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Absent Yet Present: Jazzland of New Orleans and the Rhetoric of Public Memory A Documentary Film

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Project Title:

*Absent Yet Present: Jazzland of New Orleans and the Rhetoric of Public Memory
A Documentary Film*

Faculty Name, Rank, Department:

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Proposal Identifier:

RCEU19-CM-JAW-01

Project Description:

Project Backstory:

In August 2005, Hurricane Katrina battered the Gulf Coast region of the United States. The city of New Orleans suffered the effects of not only Katrina's power, but also of broken levees. Historic flooding of the city followed, as 80% of the city was underwater for more than two weeks. One location in New Orleans East, an amusement park, Jazzland: Six Flags Over New Orleans, was left to ruin for years. The damage to the park was identified as a total loss and the site was abandoned by Six Flags, Inc. as the company broke their lease with the city and filed for bankruptcy protection. Since 2005, the park has remained as a ghostly reminder for residents of the failure of city officials to productively move forward following the deleterious effects of the storm. Numerous business proposals to redevelop the site have failed. Movie studios have rented the site for large budget productions. Hundreds of urban explorers illegally trespass to the site, claiming it is a relic to be preserved as living history, while others claim it to be haunted.

Project Motivation:

Marita Sturken claims that American culture processes trauma and violence via a "tourism of history."¹ Souvenirs, museums, re-enactments, and more steer the meaning of such events towards patriotic and ideological purposes. Over time, these purposes become clearer albeit their meaning(s) remain contested. When we consider spaces that have been affected by disasters, it is important to note that many such sites have been transformed into formalized and "sanctioned" places to visit. Museums, memorials, parks, and monuments erected amongst rows of flowers is often the imagery evoked.

¹ Marita Sturken: *Tourists of History: Memory, Kitsch, & Consumerism from Oklahoma City to Ground Zero* (2007).

These sites have been merged with material artifacts and placards to restore an authoritative power to the history tellers. Their power resides in the art of curation where all those who enter must exit through the gift shop. Careful discourses are generated at such sites. They can argue for specific kinds of historicity and memory, speak to things both absent and present. These places invite the curious. They offer the chance to interact with history. They also isolate. Take, for example, The Sixth Floor Museum in Dallas, housed inside the original physical structure of the Texas School Book Depository, where Oswald allegedly fired shots at JFK in 1963. You can visit the sixth floor and observe the spot where Oswald watched the motorcade. The area is carefully re-constructed to invite exchange with our imaginations; however, it is also encased inside a giant glass box. We can't get too close to history at these sites. We remain at a distance.

What of sites that have not been through such formal curation? What are we to make of sites that have been abandoned, to decay and ruin? Alice Mah² argues that abandoned spaces are in a state of "ruination" as opposed to being ruins. The transition of a space, from operational/open to abandoned/closed offers a unique window to apply a rhetorical frame; however, the Jazzland site, as one will see, is neither open nor closed, but rather, liminal. It is a site of "in-betweens" with multiple meanings and implications both to Louisianans as well as the curious who explore the city and as well as public culture. Jazzland is a mnemonic artifact that performs multiple identities in public memory and culture that make it a source of contested meanings.

Current Status/Work on the Project:

A preliminary archive of oral interviews, compiled by Dr. Watson from 2009-2013.

In the spring of 2019, UAH students enrolled in CM360 Advanced Video Production, will travel to New Orleans to function as production crew in order to complete principle photography for the project.

Project Objective:

The post-production of a feature-length documentary film about the rhetorical, social, and cultural power of Jazzland to be distributed or broadcast is the goal.

Project Goals:

The first goal of the project is to research and structure supporting material (interviews, articles, database findings, media, visuals) to supplement existing footage.

The second goal of the project is to edit these materials using Adobe Premiere, After Effects, Audition, and other pertinent filmmaking software for the purposes of formal post-production on the documentary film.

² Alice Mah: *Industrial Ruination, Community, and Place: Landscapes and Legacies of Urban Decline* (2012).

A student working on this project will have the following responsibilities:

“Associate Producer” Duties: (two days a week)

Research/Organization/Structuring archival media and documentation of the supporting material used in the movie.

Secure formal authorization and accreditation of any supporting materials for use.

Coordinate communication between the project and potential broadcast outlets (ex-PBS).

“Video Editing” Duties: (three days a week)

Assemble, cut, and correct visual and aural media for use in the film.

A student working on this project will make the following tangible contributions:

Professional/Creative accreditation as Associate Producer and/or Editor for the film

Craft a paper or poster presentation to be given at either the SSCA (Southern States Communication Association) conference or the ACA (Alabama Communication Association) conference in 2020.

A student working on this project will receive experience/skills of:

Deeper understanding of the rhetoric of public memory, culture, and the socio-political history of New Orleans.

Deeper understanding/experiential learning of the role of a producer of a documentary film.

Deeper understanding/experiential learning of the research and post-production process of making a feature documentary film.

Deeper understanding/experiential learning of professional video editing software and technologies, from design to implementation.

***REQUIRED:** Student rank of Junior or Above. **PREFERRED:** 1-2 years of coursework in Communication Arts, Art, English, History, or other related field. Have taken CM260. Have awareness/competencies of video or media related technologies.*

The student will be working in direct mentorship to me as the director and executive producer of the project. Any necessary training in research or technology skills will be executed/taught by me.