation of women in any context before their more widespread and positive representation came about. There does exist, however, an interesting exception to this rule at the “Wildwood” marker in Madison County. This marker, created in 1958 well before the new wave of women-centered, positive representation, glorifies Virginia Clay Clopton, an “Author and Social Leader,” and even uses language that does not confer ownership of herself by her husbands, even when they were powerful men such as Clement Comer Clay, a “United States Senator from Alabama” (Lang, Appendix AS). These types of discrepancies display a very interesting dynamic in both the structure of some of

these markers as well as the intention of some of their creators regarding the way in which they choose to actively promote certain understandings of events or individuals.

Transgender/Other Gender History

Exploring the history of genders that exist outside of our binary understanding of men and women proves itself to be a complicated task. As far as has been examined, there exists no semblance of transgender history or history of other genders in Alabama's public memory with regard to its markers, monuments, memorials, and museums. This comes as no surprise, however, because, as a marginalized group of relatively recent societal acknowledgement, the track record of Alabama's public history recognition does not bode well for their contemporary representation. This is not to say that transgender individuals or those who identify with other genders have had no impact on Alabama's history, but that these stories, if they do exist, go entirely unnoticed or underrepresented.

This is, however, not a trend that we envision to last forever. As other marginalized groups have gained a larger stake in the public landscape of Alabama's memory over time, we suspect something similar to occur with these groups of marginalized gender identities. With the historic increased inclusivity of Alabama's public memory, the data leads us to believe that the stories and experiences of transgender people and other gender identities will be recognized and portrayed positively at some point in the future. In a

similar manner to the changes that we have already explored with Alabama's public commemoration of histories like Black history, women's history, and Indigenous histories, we suspect that as society becomes more inclusive so will the public commemoration of once forgotten or hidden stories and people.

4. Timeline

The timeline of public memory in Alabama spans over a century and has constantly been evolving and changing. In the early years of Alabama's public memory, the narrative portrayed was very much so homogeneous in its audience and muse. It told the stories of White men, both mundane and extraordinary, to the masses of White men willing to listen. As time progresses, however, we see striking changes being made to not only the types of stories being told, but also to their intended audiences. Through the growing inclusivity of stories of historically marginalized groups, Alabama's public memory has shifted into a state where it is more representative, but in a way also more segregated than it had been before. In this section, I will acknowledge and define some distinct periods in Alabama's public history and explore their key characteristics. Though, as evidenced in the Appendices, there are many markers for which there is no indication of the date of their creation, there are still some evident boundaries between eras of marker creation that are very telling.

Alabama's public memory essentially began in the late 19th Century, around 1880, as monuments and memorials

of events and people from the Civil War began to crop up. As established, this landscape was created entirely by and for White men. In other words, White men in Alabama who wanted to glorify themselves created the public memory landscape as we recognize it today. Public history sites such as the “Confederate Dead of Wilcox County” monument in Wilcox County and the “Alabama Confederate Monument” marker in Montgomery County which were created in 1880 and 1898 respectively, commemorate the events of the Civil War, which happened only roughly 30 years prior, though there are no earlier public markers that denote other types of history (Lang, Appendix AAN, AY). This segment of Alabama’s public history extends into the early 20th century as well, until about 1939. These first roughly 30 years of the 20th century are also marked by the rapid creation of markers, monuments, and memorials dedicated to individuals and events of the Civil War. These markers clearly center around the stories and experiences of White men, who were, and even still are, the dominant group of Alabama’s public memory. As we explore later years though, we will come to see the ways in which these commemorated stories change.

The next key segment of Alabama’s public history that we will explore is found in the mid 20th Century, from around 1940-1969. This part of Alabama’s public history is more or less defined by similarly characterized markers, although the form and method of their creation changed greatly. The markers still clearly centered around the stories and experiences of White

men, but instead of being created by fringe groups, a few state recognized historical groups and commissions were established that handled the creation of many markers for the purpose of public commemoration rather than personal vindication. The first of these was the Alabama Historical Association (AHA), created in 1947 and serves as “the oldest statewide historical society in Alabama” (Alabama History). This group has its hand in the creation of many markers all across the state as it attempts to commemorate stories through their “interest in Alabama history and a belief in its value for society today” (Alabama History). The other major group created was the Alabama Historical Commission (AHC), which was established in 1966 by Alabama Governor George Wallace (Alabama Historical Commission). This group has a little more stake in the physical realm of Alabama’s public history, as their mission is accomplished through “Preservation and promotion of state-owned historic sites as public attractions; and, statewide programs to assist people, groups, towns, and cities with local preservation activities” (Alabama Historical Commission). A key difference between these two groups is the AHA’s more heavy involvement with marker creation and the AHC’s stronger focus on these sites as public attractions such as museums. Due to this difference, many of these markers are more representative of the AHA and their narrative. This narrative, however, evolves and changes as time goes on, as we will explore in the following paragraphs.

