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# EDITORIAL FOREWORD

*Festina Lente: With all deliberate haste*

AKEL ISMAIL KAHERA

This issue of the Journal of History & Culture marks the tenth year of the Texas Institute for the Preservation of History & Culture (TIPHC). On May 26, 1999 the 76th Texas Legislature created TIPHC under House Bill 889. The Legislature recognized the need to enrich and preserve the history of African-Americans in the State of Texas and beyond, because much of the historical material was rapidly disappearing, and because insufficient numbers of trained professionals are engaged in research, resource management and preservation. It is fair to say that the primary mission of TIPHC is to enhance and build its capacity to become the primary repository of African-American history and culture in Texas; to disseminate knowledge; to promote research and investigation “by any means necessary.” The Journal of History & Culture concerns itself with our understanding of time, space and motion as evidenced in a myriad of cultural milieus attendant to the African Americans but primarily reflected in this group’s relationship to the built environment. Within these cultural environments lies the total pattern of their development and engenders their capacity to learn, formulate and transmit knowledge to succeeding generations through the design and use of tools, artifacts and systems of abstract thought. The focus of the Journal of History & Culture lies not only with the research activities of collecting, displaying and disseminating knowledge of the history and culture of African Americans, but similar to the learning activities that happens in the design studio or classrooms, it goes to the other spectrum of pedagogy, which is to confront historical phenomenon and theory as well in an attempt to deal with how the academy and the world understands and interprets the cultural transition of African-American and Texans in a given space over time.

Before briefly discussing the essays in this issue, we reiterate two crucial points: first the value of public education to promote scholarship and to combat the paucity of knowledge available to society; secondly the failure to act with all deliberate haste could easily provoke disastrous intellectual consequences for future generations. In the “The Education Debate” Carla Jackson Bell sets the tenor with regards to some of the ideas discussed throughout many of the schools of architecture today especially Historically Black Colleges and Universities schools of architecture. She is after all arguing about the value of an architectural education and sadly, the exclusion of women from the profession—a problem we are still confronted with today, in spite of the widespread appropriation of techno-science. Above all in the 19th century the individual choice of undereducated blacks, men and women,

to gain knowledge, and indeed self-empowerment was legitimate. However this progressive ideal provoked an important discussion between Booker T. Washington and W.E. B. Dubois concerning racial and social justice, labor and intellectual propriety.

In “Illuminating the Invisible”, Benjamin Flowers engages us with a debate about the power hierarchies of architecture, race and the production of space which transgress many boundaries—poignantly described by Ralph Ellison in the *Invisible Man*. Because much of this type of discussion is absent from the postmodern discourse, it is no accident that this discursive debate carries enormous weight both in the academy, the public domain, and in contemporary society—especially how the tenets of architecture and public space affect behavior.

In contrast, “If you fly too close to the sun,” critiques the domain of Eurocentric power and the domain of knowledge as portrayed in Raphael’s fresco *The School of Athens*. Toni Morrison introduces us to a similar debate in *The Bluest Eye*; in a word it is a reminder of human betrayal rooted in the abuse of power. Raphael has left no detail account of *The School of Athens* so this interpretation posits an end point: the abuse of power. At the heart of the discourse is the Promethean myth; the tacit approval of the myth among individual architects today sheds light on architectural dystopia and intellectual propaganda.

“Using science to uncover history,” is an important project that is often overlooked. The essay allows us to revisit the social history and the power of burial places. In this exchange the authors investigate the terrain of a burial place that was once part of the plantation milieu to illustrate the value of topography as a project to be realized in slave archeology. The investigation of a burial place also suggests the possibility of an infinite number of historical tropes, the institution of slavery and the community of slaves and former slaves whose collective activity is largely responsible for the wealth of this nation.

In his essay “Human activity and symbolic structures,” Arsenio Rodrigues presents an in-depth study of the experiences and activities of people at the Bonfire Memorial. By way of observation, kinesics, proxemics and photography it examines how people interact with the physical characteristics of the memorial to determine a chronology of experiences within a setting.

Maybe no theory captures the whole truth about the power of knowledge, and certainly no one has really been able to account for the fact that it is a human universal, which can be abolished in one form only to re-emerge in another. Each essay in this volume makes a number of serious epistemological suggestions, which sheds light on the frailty of human understanding, and above all human constraints conditioned by space and time. Finally, I would like to thank all those who have expressed a deep commitment to the growth of TIPHC.



# THE EDUCATIONAL DEBATE...

*On the “Edumacted” Black Architect*

CARLA JACKSON BELL, Ph.D.

## Abstract

*The educational debate between Washington and Du Bois is a historical perspective which highlights the disagreement in America on the philosophy and purpose of education for Blacks, particularly women, in early 19<sup>th</sup> century America. It places a liberal arts education versus an industrial education, a polarization that had and still has broad implications for professional programs. In this article, the debate is reflected in a subsequent architectural apprenticeship approach (i.e., master builder training) and its omission in modern architecture education which has resulted in the “edumaction” of Black architects. The scholarly literature argues that Washington’s master builder training made entry into the field of architecture difficult for women. Today, Black women continue to remain underrepresented in the ranks of licensed architects, and the most renowned White schools of architecture have a low percentage of Black students. This article is particularly directed toward minorities and women, especially Black women, in architecture, planning, and construction programs who may experience special hardships such as isolation, marginalization, stereotyping, and discrimination. It is also directed to the teachers who train these students to contextualize the current problems their minority and Black women students face.*

## Introduction

History reveals that prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, most Blacks were not educated in colleges and universities, and Blacks were barred for the most part from higher education. A series of normal schools were created to produce Black teachers to teach the untaught. Systematically, these schools were intended to provide Blacks with an “edumaction”—“ed — you — macation”— or just simply the means to “educate — yourself.”<sup>1</sup>

An “edumaction” has and is still taking place amongst America’s disfranchised populace (i.e., Black students), especially in public elementary and high schools. Based on the history, I question if Black students in these schools have a fair chance at an equitable and gainful education instead of remaining in schools that don’t necessarily work for them?

Black students still suffer from an educational set of assumptions created in the 19<sup>th</sup> century about what was appropriate for their education. Understanding this evolution is best done by looking at the educational debate



between Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois, essentially a debate between an industrial/trade education and a liberal arts education. Washington believed in education in the crafts, industrial and farming skills, and the cultivation of the virtues of patience, enterprise and thrift.<sup>2</sup> On the contrary, Du Bois believed that a liberal arts education was more important than an industrial education.<sup>3</sup>

After 1865, Blacks could attend their own grammar and normal schools; then they could enroll in Black high schools. The French concept of an “*école normale*” was to provide a model school with model classrooms to teach model teaching practices to its student teachers.<sup>4</sup> Washington, however, identified these Black normal schools as inadequately equipped, illogically distributed, and of varying efficiency and grade.<sup>5</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois also believed that these Black schools were doing little more than industrial training, and the public schools were training but a third of Black students who ought to be in them and training these too often poorly.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the debate began with Washington’s and Du Bois’s views on whether Blacks should be taught by Black teachers in their own normal schools or whether they should be taught in liberal arts colleges with the same rights as Whites. Either way, because of the low percentage of licensed Black architects, schools of architecture have not worked very much for Blacks — resulting in what is called the “*edumaction*” of Blacks.

History reveals that schools for higher training of Black students were later developed to broaden the development of Blacks.<sup>7</sup> This development was reached with different degrees of speed in different institutions: Hampton Institute in Hampton, Virginia, started in 1861; Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, started in 1871, Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama, started in 1881; and Spelman Seminary began in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1881. Upon recommendation of Hampton founder Sam Armstrong, Booker T. Washington was appointed as the first leader of the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute. Washington believed that education was a crucial key to Blacks rising within the social and economic structure of the United States. He rose into a nationally prominent role as spokesman and leader for Blacks. The four schools—Tuskegee Institute, Hampton Institute, Fisk University, and Spelman Seminary—focused on what Washington termed “maintaining the standards” of minor training by giving teachers and leaders the best practicable training, and above all, furnishing the Blacks’ world with adequate standards of American culture. By 1900, some 34 Black Americans had completed one year or more of an industrial trade from one of the four schools.

After slavery, the industrial system was developed that taught Black men an industrial trade (i.e., master builder training) and completed a variety of building projects.<sup>8</sup> After slavery in the New World, many Blacks



**Booker T. Washington**  
(Figure 1) Image courtesy of the  
Tuskegee University Archives



**W.E.B. DuBois**  
(Figure 2) Image courtesy of the Prints &  
Photographs Division, Library of Congress



**Black children studying grammar at Children House School** (Figure 3) Image courtesy of the  
Tuskegee University Archives



**Master builder training** (Figures 4 and 5)  
Images courtesy of the Tuskegee University Archives



**Black girls' industries sewing class** (Figure 6)  
Image courtesy of the Tuskegee University Archives

have been subjected to substandard education as compared to their European American counterparts. From this apprenticeship style of teaching, Washington organized the Industrial Department in 1885, and by the 1920s the master builder training was completely omitted from Black institutions due to Euro-centric influences and was never recognized in White institutions. Beginning in the 1920s, architecture was emphasized and taught as a science, art, and professional practice. Euro-centric influences dominated the architecture curriculum; therefore, the profession was aimed at Euro-American males. The modern-day profession of architecture is a direct descendant of the patronage system; it is based on a European model that has been thoroughly Americanized. Moreover, history reveals that Washington's apprenticeship approach became a catalyst for omitting Black women from the fields of architecture design, planning and construction. Excluding the master builder approach, history also documents that the apprenticeship approach is still practiced in architecture programs across the country. The omission of Black women in these fields has disfranchised the Black populace and has subsequently resulted in the "*edumaction*" of Black architects.

In post-secondary institutions outside of Black schools of architecture, most students of color are still a distinct minority, especially Black women. Black women remain the most underrepresented group in the rankings of licensed architects in the United States. In the article "The Canon and the Void: Gender, Race, and Architectural History Texts," Meltem Gurel and Kathryn Anthony mentioned that architectural history texts play a significant role in conveying the culture, norms, and values of the architectural discipline to students. This study of architectural history texts indicated that critical thinking continues to remain marginal to the grand narrative of architecture.<sup>9</sup> Once minorities get into architecture school, they are exposed mostly to the Euro-American history of American architecture. They are not exposed to the history of Blacks as builders, and they are not given any sense of the cultural relevance and practice of this field.

The dichotomy between Washington's and Du Bois' educational approaches played itself out, and the education of Blacks in modern programs have changed to and been directed by a Euro-centric (i.e., White cultural canon). David Nicol and Simon Pilling argued that architecture education is isolated according to cultural, gender, and curriculum development; therefore, students' understanding and communication of architecture with each other—and later, with clients—are inadequate.<sup>10</sup> C. B. Steiner also stated "It is not what is in and out of the canon, but rather the social structure of the canon itself that must be reconsidered"<sup>11</sup> In recent years, numerous publications have spotlighted the importance of women and Blacks as critics, creators, and consumers of the built environment.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, the canon is decidedly European.<sup>13</sup> I believe that the debate should be furthered by reviewing and

supplementing current views that may affect the education of Blacks architects, planners and constructors, particularly women, in 21<sup>st</sup> century America and beyond.

