

Research and Creative Experience for Undergraduates Program (RCEU) Summer 2021

The Rhetorical Landscape of Public Memory in Alabama

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Communication Arts

Introduction

Recently, there has been much controversy surrounding public sites of history, such as the Confederate statue pictured here. This has sparked much debate about the ways in which 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 that are commemorated in Alabama's public memory, but also the ways in which these events are portrayed.

Methodology

To begin, I added every historical marker, memorial, monument, and museum in every county in Alabama into a database that denoted different characteristics of each site, as seen here. This database can be used in a variety of ways, such as purely referential in nature, or analytical too as shown in this project. After completing the database, I analyzed all the information and compiled it into a research paper that draws conclusions about the larger picture of Alabama's history that is painted through its sites of public commemoration.



1. Photo from: Gattis, Paul. "Madison County 'looking at every option' to Relocate Confederate Monument," 2020.

Key Findings

- Public commemoration of history in Alabama began shortly after the end of the Civil War in the early 1870s
- White, male history was and still is by far the dominant force in what stories are memorialized
- As time has passed, Alabama's public memory has become more diverse, including stories of Black, Indigenous, and Women's histories
- There is still a long way to go for Alabama's public memory to be more representative, but the trends are promising for the future

Conclusion

By understanding the stories that are chosen for public commemoration, we can understand a lot about the state of Alabama. These sites can show us social power dynamics, growth and diversity of ideas, as well as the types of things that Alabama residents and historians deem important. By critically analyzing these memory sites, we argue over a grand picture of the state of Alabama for what it has valued from its past, what it is articulating about its present and presence, and what that tells us as we face our future.

Metadata Fields within Google Spreadsheet

H	I
Gender	Description
	Commemorates the building of a house by an important local figure, Absalom Pratt, and gives some of his personal history
	Commemorates the construction of a large furnace by a local iron industry
	Denotes these furnaces as vital to the production of iron for the Confederacy at Selma during the Civil War
	Commemorates the building of a local farmhouse by Wilson Hayes
	Denotes a house built and moved to the Brierfield area that holds local and architectural significance
	Commemorates the construction of the local cemetery that is older than the town it is located in
	Commemorates the establishment of a local school for men and women
	Provides further information on the aforementioned school
	Commemorates the establishment of the town of Belle Ellen by a coal and iron company
	Commemorates the establishment of the town of Blocton and the coke ovens that drove its economy
	Commemorates the establishment of two local mining towns
	Commemorates the establishment and history of the local town of West Blocton
	Commemorates the establishment and history of the local town of Woodstock

	Name	Location	Classification	Ind/Grp/Evnt	Lcl/St/Rgn/Natl	Date	Race
1							
2							
3	Absalom Pratt House	Montevallo Road, Brierfield, AL	Marker	Event/Individual	Local	2000	
4	Bibb Furnace	240 Furnace Parkway, Brierfield, AL	Marker	Event	Local	Unlisted	
5	Bibb Naval Furnaces/Brierfield Furnaces	Montevallo Road, Brierfield, AL	Marker	Event	Local	1953	
6	Hayes-Morton House	240 Furnace Parkway, Brierfield, AL	Marker	Event	Local	Unlisted	
7	Sunshine & Dorothy Morton House	240 Furnace Parkway, Brierfield, AL	Marker	Event	Local	Unlisted	
8	Centreville Cemetery	Mill Street, Centreville, AL	Marker	Event	Local	2012 **	
9	Site of Six Mile Male and Female Academy	Sixmile School Road, Six Mile, AL	Marker	Event	Local	Unlisted	
10	Six Mile Male & Female Academy Site	1094 Montevallo Road, Centreville, AL	Marker	Event	Local	1983	
11	Belle Ellen	Cahaba River Drive, West Blocton, AL	Marker	Event	Local	2000	
12	Blocton/Blocton Coke Ovens	Blocton Bypass, West Blocton, AL	Marker	Event	Local	1998	
13	Piper/Coleanor	Cahaba River Drive, West Blocton, AL	Marker	Event	Local	2000	
14	West Blocton, Alabama	1139 Main Street, West Blocton, AL	Marker	Event	Local	2010	
15	Town of Woodstock	Alabama Route 5, Woodstock, AL	Marker	Event	Local	2010	

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