The third well-defined era of Alabama’s public history is found in the late

20th Century, from roughly 1970-1999. This era is defined by the greatest change in both the content and form of these historical markers up to that point. The late 1970s and 1980s especially saw a great increase in the recognition of histories outside the White, male dominant group. This era saw markers created like the “Carrie A. Tuggle” memorial in Jefferson County, created in 1979, which honored the memory and accomplishments of Carrie Tuggle, a local, Black, female educator (Lang, Appendix AK). This change, while noticeable at the individual marker level, was also represented in the creation of branches of historical groups like those discussed above. In 1984, the AHC created the Black Heritage Council “to advocate and advise on the preservation of African-American historic places in Alabama” (Alabama Historical Commission). These types of inclusive change are very representative of this specific era, and put Alabama’s public memory on the track we see it today, telling the stories of more and more people than it ever has. These changes continue to occur, and even shape the next era that will be discussed.

The fourth and final distinct era of Alabama’s public history that will be explored is the contemporary era, spanning from roughly 2000 to the present day. The markers created in this era have been the most inclusive and representative of all the previous eras, providing the widest view of Alabama’s public history that has ever been seen. As established in previous sections, the history of long ignored or misrepresented groups have, over time, come to be not only more represented, but more accurately and

positively represented as well. A clear example of this change is the massive uptick in markers relating to stories, experiences, and prominent individuals of the Civil Rights Movement in locations significant to the movement. In addition to record levels of inclusivity, another defining characteristic of this era is that it holds the first examples of removal of history. This removal comes in the form of the taking down of markers and monuments such as Confederate monuments, in favor of a new, less glorified, and more accurate portrayal of history than that put forward by a dominant, self-glorifying, narrative-controlling group. These new events provide an interesting context to continue looking at public history through, as it is an entirely recent development and can completely alter the way in which we understand how history is recognized rhetorically and publicly.

Regarding the claim made at the beginning of the section, of Alabama’s public memory shifting from a homogeneous state to a more representative, albeit more segregated amalgam, there are some key characteristics that need to be evaluated. In this sense, segregation is more referential to the state of marginalized histories as only being a more recent development, as well as their telling of only exceptional marginalized stories. This new style of commemoration has unwittingly created a separation in the methods and types of storytelling that is represented throughout the state, although these methods and stories are now far more inclusive. It creates an interesting proposition to understand how, in an attempt to rectify misrepresentation and ignorance, instead of

bringing about unification, a new form of stratification has emerged.

5. Conclusion

Alabama has had a long and interesting history regarding the evolving state of its public memory and the rhetorical methodology behind that commemoration. It has many different facets, spanning years as well as topics and groups, with constantly changing perspectives. From its early years of mass commemoration and glorification of the stories of predominantly White men, to its more contemporary inclusivity and representation of marginalized stories, Alabama's public history has gone through drastic changes.

Alabama's public representation of its racial and ethnic makeup has seen Indigenous representation as centered around their experiences with White settlers, while also acknowledging possibilities of the causes of the lack of preservation of those groups. It has seen the continued focus on White groups, as they were and are the

dominant group that controls the historical narrative. It has also seen the misrepresentation of Black groups and, over time, the recognition and attempted reconciliation of the telling of Black stories.

In another aspect, Alabama's recognition of gender history has experienced these changes as well. The male-dominated and masculine form of history has long been the most represented because, as with White history, men's history also belongs to the dominant group. Women's history has come into light more contemporarily as they have gained more stake in society and its working over time. The histories of transgender and other genders, however, remains unrepresented, but hopefully as with other marginalized groups, as time continues we will see their stories come to light in the public sphere as well.

These changes, though pushing the envelope of diversity in Alabama's public mind through both content and form, have interestingly created a new style of stratification that permeates the new rhetorical landscape of public memory in Alabama.

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