### **Booker T. Washington's Views**

In the United States, the greatest problem of Black education sprang up from the more practical question of work, the inevitable economic quandary that faces a people in the transition from slavery to freedom, and especially those who make that change amid hate and prejudice, lawlessness, and ruthless competition.<sup>14</sup> As mentioned earlier in the article, a series of normal schools were designed to produce Black teachers to teach the untaught. From these schools arose a single generation of 30 thousand Black teachers in the South which started the teaching and learning transition to overcome illiteracy for a majority of Blacks in the United States.<sup>15</sup> This systematic plan made Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute (later Tuskegee Institute and now Tuskegee University) possible. Founded in 1881 by Washington, the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute inculcated the principles of providing practical training for Blacks and helping them develop economic self-reliance through the mastery of manual trades such as the training of master builders and agricultural skills.<sup>16</sup>

Washington adopted an apprenticeship approach in the Tuskegee Industrial Department, which would prepare Blacks for the role of the master builder.<sup>17</sup> Because of the interest in immediate economic goals contained in Washington's educational approach, Whites did not realize that Washington anticipated the complete acceptance and integration of Blacks into American life. He believed Blacks, starting with so little, would have to begin at the bottom and work up gradually to achieve positions of power and responsibility before they could demand equal citizenship—even if it meant temporarily assuming a position of inferiority. Washington argued that, despite years of White brutalization, Blacks must improve their own lot in life, through discipline, industry, and hard work. However, one of the most important requirements to receive training at Tuskegee was that of labor. Washington's apprenticeship approach represented a form of labor that assumed the presence of an expert who worked alongside trainees and/or set up situations that would cause trainees to work on problems even before fully understanding them.<sup>18</sup> Blacks were required to perform some manual labor “not only to develop self-discipline but also to develop healthy respect for honest labor.”<sup>19</sup> Washington believed in the style of training that makes use of the student's psychomotor and cognitive learning domains of “learning by doing.”<sup>20</sup> At this point, Washington's definition of an educated Black person had similarities to John Dewey's belief that a human should not be at a mindless grueling laborer without having some education in the arts and classics of academia and be able to broaden his or her morals



**Robert Robinson Taylor**  
*(Figure 7) Image courtesy of the  
 Tuskegee University Archives*



**Mechanical drawing and architecture classes**  
*(Figures 8 and 9) Images courtesy of the Tuskegee University Archives*

and ethics for the betterment of society.<sup>21</sup> The David Snedden-Charles Prosser philosophy also emerged of teaching more industrial arts and technical skills. Charles Prosser, known as the Father of Vocational Education, made remarks at the Tuskegee Chapel presided over by Washington, “There are two kinds of education: liberal education and vocational education.” “Liberal education is the kind we get in the regular public schools and the colleges and universities, and vocational education is education that tries to fit directly men and women for the callings of life.” “Effective vocational education requires practice and thinking about practice, doing and studying about doing; practice and the theory of practice.”<sup>22</sup>

In order to change the perception of Blacks and incorporate the admired views of Dewey and the Snedden-Prosser philosophy, Washington recruited faculty at the head of each of the 25 industrial departments to provide an intelligent and competent instructor to teach the students practical trades. Between 1899 and 1900, Tuskegee’s Tailoring in the Industrial Department was opened only to women. Washington’s program stuck to training male students as master builders even when the non-minority schools were becoming more and more professional in their educational approach following a more liberal education based on Euro-centric principles that did admit women into their programs. The master builder serving as both project designer and builder was the earliest form of infrastructure delivery.<sup>23</sup> History reveals that Design-build is one of the oldest curriculums in a construction program since developing from the master builder training.<sup>24</sup> To lead away from the educational exploitation of the Black masses, Washington believed in the constant aim to teach students how to put brains into every process of labor, how to bring their knowledge of mathematics and the sciences into building and how to dispense as soon as possible with the old form of ante-bellum labor.<sup>25</sup> Therefore between 1899 and 1900, Washington divided the Industrial Department and added the Mechanical Drawing and Architectural Drawing.

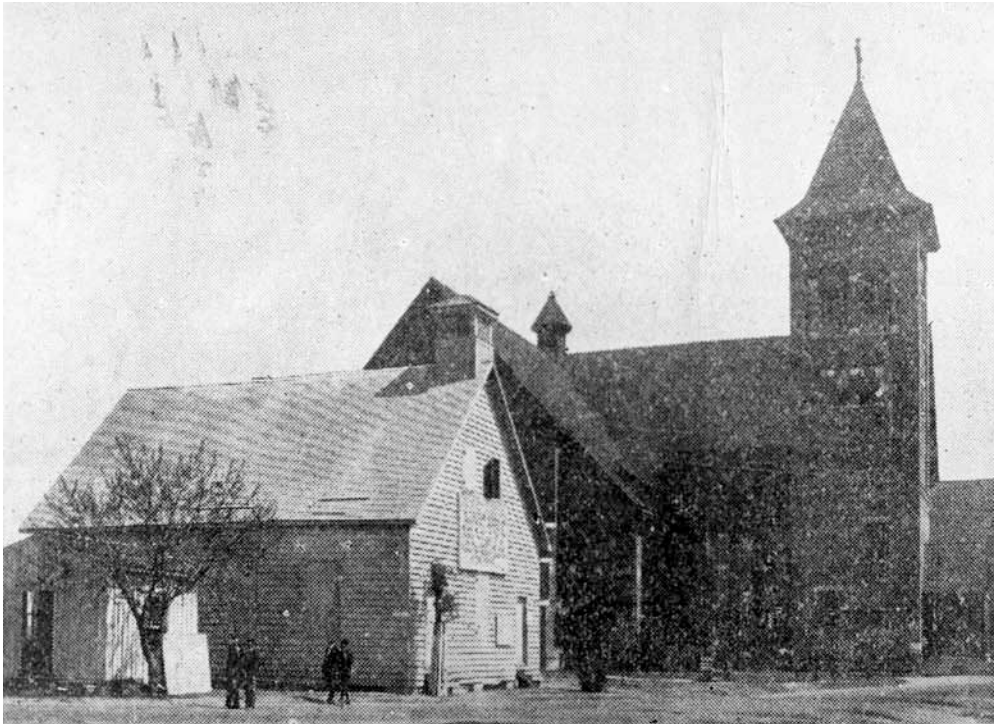
In Washington’s Mechanical Industries Department, the faculty taught students the underlying principles of that industry, mathematics and the mechanical and architectural drawing.<sup>26</sup> In 1901 Washington named Robert R. Taylor, valedictorian at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) School of Architecture and the first known Black architecture graduate from Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, to become the first director of Mechanical Industries for men.<sup>27</sup> Taylor’s architecture drawing classes at Tuskegee were essentially the same classes offered at MIT and Cornell at that time.<sup>28</sup> Between 1900 and 1909, Taylor added William Pittman (former student), Wallace Rayfield (Pratt Institute graduate), and Vertner Tandy (Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute and Cornell graduate and the first Black licensed architect in the state of New York) to the architecture faculty at Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, and David Williston (Cornell graduate) was hired in landscape architecture. In 1902, Tuskegee

graduate John Lankford became the first Black licensed architect in Washington, D.C., specializing in the design of churches and fraternal organizations. He was appointed supervising architect for the A.M.E. church in 1908 to approve the design and construction of all churches built nationwide.<sup>29</sup>

Under the tutelage of the Tuskegee faculty, male students made the bricks for the first Tuskegee Chapel built in 1906. In Washington's views, students should be trained to be master builders, which enabled them to have the experience to understand fundamental construction principles and techniques to know what could be built and how to build it. In the article "The Awakening of the Negro," Washington stated that a large part of the timber was sawed by male students at the sawmill; the plans were drawn by the teacher of architecture and mechanical drawing; and students did the brick-masonry, plastering, painting, carpentry work, tinning, slating, and made most of the furniture.<sup>30</sup> Washington passionately believed that it was essential that he first create architects—as opposed to merely carpenters and bricklayers.<sup>31</sup>

In the erection of the Tuskegee Chapel, instead of letting the money which was given to the project go to outside funding, Washington made money by accomplishing three objectives: first, providing the chapel to worship; second, giving the students a chance to get a practical knowledge of the trades connected with building; and third, enabling them to earn something toward the payment of board while receiving educational and industrial training.<sup>32</sup> Practically, Washington mentioned that the whole chapel was built and furnished by male student labor; the school had the building for permanent use; and the students had knowledge of the trades employed in its construction. History reveals that all but three of the thirty buildings on the grounds had been erected by the male students while the women to a large extent made, mended, and laundered the clothing of the young men, and thus were taught important industries.<sup>33</sup> According to Vincent McKenzie, former librarian at Tuskegee and Auburn, only until the late 1930s, Tuskegee's architecture program was the first and only program to admit Black women.<sup>34</sup>

The literature urges that Washington's apprenticeship approach made it difficult for women to enter the field of architecture. However, in 1933 degree courses were offered in architecture and building construction to men and women. These programs provided Tuskegee students with the confidence and skills to receive architecture- and construction-based training. McKenzie mentioned that there were four women enrolled in architecture in 1934: Virginia Adams-Driver, Cornelia Bowen, Ellen McCullough, and Alice Torbert-Scott. McKenzie stated that Howard University, Washington, D. C., graduated Alma Murray Carlisle and Nada Jones Williams, its first two Black women in architecture in 1950.<sup>35</sup> In 1967 Sandra Moore became the first African-American female to graduate in architecture from Tuskegee Institute. By 1986 only 36 African-American women graduated from Tuskegee Institute



**First Tuskegee Chapel**  
*(Figure 10) Image courtesy of the  
 Tuskegee University Archives*



**Industries plastering classes**  
*(Figures 11 and 12) Images courtesy of the  
 Tuskegee University Archives*



in architecture. Tuskegee hired me as its first female tenure-track professor in 1991. Between 1967 and 2004, only 112 women graduated with the architecture degree from Tuskegee; only seven of those graduates earned the master of architecture degree.

Washington's architecture program was highly regarded as a cognitive developmental conceptualization in the making of drawings necessary to produce architecture at Tuskegee.<sup>36</sup> This cognitive developmental method of contracting eliminated the contractual separation of design and construction was inherent in Tuskegee's architecture program. By the 1920s, Tuskegee had given up the idea of maintaining the master builder training and had solidly adopted the White, elite model of universities like Harvard, MIT and Yale. White schools were eager to distance the role of the architect from that of the builder to the maximum extent possible.<sup>37</sup> At this point in White schools, most students of color were a distinct minority, especially Black women. By the 1930s, the outcome of Black and White architecture programs was to promote criteria that involved students in making professional architecture judgments in their designs, formed in part through the process of socialization that occurs within the design studio and schools and perpetuated within the architectural community as a whole.<sup>38</sup>

Between Robert Taylor's arrival at Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute in 1892 and Washington's death in 1915, design and construction of the Tuskegee campus was the largest concentrated physical enterprise in America built from the ground up by Blacks for its intended Black use and occupancy.<sup>39</sup> By 1910 the Tuskegee campus-building program was substantially complete, and the faculty and graduates were also building Black churches and schools throughout the South using the master builder training. The master builder training passed on specialized skills and knowledge from one generation to the next, gradually enhancing the profession through the development and application of new techniques, often based on trial-and-error.<sup>40</sup> The biggest impact the Tuskegee model had on institutional architecture was the establishment of Rosenwald Schools where Blacks built more than 5,300 "campuses."<sup>41</sup> Those erected between 1913 and 1920 used plans designed by Tuskegee faculty.<sup>42</sup>

### **W.E.B. Du Bois' Views**

The archival section of *The Atlantic* magazine online offered the essay "Of the Training of Black Men," by Du Bois that said Whites in the South and North refused to teach Blacks; if Blacks were to learn, Blacks must teach themselves, and the most effective help that could be given to Blacks would be the establishment of schools to train Black teachers.<sup>43</sup> Du Bois wrote in 1903 that as intelligence and wealth demanded, the educational system in the South continued to omit Black women from industrial and manual training; simple schools should have taught Black

males and women to read and write and high and normal schools could have completed the system.<sup>44</sup>

Du Bois was not an early opponent of Washington's program. During the late 1890s, there were several remarkable similarities in the ideas of Washington and Du Bois, who for a brief period found educational issues on which they could cooperate.<sup>45</sup> The years from 1901 to 1903 were years of transition in Du Bois' philosophy. Du Bois grew to find Washington's program intolerable as he became more outspoken about racial injustice and began to differ with Washington over the importance of a liberal arts education when the latter's emphasis on industrial education drew resources away from Black liberal arts colleges such as Talladega, Spelman, and Morehouse.<sup>46</sup> Generally, Du Bois opposed Washington's program because he believed that it was narrow in its scope and objectives; devalued the study of the liberal arts; and ignored civil, political, and social injustices and the economic exploitation of the Black masses. Du Bois thought Washington's emphasis on industrial education actually kept Blacks trapped in lower social and economic classes by suggesting they were best suited to service occupations. Du Bois wanted Blacks encouraged to succeed in the arts and sciences as well as industrial trades.<sup>47</sup>

Du Bois asserted that Washington's apprenticeship approach was not enough in that the teachers of teachers should be trained in more than technical normal approaches: "They must also be broad minded, cultured males and females to scatter civilization among a people whose ignorance was not simply of letters, but of life itself."<sup>48</sup> Du Bois wanted to move away from the self-education system (i.e., grammar, normal and Black high schools) that had been implemented to assist in the substandard education of Blacks in America. Du Bois understood Washington's program, but believed that it was not the solution to the race problem. Blacks should study the liberal arts and have the same rights as white citizens. Blacks, Du Bois believed, should not have to sacrifice their constitutional rights in order to achieve a status that was already guaranteed.<sup>49</sup>

In *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois took the position that "the Black men of America have a duty to perform; a duty stern and delicate—a forward movement to oppose a part of the work of Washington."<sup>50</sup> In this famous book, Du Bois made little to no mention of Black women as leaders in American. Du Bois disputed Washington's strategy of *freeing autonomy* which believed that Blacks should develop a separate group economy of producers' and consumers' cooperatives as a weapon for fighting educational discrimination and poverty.<sup>51</sup>

In an essay entitled, "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others," Du Bois also said that Washington's accommodationist program asked Blacks to give up political power, to give up on civil rights, and give up on seeking higher education for Black youth.<sup>52</sup> Du Bois firmly believed that persistent agitation, political action, and academic education would be the means to achieve full citizenship rights for Black Americans. He stressed the necessity



**Girl's industries furniture making**

*(Figures 13) Image courtesy of the  
Tuskegee University Archives*

for liberal arts training because he believed that Black leadership would come from students with college-trained backgrounds as well as technical normal school backgrounds—not only the “educate – yourself” practice that is still taking place amongst Blacks in the United States. Du Bois’ philosophy of the *Talented Tenth* was that a college-educated elite would chart, through their knowledge, the way for educational and cultural elevation for the Black masses.<sup>53</sup> Du Bois’s views remained somewhat evident but less visible than Washington’s views until the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s.

Historical scholars strongly disagreed on strategies for Blacks and educational progress but suggested that Washington and Du Bois made a permanent mark on the historical debate over how Blacks should achieve equality in America. Both Washington and Du Bois had the same goals—eradicating racism, segregation, and discrimination against their race.<sup>54</sup> Both Washington and Du Bois also tended to blame Blacks themselves for their condition. Washington placed emphasis on self-help and moral improvement; however, Du Bois focused on the rights of Blacks. Washington and Du Bois were willing to accept franchise restrictions based on education and property qualifications, but not race. They encouraged the development of Black business; however, did not agree that the Black masses should receive only industrial training as exemplified by Washington’s belief in Black males being trained as only master builders rather than a liberal arts education. Again, Du Bois believed this approach devalued the study of the liberal arts while ignoring civil, political, and social injustices.

However, Washington and Du Bois wanted the same thing for Blacks—first-class citizenship—but their approaches for obtaining it differed. Du Bois had the well-to-do background and classical education which was far different from the life of Washington, a freed slave and recipient of a very practical education. Their backgrounds led to the differences in their educational views on training Blacks. Washington focused on the policies he thought would win the respect of Whites and lead to Blacks being fully accepted as citizens and being integrated into all strata of society.<sup>55</sup> Du Bois’ educational approach led to the belief that White people owe Blacks an education, and that it was the sole responsibility of the White oppressor to raise Black people up as societal equals.<sup>56</sup> Du Bois wanted Blacks to have the same educational opportunity as Whites. In his view, Blacks should not be segregated by attending only technical high and public schools. As mentioned earlier, the segregation of self-education or an “*edumacation*” has and is still taking place amongst Black students in public elementary and high schools and in several architecture programs in the United States..

## The 21<sup>st</sup> Century's Lack of a Diverse Profession

To date, there are 130,000+ licensed architects in the United States; only 1% (1,662) are African-American, and of the 1,662, only 224 are women. Current American Institute of Architects (AIA) membership statistics reveal that Native Americans comprise a mere 0.2%, African American 0.9%, Latino 2.1%, and Asians 3.1% of all registered architects.<sup>57</sup> In each of these underrepresented groups, men far outnumber women not only in the practice of architecture but also in careers as educators in professional programs.

In 1990, Linda Groat and Sherry Ahrentzen conducted thorough investigations documenting 210 female architecture full and part-time faculty across the United States for the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture (ACSA).<sup>58</sup> They analyzed demographics within schools and found that women were grossly underrepresented among the ranks of tenured faculty. Groat and Ahrentzen also pointed out that two-thirds of these women believed that sexism was inherent in architecture education. Over one-third of the women faculty surveyed perceived significant disparities in salary, appointments to institutionally important committees, and standards for promotion.

A March 1999 study by the MIT Council on Faculty Diversity published in the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) *Faculty Newsletter* reported the results of a study on the status of female faculty in the schools of architecture and planning; engineering; humanities, arts, and social sciences; and the Sloan School of Management. The study found that many tenured women faculty experienced professional marginalization accompanied by inequities such as lower salaries, less office space, fewer resources for their research than male colleagues, greater family responsibility, and exclusion from important decision-making roles in their departments. The report documented the small number of female faculty—15 tenured women versus 197 tenured males in 1994—and the fact that the percentage of female faculty had remained unchanged for at least 10 and probably 20 years. Only 16% of the MIT faculty was female. In architecture and planning, the proportion of female faculty was high relative to other schools. Problems occurred in promoting junior female to tenure from within the organization. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) *Faculty Newsletter* also reported that outside MIT, the study on the status of female faculty in science resonated widely with professional women.<sup>59</sup> The problems identified in the MIT report proved to be essentially universal for professional women in the United States.

According to the authors Gurel and Anthony, since the late 1970s, the architectural discipline has witnessed an increased interest in feminist research.<sup>60</sup> They further stated that some feminist historians have pursued research to expose contributions of *prolific* women architects who left a mark on the architecture landscape but have not received the recognition they deserved.<sup>61</sup> Among these are biographies, essays, and exhibitions on Julia Morgan,

Eileen Gray, Lilly Reich, Charlotte Perriand, and others. Even in the most recent text such as *Architecture, from Prehistory to Postmodernity and Buildings Across Time* published in 2002,<sup>62</sup> other authors widely acknowledge that prolific women voices remain marginally covered in the canonical premises of the text, or at worst, they are totally dismissed.<sup>63</sup>

To date, the literature identifies only Dr. Sharon Sutton as the first Black women to be promoted to full professor in an accredited professional architecture degree program in the United States. In 2003, Michaela Pride-Wells was named Associate Professor and School Director at the University of Cincinnati, making her the first Black women to be a director of an architecture program in the United States. They are two of only four women with a ranking higher than professor in an architecture program in the United States.

### **The Future of the Profession**

For the future of architecture education and the training of Black architects, Kathryn Anthony stated that the profession should increase its minority representation as it moves into the 21st century and beyond.<sup>64</sup> According to the book *Voices in Architectural Education*, edited by Thomas Dutton, the White canon in architecture education is likely to be maintained to the detriment of the profession.<sup>65</sup> Brad Grant stated that because of the strikingly low statistics of ethnic diversity in the architecture profession, Euro-centric traditions are culturally dominant in architecture education.<sup>66</sup> This is not unusual in a culture where Blacks often find that their social experiences and cultural expressions remain invisible. Scholars believe that the White cultural canon has led to the low percentage of Black architects, especially women, in architecture, planning and construction professions.

Architecture education needs to emphasize an inclusive cultural perspective as it presents educational issues.<sup>67</sup> However, research shows that this has not been the case in architecture education in the United States because part of the culture is invisible. Scholars such as Dana Cuff, Christopher Jarrett, L. Hurst Mann, Judith Torrington and Deanna Smith suggested that architecture education must develop diverse approaches to better enable all students to develop their skills, to identify strategies and attitudes for a more diverse professional approach, and to lay the foundation for lifelong learning in professional programs.<sup>68</sup>

Van Jones' *Green For All* national initiative is recognized for its 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond approach to combat poverty, racial inequality and the environmental crisis through the building of a robust and all-inclusive green economy for the future of self-reliance instead of the self-education of Blacks in the United States.<sup>69</sup> Jones' initiative is very similar both to Washington's educational views and Du Bois' views on racial inequality and has a diverse training

approach for educators interested in the training of Black architects. Van Jones' article suggests that there is a need to question and constantly reconsider the future of self-reliance for Blacks which suggests providing new innovative approaches in architecture and Design-build programs that will be more inclusive of minorities. This article makes a case for the importance of affirming that Black architects may have a greater chance to achieve educational equality by revisiting the educational debate between Washington and Du Bois and furthering their views by renewing current initiatives that may affect the education of Black architects, planners, and constructors in 21<sup>st</sup> century America and beyond.

### Concluding Comments

Even though concepts of Washington's master builder training was aimed at men is not used today in professional architecture programs, Black women are still faced with major educational challenges which may have contributed to the growing number of less satisfied minorities in the profession. The demise of Washington's master builder training resulted in Black women being accepted into Washington's architecture programs and ultimately White Institutions in the United States. At this point, Blacks were no longer segregated to only industrial or liberal arts educations. For this article, I was particularly interested in the Washington's apprenticeship approach, which is still practiced in modern architecture education and may have an effected on the underrepresentation of Black women in the field of architecture. Based on the literature, an "*edumaction*" has and is still taking place amongst most Black students in public elementary and high schools and in many ways have resulted in the educational practices in architecture, community planning and construction programs in the United States. This article reveals that because of the low representation of Blacks in the architecture profession, Black students in most architecture programs still have not had a fair chance at an equitable and gainful education; instead, that have remained in schools that don't necessarily work for them.

A review of the relevant literature revealed that the training of Black architects in professional programs should be questioned and constantly reconsidered so that the profession will be more inclusive of minorities, particularly Black women students. The present article strengthens scholarly views on architecture education by revealing the debate between Washington and Du Bois and how their views and others may affect the education of Blacks in 21<sup>st</sup> century America and beyond, especially the training of future architects in architecture and Design-build programs.

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# ILLUMINATING THE INVISIBLE:

## *Race + Space in Architectural Pedagogy*

BENJAMIN FLOWERS, Ph.D.

*“You are saved,” cried Captain Delano, more and more astonished and pained; “you are saved; what has cast such a shadow upon you.”* HERMAN MELVILLE, BENITO CERENO

*I enjoy my life with the compliments of Monopolated Light & Power. Since you never recognize me even when in closest contact with me, and since, no doubt, you’ll hardly believe that I exist, it won’t matter if you know that I tapped a power line leading into the building and ran it into my hole. Before that I lived in the darkness into which I was chased, but now I see. I’ve illuminated the blackness of my invisibility—and vice versa.* RALPH ELLISON, INVISIBLE MAN

### **Abstract**

*This essay explores a continuing effort to situate race and its attendant complexities within the discipline and practice of architecture.*

### **Introduction: Race + Space**

Race in American life is an organizing force in both the discursive and built landscapes of daily life. This condition weighs on the minds and bodies of men and women across the spectrum from white to black—from Captain Delano to Jack-the-Bear. In life segregation (just one of the many examples of the ways in which racial logic was materialized in the built environment) compelled the creation of distinct but overlapping public and personal spheres between black and white where intimacy, alienation, violence and power sketched simultaneously interrelated and divided lives. Likewise, “the pervasiveness of race” in American thought, as David Roediger notes, depends on a “complex mixture of hate, sadness, and longing.”<sup>1</sup>

It is telling that Melville and Ellison, writers who emerged from distinct temporal and cultural milieus, both turned to highly spatialized narratives, in an effort to explore the contours of race. In so doing, these works of fiction point to the important ways the built environment—and architecture in particular—is implicated in the changing tides of racial thought in the United States. Their work encourages us to explore the ways in which notions

of race inform the production of space and architecture and the fashion in which that act of production can and does reinscribe relations of power, hierarchies of race and positions of privilege. This in turn, compels us to consider how and why unions and divisions founded upon racial ideologies have profoundly shaped our built landscape, past and present, city and suburb.

Such a consideration raises a host of questions. As we move through the urban landscape, how do our perceptions of space change when the everyday is complicated via historical knowledge? Do we regard the Capitol of the United States differently upon learning that its construction depended on slave labor? Do we think any differently about walking through Five Points in Atlanta after learning that in 1906 it served as a gathering place for white mobs that attacked and killed black residents? Is the geography of our everyday lives more or less integrated than that of our parents? How has architecture, as a discipline and practice, challenged or elided these divisions? How do these divisions—(such as the signs above), technocratic and aloof, or excused as the work of an invisible hand (in the public discourse of capitalist democracy)—shape and inform architecture’s role as a conveyor of social power? How have architects—as a social group, as a labor market, and as arbiters of distinction—embraced or resisted integration in the 20<sup>th</sup> century?

Although architecture is clearly very much involved in the space-making practices that are intertwined with the cultural, political, and economic vectors of race logic in the US, the discipline has responded hesitantly to the call for self-reflexive consideration of its implicated state. Likewise this self-reflexivity is absent from both the content of much of architectural education. The demographic diversity of student populations at architecture schools across the nation lags significantly behind other professional graduate fields of study. That absence of diversity is even greater among the faculty charged with training the next generation of architects and designers. All of these factors hinder, but need not prevent, critical inquiry into the relationship between race, space, and architecture in the United States.

### **Teaching the Intervention: Power and the Built Landscape**

Such a critical inquiry requires a commitment on the part of both faculty and students to multiple modes of analysis of the discipline and practice of architecture: historical, theoretical, aesthetic, political, economic, and cultural. In an effort to spur such a process of critical inquiry, in 2006, I developed a course for architecture students at the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta, where I teach. Located in a city that in many respects epitomizes both the “New South” and the significant (albeit heavily contested) political enfranchisement of black



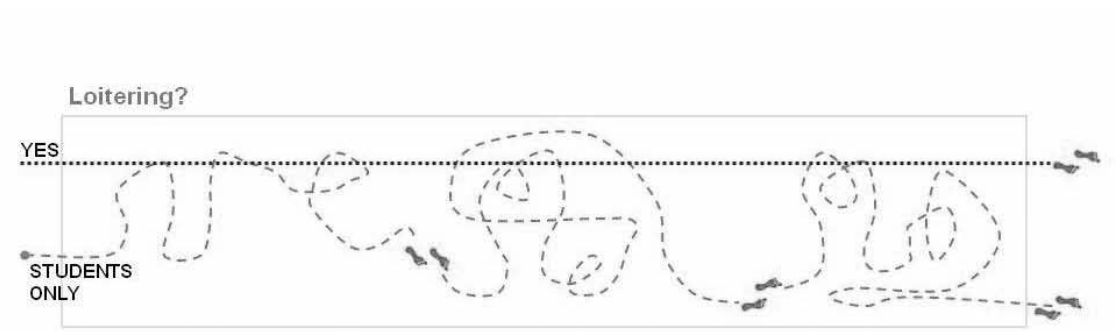
**Figure 1**

*3rd Avenue Tunnel prior to intervention*  
Source: Cassi Niemann and Laura Welborn



**Figure 2**

*No Loitering signs in the tunnel*  
Source: Cassi Niemann and Laura Welborn



**Figure 3**

*Map of Legal and Illegal Routes Through the Tunnel*  
Source: Cassi Niemann and Laura Welborn

urban populations since the 1970s, Atlanta is rich site for engaging Jack-the-Bear's effort to "illuminate the blackness of [his] invisibility and vice-versa." Students in the course split their time between two major and related tasks: 1. engaging an ambitious multi-disciplinary reading list with texts from architecture, history, literature, sociology, and geography addressing race and space, and 2. designing, building, and installing an "intervention" into a site of their choosing.<sup>2</sup> Briefly, the intervention is expected to develop out of a set of questions regarding the built environment: How do spaces empower and disempower us and those around us in our daily lives? How do institutions depend on a spatial articulation of power to maintain authority? How is neighborhood identity (an almost always "raced" condition) revealed, controlled, manipulated or even elided across space and through the control of space? After analyzing the work of architects and other figures ranging from Dread Scott, the Critical Art Ensemble, Otabenga Jones & Associates, Mark Jenkins, Urban Curators, Nadine Robinson, the Wooster Collective, Banksy, and Hank Willis Thomas, students are asked to develop an intervention of their own creation.<sup>3</sup>

These interventions range from the tectonically simple (signage crafted to appear official and attached to built surfaces or a two-by-four inserted into a doorway or across a staircase) to complex (scale models of considerable detail inserted into unexpected sites or elaborate chalking of public spaces). In the past students also developed projects with both three-dimensional and virtual components (for instance using websites to bridge imposed physical boundaries separating communities or posting on-line videos documenting the construction and reception of their intervention). Regardless of format, each intervention is tasked with achieving one or more of the following: exposing the relationship between the built environment and power in the chosen site; challenging the hierarchy (or hierarchies) of power at that site and re-ordering the hierarchy of power or relationship between power and the built environment in that site.

The pedagogical purposes motivating this choice of assignment are (at least) two-fold: one is to de-mystify the relationship between race and space, moving the examination of that relationship from the realm of theory and discourse into the world of everyday life. In the process, students develop a trained eye. Rather than seeing the built environment around them as merely the physical embodiment of the status quo and therefore, largely neutral, they instead are encouraged to understand the built environment as one of many sites where contests over opportunity, resources, access, equity, and power play out. The second is to encourage students to understand first-hand (rather than textually) the multiple ways architects are implicated in the process of transforming ideologies into the material world. From this position—one informed by the various strands of history, discourse and aesthetics continuously at play in the built landscape—students can consider how and in what fashion both the discipline and practice of

architecture might undertake a reckoning that allows for a future that doesn't repeat the past.

Two recent interventions that sought to encourage thoughtful discussion of the relationship between the built landscape, design and race illustrate the potential pedagogical benefits of a curriculum invested in raising these very questions. Both interventions are directly concerned with how spaces operate in ways that overtly and covertly order inhabitants (informed by history and notions of personal identity) into insiders and outsiders. The first takes as its site a tunnel that connects the campus of Georgia Tech to the city of Atlanta. The second addresses the role of campus memorials in promoting or eliding the history of race (and specifically desegregation in the 1960s) at the Georgia Tech campus.

### **Intervention 1: 3rd Street Tunnel**

The 3<sup>rd</sup> street tunnel runs under a freeway, and is, to put it kindly, a spare and largely unwelcoming space (Figure 1). It is also a site where anxieties among students and university administrators about race, crime, surveillance, and control play out on a daily basis. The boundaries of the campus, marked by flags and brick walls, materialize the historical antipathy between Tech and the city. The tunnel's provision of access to the campus (which is largely white, and widely regarded as a bastion of white privilege) in a city that is predominantly black undoubtedly shapes spoken and unspoken anxieties about the space. This tension is exacerbated by the ambiguities surrounding proprietorship of the tunnel: the university does not claim ownership of the tunnel but does maintain a vigilant anti-graffiti crew, who paint over tags and markings on the tunnel with surprising speed and efficiency. The city of Atlanta police patrol the tunnel on bicycle but whether this is an effort designed to discourage city residents from entering campus or to regulate the flow of disruptive student activity out into the city is not entirely clear. While criminal activity in or around the tunnel itself is relatively rare, in discussions about campus safety, the tunnel is routinely cited as a "high-risk" space. "No loitering" signs, rare elsewhere on campus (and off, for that matter), are prominently placed throughout the tunnel (Figure 2). In contrast to all other entrances from the city onto the campus, the tunnel is closed under lock and key at night.

The intervention the students developed in response to this site focused on interrogating the legal definitions of "loitering" and notions of identity and belonging raised by the ambiguous status of the tunnel as both "student" (or campus) space and "public" space. Loitering statutes in the South, like other forms of public safety regulation, were often enforced disproportionately and capriciously against black residents. During the 1950s and 1960s, for instance,



**Figure 4**

*Video Stills Documenting Intervention*  
Source: Cassi Niemann and Laura Welborn



**Figure 5**

*Memorial Boulder Precedent, Georgia Tech Campus*  
Source: Chad Boone



**Figure 6**

*Memorial Boulder Construction*  
Source: Chad Boone



such statutes were used to break up lawful and peaceful protests by civil rights activists. In the particular context of Atlanta, the regulation and penalization of “loitering” was, and remains, a powerful example of the intersection between race and space.

Although there are clear and reasonable safety prerogatives that might compel state action on issues such as “loitering” (however one might define that activity), in the case of Atlanta, the history of enforcement of loitering laws pitted the right of individuals to determine just where and when they might wish to pause amidst their daily routine and the desire of the state to exercise authority over the movement of certain bodies through the urban landscape. As anyone who has spent time at a university knows, students spend a great deal of time engaging in behavior that off-campus would certainly qualify as loitering. The location of such activity—on or off campus—goes a long way towards determining whether it is prosecutable or not. The logic of the intervention emerged from these intertwined conditions.

Using tape and chalk (to avoid charges of vandalism), two routes were marked out on the tunnel: one a blue line running directly through the length of the tunnel—a non-loitering route; the second route, in red, meandered, proceeding in a seemingly aimless fashion, with stops along the way where those following the route were encouraged to sit on a provided chair for a rest, jump over a mark, “hi-five” the wall, and pause to “reflect” (Figure 3). At one point, the two lines, red and blue, run side by side, encouraging interaction between both groups of users. On the campus side of the tunnel, chalking instructed users to pick a line to follow; on the city side of the tunnel, chalking directed users to follow a single line, which once it entered the tunnel, split into two lines, one of which was denoted as “students only.” Users moving from the city side were asked to engage in an act of self-identification, unlike those moving through the tunnel from the campus side. The students then filmed the responses of users (students, faculty, staff, city residents unaffiliated with Tech, and even police) as they passed through the tunnel during a single day (Figure 4).

The playful nature of the intervention is reflected in the largely positive response of users to it, with many following the meandering path and others dutifully following the direct route step-for-step. Even an Atlanta city police officer on his beat on bicycle rode the meandering route with care. Engaged with the space of the tunnel in an unexpected way, users were encouraged to reconsider their preconceptions about the operation of the space and their own sense of identity as they moved through it. The banal, plain, and perhaps ominous site, through the joint effort of designer and user, became something quite different. Anxiety was replaced with curiosity, a swap that in

the context of highly contested urban space is no mean feat. The intervention offered a model for the ways a more dynamic claiming of space by the campus community, rather than excluding others, might serve a broader goal of challenging the status quo assumptions about race and space that determine much of the geography of daily life in Atlanta.

## **Intervention 2: Memorial Boulders**

The second intervention is concerned with memorials and the history of desegregation at Georgia Tech. Roughly 30 percent of Georgians are black; in Atlanta, that percentage increases to over 50 percent. At Georgia Tech, however, less than 7 percent of the undergraduate student body is black. Unlike Ole Miss or other universities in the Deep South, Tech underwent the process of desegregation without the intervention of the courts, a fact that Tech is reasonably proud of. Likewise, the school produces more black engineering Ph.D.s than any other school in the nation. Nevertheless, the history of race relations in the post-war era at Tech is, as to be expected, complicated. Tech, like most schools, has a robust set of campus traditions that celebrate or memorialize significant aspects of the university's history. The history of desegregation, however, is mostly absent from these campus celebrations and traditions. The student's intervention arose out of a desire to address the absence of formal recognition of the history of desegregation at Tech, and to comment on what that absence means for the university community today.

Like universities everywhere, plaques abound at Tech. These are placed on the buildings, structures, park benches, and even boulders that dot the campus (Figure 5). These plaques record the names of alumni and corporations whose largesse benefited the school, or famous and obscure figures from the ranks of faculty and administration who shaped the institution's identity in the past. Using the medium of the memorial plaque affixed to a boulder (a somewhat curious form of memorialization to be sure), the student devised a series of official-looking plaques that described significant moments in the desegregation of Georgia Tech. Rather than attach these to existing boulders (as this limited potential site choices), the student built his own set of faux-boulders out of cardboard, papier-mâché and multiple coats of paint—a sort of trompe-le-oeil in three dimensions (Figures 6 - 8).

After surveying the campus, memorial boulders were placed at sites chosen either for their proximity to specific historic structures or for their proximity to locations with significant pedestrian traffic. One boulder, placed in the garden in front of the basketball arena, noted that the arena was the site of the first racially integrated high school basketball tournament in 1967. Another boulder, placed near a large classroom building, identified the first three black students to attend Georgia Tech. Another, located near the architecture building, noted that Georgia



**Figure 7**

*Memorial Boulders at the Papier-mâché Stage*

*Source: Chad Boone*



**Figure 8**

*Memorial Boulders Awaiting Paint*

*Source: Chad Boone*



**Figure 9**

*Memorial Boulder on-site*

*Source: Chad Boone*



**Figure 10**

*Memorial Boulder with missing plaque*

*Source: Chad Boone*

Tech was “the first university in the Deep South to desegregate without a court order”(Figure 9). The student then recorded the response of passersby to the memorials.

The response of groundskeepers was fairly swift and unsentimental: the boulder in front of the basketball arena was removed within a day, as were the other boulders located in areas where a high volume of public events meant fairly rigid maintenance standards were in place. Other boulders, however, lingered for days and even weeks, eventually falling prey to the forces of nature rather than to the assiduousness of physical plant. Among these, however, two developments stand out. A boulder that identified the first black professor at Tech was damaged, the plaque smashed. Whether the damage was intentional or not is uncertain, although it is difficult to imagine how it might have occurred accidentally. It is also difficult to discern the motivations behind the damage; perhaps it was evidence of racial animosity, or perhaps just mindless destruction fueled by beer from a nearby fraternity house. Perhaps it was both. The boulder with a plaque commenting on desegregation at Tech and the courts, located near the architecture building, had its plaque removed within a day, and the boulder left behind (Figure 10). The boulders weighed no more than five pounds, so it is curious that the person took the time to carefully pry off the plaque rather than just pick up the entire boulder. Again, the motivations behind the act are not known, although it seems in this case that the goal might have been to preserve the plaque rather than destroy it, which suggests something other than antipathy to the history recorded on the plaque.

### Concluding Comments

The environment into which these interventions were placed is a constantly shifting terrain, even if the seeming permanence of buildings, roads, and institutions makes it seem otherwise. The social forces that play out in the built landscape change and modulate over time, as do our perceptions of their effects on the built environment. Hierarchies are constantly in the process of adjusting and readjusting to conditions that threaten their authority, and those readjustments often play out on the built landscape. Just a few months after the intervention at the tunnel, the university’s chief of police announced the tunnel was to be permanently closed due to concerns about crime. The move was greeted by many students as a reasonable response to vaguely stated fears about threats to “public safety.” When several faculty contacted the chief of police noting that most crime on campus took place elsewhere and that increasing activity around the tunnel was likely as good an antidote to crime as closure, the response was the verbal equivalent of a shrug. In the recent public discourse about race in the United States, a trend of sorts has emerged suggesting that the nation has entered a post-racial phase. Perhaps one might embrace such logic if one

were only looking at the current presidential race (although I would suggest that even at that site such an observation would be flawed), but evidence from the built landscape around us should lead us to maintain a skeptical, if hopeful, perspective on such claims.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991), p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> In past semesters, the reading list has included Kathryn Anthony, *Designing for Diversity: Gender, Race, and Ethnicity in the Architectural Profession* (Urbana, Ill: University of Illinois Press, 2001), Joe Austin, *Taking the Train: How Graffiti Art Became an Urban Crisis in New York City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), James Baldwin, "Fifth Avenue, Uptown," *Esquire* (July 1960), Ron Bayor, *Race and the Making of Atlanta* (University of North Carolina Press, 2000), Craig Barton, ed., *Sites of Memory: Perspectives on Architecture and Race* (Princeton Architectural Press, 2001), Mike Davis, *Magical Urbanism: Latinos Reinvent the U.S. City* (Verso, 2001), Murray Edelman, "Space and the Social Order," *Journal of Architectural Education* (1978), Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Vintage, 1947), Darell Fields, *Architecture in Black* (London; New Brunswick, NJ: Athlone Press, 2000), Benjamin Flowers, "Race, Space, and Architecture in Oakland Cemetery," *Scapes* 6 (Fall 2007), Robert Goodman, *After the Planners* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971), Ian Grandison, "Negotiated Space: The Black College Campus as a Cultural Record of Postbellum America," *American Quarterly* 51:3 (1999), Cheryl Harris, "Whiteness as Property," *Harvard Law Review* 106 (1993): 1709-91, Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995) Andrew Herod and Luis Aguiar, "Cleaners and the Dirty Work of Neoliberalism," *Antipode* 38:3 (2006), Arnold Hirsch, "Massive Resistance in the Urban North: Trumbull Park, Chicago, 1953-1966," *Journal of American History* (September 1995): 522-50, George Lipsitz, "The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: Racialized Social Democracy and the 'White' Problem in American Studies," *American Quarterly* 47: 3 (1995): 369-85, Eugene J McCann, "Race, Protest, and Public Space: Contextualizing Lefebvre in the U.S. City," *Antipode* (vol. 31 No. 2, 1999: 163-84), Herman Melville, "Benito Cereno" (1855), Walter Mosley, *Devil in a Blue Dress* (W.W. Norton, 1990), Lorri Nandrea, "'Graffiti Taught Me Everything I Know About Space': Urban Fronts and Borders" *Antipode* 31:1 (1999), Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge, 1994), Laura Pulido, "Rethinking Environmental Racism: White Privilege and Urban Development in Southern California" *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 90(1): 12-40, 2000, David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (Verso, 1991), Lawrence Vale, *Architecture, Power, and National Identity* (Yale University Press, 1992), Camilo José Vergara, *The New American Ghetto* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999), Cornell West, *Keeping Faith: Philosophy and Race in America* (New York: Routledge, 1993), Andrew Wiese, "Places of Our Own: Suburban Black Towns Before 1960," *Journal of Urban History* (vol. 19 No. 3, May 1993: 30-54), Craig Wilkins, *The Aesthetics of Equity: Notes on Race, Space, Architecture, and Music* (University of Minnesota Press, 2007), Dreck Spurlock Wilson, *African American Architects: A Biographical Dictionary, 1865-1945* (New York: Routledge, 2004), Tom Wolfe, *A Man in Full* (Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> Each of these individuals and groups maintain fairly active on-line presences with useful examples of their work available for review by interested readers.

# IF YOU FLY TOO CLOSE TO THE SUN:

## *Postmodernism, Pantheism & the Promethean Myth*

AKEL ISMAIL KAHERA Ph.D.

*If you fly too close to the sun you are likely to get struck down by the gods.*

-DAEDALUS, ARCHITECT, INVENTOR, AND MASTER CRAFTSMAN

### **Abstract**

*Arguably the false consciousness, which is reflected in much of architectural theory and praxis over the last two decades, was perhaps foretold in Raphael's fresco The School of Athens. To situate The School of Athens, it is important to realize that architectural theory and praxis has been split between two extremes: mimeses and meaning, which in my view inherits from Pantheism and the Promethean myth. Postmodernism seeks to transcend these two extremes and the Kantian subject/object divisions; therefore, it is important to pin down the relationship between all three theoretical positions. As a way of summing up the debate I ask the question: Do architects have a god-complex? To summarize the expectations of this essay I will explain why I believe a god-complex to be true: first, an architect can claim sole ownership of an aesthetic idea or novelty; second, it is easy to assume that the idea may have transcendent meaning, based on some supreme purpose, or his/her ability to acquire earthly power or psychosocial insight. So just how ridiculous is the proposition that architects are like god(s)? Is the universally accepted God woefully inadequate? Is human creativity related to Divine creation? Or is this just another clash between Zeus, the corporate client and Prometheus the educated Architect? And finally, are we insensitive to God's purpose or divine intervention?*

### **The god-complex: cogito ergo sum**

Although an architect may exclaim, 'I think therefore I can create', does s/he think that his/her role is interchangeable with the universally accepted God, the absolute creator? We may recall that Thomas Aquinas argued that God is the absolute creator of all human and animal life, all categories of space, form, time and the natural environment—and indeed the entire universe. Lets assume that Aquinas is absolutely wrong, the fact remains that an Omnipotent God is commonly understood to be the Creator of the universe, this belief is endorsed by at least the three Abrahamic faiths: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. On the other hand if Aquinas is correct one thing seems clear: architects do not create they simply re-arrange, cognizant of his/her fallible qualities we may speak of

the architect's role as a destroyer not a creator. In sum, praxis may result in some kind of paradox like Yamasaki's Pruitt-Igoe, which was apparently invested with benign neglect, noble action and naïve belief. Above all if Aquinas is correct there is a key difference between God's infinite power to create in a flash or to destroy in a flash, which is nothing like the fallible qualities of any mortal architect.

In my view Raphael's fresco embodies a dramatic interpretation: *obscurum per obscurius*, explaining the obscure by means of the more obscure, which reflects the myriad ambiguities of Postmodernism, Pantheism, and the Promethean myth. but this view must be qualified. In *The School of Athens*, Raphael created an allegorical trope, with two statuettes framing the composition—Minerva the goddess of scientific arts and Apollo the god of liberal art—to testify to the primacy of creative and intellectual power and test the possibilities of a discipline, such art, philosophy and architecture.<sup>1</sup> Within the rhetorical context of this pictorial representation, the fresco is a set of metaphors, but the ultimate connotation is the ability of human beings to acquire earthly power i.e. *a priori* knowledge. Raphael's way of summing up the importance of *a priori* knowledge is to place the assembly in the Lyceum. Aristotle and Plato are depicted at the visual center, they are engaged in a discourse, in true Peripatetic manner. Not only this, but also Leonardo, Archimedes, Bramante, Michelangelo, Averroes (Ibn Rushd) and others are suitably arranged from which we must understand that they are in a state of mental and emotional stability and able to make rational judgments; perhaps this is meant to further interrogate the meaning of body, spirit, action and emotion.

In addition, Aristotle is observed pointing down indicating his curiosity with the reality of life, and the phenomenon of the natural world. Plato is pointing upwards—apparently his gesture can be attributed to the natural laws of the world or our abstract sense of being. Finally, Michelangelo the gifted artist and architect is seen leaning on an un-cut block of stone with his head in a reflective position. The activity of the Lyceum becomes a metaphoric medium between the human assembly and the two deities representing a physic struggle, very much the way Raphael portrayed Michelangelo. In his contemplative posture, he imitates the architect/designer contemplating a problem from beginning to end; this idea reflects another allegory by calling attention to meaning, mimesis and praxis.

Art historians have explained Raphael's fresco as having four domains: theology, philosophy, law and the arts to which I might add human history, suffering and transcendence. There is no sub-text to the fresco, all we have are visual icons hence the four domains produce vividly ambiguous dichotomies. In my view, the ultimate dramatic emphasis of Raphael's fresco is an allegorical liaison between two tropes: myth and reality; and secondly the commonly held point of view that a human being is *homo universale* or 'the measure of all things' (παντων μετρον ανθρωπος). The decisive appearance of both concepts depicts the illusion of human beings as false gods.



Indeed the common classification of aesthetics in the west relies heavily on the fact that “the main subject of Greek art was the human body, whether it was representing divinities or men, and this is in keeping with the conception of a single world, in which gods and mortals resembled each other sufficiently to behave similarly.”<sup>2</sup> Two distinct phenomena are involved in the production of space characterized by gods and mortals in the following passage:

By recognizing the changing multitude of gods, the Romans implied that it was of no great importance whether you actually believed in them. In those days you could even become god, by means similar to those now used to obtain an earthly title.<sup>3</sup>

These allusions point to the ‘god-like’ sensation among mortals that have caused some of our most intractable philosophical problems today, a case in point is the *via negativa* or negative theology of Karl Barth. Nevertheless, with respect to the ‘god-like’ sensation, a few observations are in order. First, individual architects are exceptionally talented, and at least trained to have power over aesthetics and the production of space. Yet both aesthetics and the production of space are mere configurations that have no reality beyond a temporal context in the physical world.

Second, what may appear to be the work of a genius in many instances is nothing but chaos yet we believe in the absurdity. In this interpretation, innovation, novelty and imagination, are no longer allegorical but the fulfillment of truth embodied in the illusion of ‘sanctified’ knowledge. Hence we accept the ‘god-like’ status and the narcissistic behavior; certainly this conduct is driven by the quest for originality. So is there something uncharacteristic about this type of ‘educated’ individual? And is it this creative power, not withstanding its many imperfections that permit the architect to pretend to be ‘god-like’?

The concept about ‘creative power’ predates Plato, Aristotle, and Kant. Since the era of Imhotep, Architect of the first Step Pyramid complex, the concept of individual creation, has shared cosmological tropes and the realm of divinity. Imhotep’s name meant ‘he who comes in peace’ he was associated with the god Thoth, the god of wisdom and he was also connected with medicine.<sup>44</sup> Imhotep’s Pyramid complex is a funerary edifice codified by Egyptian eschatology, reflecting life, death and the substantiation of human existence.<sup>5</sup> These features are embodied in the geometry of the Egyptian temple, approaching the cosmological idea expressed in *The Papyrus of Ani* (*The Egyptian Book of the Dead, circa. 240 BC*). In the geometry of the Temple of Luxor, Pharaoh is the symbolic being, the perfect man, which represents the final stage of his evolution and his ultimate divination.

In brief, the geometry of the Temple was a code, and a system of rules to remind the public that the method of space and geometry is contained by cosmological events, *before, during* and *after* life as in *The Papyrus of Ani*. This is precisely why Senmut, architect of the Pharaoh Queen Hatshepsut boasted of his privilege and prestige in the



**Figure 1**

*The School of Athens, Rafael, 1511*

Source:[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Sanzio\\_01.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Sanzio_01.jpg)



**Figure 2**

*St Thomas Aquinas*

Source:<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:St-thomas-aquinas.jpg>



**Figure 3**

*Vulcan Chaining Prometheus, Dirck van Baburen Rijksmuseum, (1590-1624)*

Source:<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Prometheus.jpg>



**Figure 4**

*Relief of Zeus from the 2nd century CE after a Greek original from the 5th century BCE*

source:[http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/84/Zeus\\_Altemps\\_Invent635.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/84/Zeus_Altemps_Invent635.jpg)



**Figure 5**

*The earliest Pyramid of Pharaoh Zoser at Saqqara (3rd Dynasty c. 2650 BC) by the architect Imhotep It stands about 60m high.*

Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

following words: “I had access to all the writings of the prophets; there was nothing which I did not know of that had happened since the beginning.”<sup>6</sup> Senmut’s dramatic personification is typical in much of the pre-modern world because “the execution of sacred and prestigious public works elevated the office of the architect.”<sup>7</sup>

At this point it might be useful to ask why architects until today are unable to resist the Cartesian maxim *cogito ergo sum*? Perhaps it is because the relationship between knowledge and existence remains connected to the maxim ‘I think therefore I am’, which Descartes adapted to describe temporal reality. In his own words Descartes explains what he meant by *cogito ergo sum*.

I knew that I was substance, the whole essence or nature is to think, and that for its existence there is no need of any place, nor does it depend on any material thing; so that this ‘me,’ that is to say, the soul by which I am what I am, is entirely distinct from body, and is even more easy to know that is the latter; and even if body were not, the soul would not cease to be what it is.<sup>8</sup>

The statement *cogito ergo sum* is perhaps the most famous in the history of philosophy, it illustrates precisely the opposite of what many world cultures believe to be true. Furthermore, *cogito ergo sum* suggests that thinking and consciousness are the essence of being but it separates the mind from the body and the soul. The separation cripples any sense of reality connected to the unity of all existence thus it has rendered architecture and culture divorced from the knowledge of being.

To illustrate the point, *cogito ergo sum* is opposite to what the Aborigines tell us about ‘dreamtime’ which points to the belief in the unity of all existence; in other words time and being are one and the same. Dreamtime connects the physical world with the sacred world and the human world, dreamtime is the beginning of knowledge which is antithetical to *cogito ergo sum*. In another example Claude Levi-Strauss defines the time-space relationship in one expression: ‘reversible space and linear time’. His proclamation comes from the observation of so called ‘Primitive’ societies, where being, body, spirit and mind, are connected, broadly speaking, it could be argued that in such societies no sacred edifice is separate from cosmological meaning.

Similarly, Le Corbusier’s words ‘taking possession of space’ is a metaphor of being, which carries over into the matter of dwelling. Although his observation seems valid, it is no accident that his discursive archetype remains decidedly Euro-centric and is not shared with all world cultures. For example the term *ʿfana* in Arabic is the denial of self by endorsing God as the only inconceivable reality. It mirrors the term *nirvana* in Buddhism. In general we

can say that the dominant function of mystical representations in the two examples noted above remain distinct from the term *cogito ergo sum*. One major aspect of body, spirit, action and emotion is reflected in the tensions that exist in understanding of deity. This persistent pattern of disorientation can be found in Olsson's words; like Descartes he turns *cogito ergo sum* into a frightening dogmatic conclusion:

God—the incarnation of power is not to be trusted, for if he has changed his mind once he can do so again. Only logic is predictable, and God is not logical. Indeed God is nothing but a proper name for everything we sense is too important to ignore and too evasive to specify. 'God' is a pseudonym of power.<sup>9</sup>

Ironically Olsson's view may explain why buildings collapse or are often torn down (again like Pruitt-Igoe); is it because the power of the mortal architect, is not to be trusted? Yet another element of this remark takes over the dialectic nature of the *god-complex*; it becomes especially critical in the confrontation between the created thing and the creator of a thing. Inasmuch, the expression of willpower whether the indeterminate outcome is arbitrary, absurd or an abstract, has its roots in Postmodernism, Pantheism and the Promethean myth. The reactivation of the myth in architecture reflects a form of power, and an attempt to make us see the architect as some kind of 'god-like' person.

### **Pantheism: *fallor ergo sum*.**

The key scholastic debate about meaning and mimesis in Raphael's fresco *The School of Athens* deals with knowledge and aesthetic expression. In Latin Europe, old truths were invoked with neo-Platonism, Pythagorean Orphism and Pantheism to arrive at an ideal aesthetic expression.<sup>10</sup> Similarly the basic assumptions of creative reasoning were essentially grounded in the Promethean myth. Prometheus was a god, his name means forethought. Wilson Bryan Key reminds us that the disparate mental universe of Ancient Rome and Greece had profound psychological consequences for the pre-modern mind and for individual architects such as Palladio. In Key's view,

During the Middle Ages Catholic scholastic philosophers adopted Aristotelian logic, to justify and validate papal doctrine and most importantly, to verify the existence of God. Aristotelian logic became the foundation of western religious, social, and economic, legal and philosophical reasoning.<sup>11</sup>



**Figure 6**

*On the west bank of the Nile (Thebes) Deir el-Bahri the funerary temple of queen Hatshepsut, the work of architect Senmut. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.*



**Figure 7**

*Pruitt-Igoe Housing Project. St. Louis Missouri.  
Source <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pruitt-Igoe-collapses.jpg>*



**Figure 8**

*Andrea Palladio Frontispiece of The Architecture of A. Palladio (1715)  
Giacomo Leoni's translation of  
Andrea Palladio's Quattro libri  
dell'architettura (1570).  
Source:[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The\\_Architecture\\_of\\_A.\\_Palladio\\_frontispiece.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Architecture_of_A._Palladio_frontispiece.jpg)*



**Figure 9**

*McKim Free School, Baltimore, Independent City, MD. This Greek Doric structure set the standards for the city's early school architecture. Endowed by John McKim, the school was built in 1833. The granite facade, with its monolithic columns, is derived from the Temple of Athena and Hephasestus (The Theseum) in Athens. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.*

Such ideas projected power, and invariably the power of intellect over nature. In such a system divine power and natural order is removed, as a result the general interpretation has leaned towards Neo-Platonic and Aristotelian thought. Of course Palladio's quest for knowledge is different from that of the Egyptian architect Senmut. Palladio's pursuit for originality is inevitably formulated around Vitruvian and ancient Rome. In his pursuit Palladio wrote in his *Four Books of Architecture*,

Guided by a natural inclination, I gave myself up in my most early years to the study of architecture: an as it was always my opinion, that the ancient Romans, as in many other things, so in building well, vastly excelled all those who have been since their time, I propose Vitruvius for my master and guide, who is the only ancient writer of this art, and set myself to search into the relics of all the ancient edifices.<sup>12</sup>

However Palladio's quest has ontological connections to the Greek concept of *techne* associated with both art and architecture and above all the process of design. The essence of *techne* is that "something concealed comes into unconcealment."<sup>13</sup> How a space is created and ultimately how the concept affects our perception of the environment. Therefore it is possible that architecture can extinguish memory or on the other hand cultivate a divine sense of existence. Nevertheless, Renaissance thought defined *God as a circle whose center is nowhere and whose circumference is everywhere*. This abstract formulation of divine existence rendered idiomatic meaning to the creative force of 'being'. In the devising of an aesthetic composition, Palladio, Bramante and other Renaissance artist and architects held many antithetical definitions of truth. It is in this regard that Michelangelo declared, "whoever departs from Bramante departs from the truth."

It is precisely this attitude that perpetuates the myth; the architect is obsessed by a drive that originates in the brain and emerges as a conscious bias to guide decision-making, but having the drive does not make one a 'master' of reason, similarly esoteric knowledge would not make us less inclined to be intellectually cultivated. In response to pure reason I suspect Augustine meant precisely what he said '*fallor ergo sum*', I am deceived therefore I am'.

The Renaissance notion of being influenced the ideas espoused by Francis Bacon in the seventeenth century. Bacon argued that the real world must confer things themselves and control things themselves. Bacon believed in scientific truth, he excluded intervention of the divine from the realm of human existence. Along with Bacon

we find Hobbes, Newton, Kant, Hegel and Nietzsche subscribing to and propagating the world view that ‘God is either Dead’, or absent from universal existence. In the struggle to break free from the shackles of dualism and materialism these men upheld the notion of a scientific world devoid of Divine intervention.

Postmodernism singlehandedly reasserted the sophistry of our allegorical Zeus and Prometheus, insofar as we have been led to believe that the exchange between modern science and knowledge exemplifies a new ethos. Thus it carried enormous weight in contemporary problems of theory and praxis. Although the god Hermes is not figured in the School of Athens it might also be noted that in Pantheist belief he even fooled the other gods, because of his magic and manipulation. Both in Postmodernism and Pantheism these tricks are so transparent one wonders if today they simply exist today with the tacit approval of people in power. It follows that the consequence of this narcissistic behavior ends up being yet another form of syncretism such as postmodernism, post-structuralism and deconstruction with its emphasis on *text*, *difference*, *discourse*, and I might add ‘deception’; no one really believes that architects are like gods except the false gods themselves.

Genius however has unfortunately tended towards extreme individuality taking credit for every design decision by laying out theoretical falsifications divinity and the re-enactment of the Promethean myth. It follows that the ‘god-like’ architect, who having changed ‘the world’ with her/his ‘creative genius’, must now move from reward to ritual to claim some semantic label and blind obeisance.

Again, most people who follow the doctrine of monotheism depend on the Divine Creator a sustaining God therefore it is not likely that architectural genius and adroitness will elevate the architect to divine status. In addition the monotheistic view conceives of the world created out of overflowing generosity; tragedy is not an epic belief. Yet, the post-modern debates of the last two decades may have placed a halo above the heads of distinct individual architect/philosophers from within the camp, and the written text, or work of art is seen as some kind of divine revelation. In addition, the very concept of a cathartic creation signals originality that is rooted in the euro-centric experience; increasingly it seems to privilege a small sector of the architectural profession.

### **Postmodernism: O white gods!**

Tom Wolfe refers to a handful of ambitious architects in America as ‘white gods’: “The white gods come from the sky at last! O white gods.”<sup>14</sup> Wolfe of course was referring to Mies van de Rohe and Walter Gropius who came to America from Germany in the 40’s and brought with them the modernist experiment which became the hall mark of the International Style; by the late 50’s architecture in America had become increasingly an architecture

of power and narcissism. At the same time imitation and pretense had exacerbated the views of American students and practitioners alike, the ‘white gods’ sought homage and prostration, the attitude of obeisance had taken root in the profession and in the academy. Much of my ensuing argument will deal with post-modernism, the problem of creativity and the quest for originality, which seems to favor a privilege few. This I believe has added to the god-like demeanor.

Tom Wolfe described Walter Gropius, as white god number one, it is easy to see why: in the early seventies the exuberance of the Bauhaus model was embraced by five guardian angels. The result of the belief in Gropius as a solitary genius in my view is nothing but utter confusion, which Francis Bacon correctly identified as the most fatal of errors, which occurs wherever argument or inference passes from one world experience to another. Nevertheless the Bauhaus masters were skilled experimentalist who wanted to fashion architecture entirely to their whims; but were they deceived?<sup>15</sup>

Likewise, Le Corbusier wrestled with the problem of space and geometry, motivated by the ‘machine genre’ commonly know as the ‘International Style’, in the end Le Corbusier concluded that: “Taking possession of space is the first gesture of living things...The occupation of space is the first proof of existence.”<sup>16</sup> These two imaginative shifts have profound consequences for pre-modern and post-modern genres of architecture. The striking difference in each genre is brought out in the historical legacy and the desire for originality, but the problem carries with it many of the same traits as the Promethean myth. Over the last two decades it is evident that post-modern notions of aesthetics and the quest for innovation and originality continues to hold sway. As Umberto Eco notes,

the modern notion of [architecture] as a work of art as irreproducible and unique assigns a special status both to the origin of the work and to its formal and material complexity, which together constitute the concept of authorial authenticity.<sup>17</sup>

Implicitly this idea relegates the cause of progress entirely to the human mind. No doubt postmodernism is also syncretic but in a much more sophisticated manner. Post-modern thought advocates an aesthetic attitude of the world that sees the world as text; it advocates the denial of a Divine reality, the downgrading of reason and the denial of truth; while it celebrates the plurality of interpretation and of the fragmentation of ideas; it promotes the primacy of self. It is nevertheless an argument in postmodernism and deconstruction to question even divinely inspired prophets, and the existence of God.



Education alone would not suffice to determine the conclusion. Students at Princeton would often say in difference to the other Ivy League schools, ‘God went to Princeton’. Evidence from another example comes from the following anecdote: An architectural student sought a design evaluation from a famous architect in response to his winning project for a cemetery competition; the student wanted him to see his winning project and right away the architect openly declared: “God wouldn’t like this”, after a long pause the student asked why? “Because I’m the closest thing to God you’ll ever meet and I don’t like it.” I presume this was his practiced remark to all students.<sup>18</sup>

So let me recast the debate in a different way. Lest we forget, for many years Alexander, Rappoport, Harbraken, Fathy and others, have attempted to re-establish our faith in the discipline of architecture. For them Theo-centric norms replace individuality and originality in the building process; such norms can unite space and time with culture.<sup>19</sup> The advent of postmodern thought altered Theo-centric and cultural norms and the social status of architecture replacing it with a convenient synopsis of the text. This is precisely why the ‘god of deconstruction’, Derrida, must be questioned, even if deconstruction remains ambiguous, incoherent and lacking in truthfulness. Derrida and his disciples have established disparate definitions of the universe, causing us to be deficient in critical reflection, our undertaking is to lift the mask of deception and to retain some sense of eschatological desire that is codified by human conventions of space, time and social history.

Moholy-Naghy observes that the concern for originality is deep rooted in the western tradition of architecture and the fine arts. She argues that since the industrial revolution architects and artist have had a hard time holding on to and defining their role, “The architect is challenged and confused at every turn by technology, economy and a haunting commitment to the public.” She is absolutely correct, what has artificial intelligence done for the ‘people at the bottom’?

But Alas! Postmodernism came in order to affirm the philosophical differences and above all originality pure and simple. With post-modernism our allegorical Prometheus had stolen the fire once again; the exuberant self-realization of many architects today who supported the idea of philosophical postmodernism has temporarily displaced the social mission of architecture. Like Greek Humanism that had prefigured western thought once more it was as though this new knowledge generated by postmodern thought is meant to liberate us by lifting us above the savage world or poverty, racism and corporate hegemony.

## Summary

I began with a philosophical argument, *do architects have a god-complex?* so I would like to conclude on a similar note. It would seem plausible that architecture is wedged between philosophy and eschatology, and by that I mean it can serve as a conduit to explain an underlying belief system. For example the Egyptian architect, Hassan Fathy, who built a religious complex at Abiqui New Mexico—now considered by some to be a sacred site—kept the question of body, mind, spirit and soul in the foreground signaling correspondences between knowledge, intuition, faith, philosophy and science.<sup>20</sup>

According to Fathy,

In this ever-changing world of things, man is in need of relating himself to some fixed point of reference to get out of chaos into cosmos. He has ever been seeking to situate himself in space, time and the world of the spirit and the mind.... In the world of the spirit and the mind, he has been looking for what is immutable within change beyond the material form of truth, having recourse to the three tributaries of knowledge, intuition and faith, philosophy and science.<sup>21</sup>

Fathy's conception of cosmic order is implicit in the notion of temporal existence; and, temporal existence is conditioned by knowledge of being. It would seem that meaning is always dependant on context, however I want to insist that the way in which we read The School of Athens, linking the conceptual apparatus of the fresco to Postmodernism, Pantheism and the Promethean myth belong to a single domain: which I propose to call a 'god complex'. On the other hand because architecture also represents independent notions of existence, it follows that the service of design is not always perfect, form and space representations do not guarantee absolute understanding of truth. Herein lies the problem relative to man made divinity that we face today, furthermore, because ideas about space dissent from orthodoxy, it is clear that several questions emanate from the debate relative to the complexities of space making. Quite simply, the problem has to do with the understanding of being, which Hassan Fathy understood.

We might also add, the cognitive differences between philosophy and eschatology are sometimes difficult to reconcile. Today the ambiguities of post-modernism, Pantheism and the Promethean myth remain violently at odds with those of us who have not been influenced by the 'god-complex'. Lest we forget, Prometheus was also a god—his name means 'forethought'. Zeus would not tolerate any interference with his own plan for reshaping creation, because he believed that divine gifts, culture, art, and literacy would only bring misery to the mortals,

which was part of the Promethean plan.

In many ways the Promethean myth is more creditable if we consider Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison's storyline in *The Bluest Eye*. Morrison echoes the problem, when she writes of someone who is attempting to define life by means of conscious/unconscious falsifications. Morrison's analogy is already well known and she tells it best; *The Bluest Eye*, introduces us to arrogance and narcissistic behavior, by way of a pathetic 'fourth face', a 're-designed Satan' and a 're-designed image' of God.<sup>1</sup> In Morrison's oeuvre the explanation of virtue like art is beautiful, but then there are the 'people of the Bottom'—the term is hopefully self-explanatory. And with this we reach our final point, Morrison introduced us to someone called 'Breedlove' who falls prey to the false notions of white superiority.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> *The School of Athens* 1510-11, Fresco. Stanza Segnatura Vatican Palace Rome; see *The Art of Italian Renaissance: Architecture, Sculpture, Painting, Drawing*, ed. Rolf Toman (Tandem Verlag GmbH 2005), 335-6.
- <sup>2</sup> Gilles Plazy, *The History of Art in Pictures* (New York: Barnes and Nobles Books, 1999), 33.
- <sup>3</sup> R. Scruton, *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Philosophy* (New York: Penguin, 1996), 86.
- <sup>4</sup> Robert A. Armour, *Gods and Myths of Ancient Egypt*, The American University in Cairo Press, Cairo Egypt, 1986, 135
- <sup>5</sup> For further reflection on eschatology and the production of space in Ancient Egypt, Schwaller de Lubicz presents a précis in *Symbol et Symbolique* (1947) and *Le Temple dans l'Homme* (1949). On the subject of aesthetics, willpower and divinity; such idioms were of profound value to Egyptian architects see, R.A.Schwaller de Lubiz, *Symbol and the Symbolic: Ancient Egypt, Science, and the Evolution of Consciousness*, trans. Robert and Deborah Lawlor, (Vermont: Inner Traditions International, 1978): *The Temple in Man: Sacred Architecture and the Perfect Man*, trans. Robert and Deborah Lawlor, (Vermont: Inner Traditions International, 1977).
- <sup>6</sup> Spiro Kostoff, ed., *The Architect* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 5
- <sup>7</sup> Kostoff, *The Architect*, 5.
- <sup>8</sup> Antonio R. Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: G.P. Putman Sons, 1994), 249.
- <sup>9</sup> Gunnar Olsson, "Line of Power" in Trevor J. Barnes and James S. Duncan eds., *Writing Worlds: Discourse, text and metaphor in the representation of landscape* (London: Routledge, 1992), 88.
- <sup>10</sup> Thomas Molnar, "Paganism and its Renewal", *The Intercollegiate Review*, 31:1 (Fall 1995), 28-35.
- <sup>11</sup> Bryan Wilson Key, *The Age of Manipulation: con in confidence, the sin in sincere* (New York: H. Holt, 1989), 6.
- <sup>12</sup> Anthony F. Janson ed., *History of Art*, vol. II (New Jersey: Prentice Hall-Abrams, 1995), 626.
- <sup>13</sup> See Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row 1977), 11.
- <sup>14</sup> Tom Wolfe, *From Bauhaus to Our House*, Pocket Books (New York: 1981), 42.
- <sup>15</sup> Akel Ismail Kahera, "Towards An 'Integrated' Design Pedagogy: Architectural Displacements and The Location of Culture Beyond The Bauhaus Tradition", *ACSA Conference Proceedings* 2006; "(Re) Thinking Primitivism, Cubism and the Agency of the Mask: Three forms of Improvisation." *Improvisation* 2005, *ACSA SW Regional Proceedings*. 267-74, (2006).
- <sup>16</sup> See Le Corbusier "Ineffable Space", in Joan Ockman ed., *Architecture Culture 1943-1968* (New York: Rizzoli 1993), p.66.
- <sup>17</sup> Umberto Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 179.
- <sup>18</sup> Professor Craig Anz of Southern Illinois University, conveyed the incident to me; he was present when the remarks were made.
- <sup>19</sup> For example see the following books among others by Amos Rappoport, *House Form and Culture* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1969; and *Meaning in the Built Environment*, (Arizona: Arizona University Press, 1990).
- <sup>20</sup> Akel Kahera, *Deconstructing the American Mosque: Space, Gender and Aesthetics* (Austin: University of Texas Press: 2002)
- <sup>21</sup> Hassan Fathy, "Mosque Architecture", unpublished manuscript, n.d.
- <sup>22</sup> Allen Alexander, "The Fourth Face: the image of God in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*", *Journal of Black Studies* 16 (1986), 429-34.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid

# USING SCIENCE TO UNCOVER HISTORY:

## *A Geophysical Investigation of Wyatt Chapel Cemetery*

ALISON T. HENNING, Ph.D., GINGER BURNS, RICHARD HOFFMAN AND BRIAN JACOBY

### **Abstract**

*Wyatt Chapel Cemetery is an abandoned cemetery located in Prairie View, Texas. Oral histories from local residents suggest that the cemetery originated as a slave burial ground in the mid-nineteenth century. The local community is interested in examining the cemetery in order to document the history of the area. In July 2007 and February 2008, participants in a graduate course at Rice University acquired global positioning system and ground-penetrating radar data at the cemetery. The soil at the field site is ideally suited for radar work and the subsurface image quality was excellent. Numerous anomalies were identified that are consistent with unmarked burials. Two of these anomalies were excavated and confirmed as burials. The stratigraphy consists of 3-6 feet of sand overlying a hard clay, and the boundary produces a very bright reflector. In the main clearing of the cemetery site, the sand-clay boundary deepens abruptly from 3 feet to approximately 5 feet. This anomaly was initially considered a possible man-made excavation, perhaps a mass burial site. While the stratigraphy does contain abrupt terminations, most depth changes occur gradually, suggesting formation by natural processes.*

### **Background**

#### *Slave Cemeteries*

Texas is not as often associated with plantation life as are other states in the deep south, such as Virginia and Georgia<sup>1</sup>. But plantations did indeed flourish in Texas in the 1840s-1860s<sup>2</sup>. Cotton was the main crop, made possible by slave labor. By 1860, there were over 158,000 slaves in Texas, comprising 31% of the Texas population<sup>3</sup>. The Brazos River was surrounded by fertile agricultural land and many wealthy plantations were situated along its banks. Many of these plantations contained designated slave graveyards where slaves were buried before 1865<sup>4</sup>. After emancipation, slaves were often buried in newly established church graveyards. Many of the early slave cemeteries have been lost and it is estimated that there are hundreds of abandoned and neglected cemeteries in the state of Texas dating from the plantation era<sup>5</sup>. These cemeteries can contain valuable information on the cultural history of Texas, but most plantations are now gone and there are rarely any written records associated with these abandoned cemeteries.

Particularly striking documentation of slave burial practices come from oral histories of former slaves in Texas.

*They just buried the dead most anywhere where there was a good place - under a tree, on a hill, and like that.*<sup>6</sup>

*Sometimes they was buried in wooden boxes, and sometimes both white and black was buried just wrapped up. They wasn't no places to make things [caskets] like now and no graveyards.*<sup>7</sup>

These statements indicate that there were not always designated burial areas for slaves on plantations. Landscape features such as trees and hills may have served as the only markers for slave burials.

*I remember when folks died, they built plank coffins and lined the inside with plain white cloth and the outside with black. They didn't have funerals in them days - they just buried the folks in a burying ground we had.*<sup>8</sup>

*When a slave died, they made a box there on the place, and the folks go to the burying.*<sup>9</sup>

*Grandma dies...and they puts her in the slave graveyard.*<sup>10</sup>

*We had all our funerals at the graveyard. Everybody, chillun and all picked up a clod of dirt and throwed in on top the coffin to help fill the grave.*<sup>11</sup>

Some former slaves recall specific areas on the plantations set aside for slave burial grounds. Interestingly, these recollections also suggest the use of simple wooden caskets for the burials.

### **Liendo and Alta Vista Plantations**

In 1822, Jared Ellison Groce of Georgia came to Texas with Stephen F. Austin as one of the “Original 300” settlers<sup>12</sup>. Groce brought approximately 90 slaves with him to Texas and built the profitable Bernardo Plantation in

what is now Waller County<sup>13</sup>. After his death, his son Leonard W. Groce purchased “that part of the Liendo survey which lay north and west of Pond Creek”. In 1853, he built the Liendo Mansion on a small hill above Pond Creek, which flows into the Brazos River<sup>14</sup>. Liendo was one of the wealthiest plantations in the state, the social center of the state, and employed over 300 slaves<sup>15</sup>. Liendo is named for the original owner of the land grant, Justo Liendo. After the Civil War, Liendo fell on hard times; without the slave labor, it was impossible to maintain such a large estate. Groce went bankrupt in 1868 and died penniless, like many southern planters during Reconstruction<sup>16</sup>.

In 1848 or 1849, Groce’s cousin Jared Ellison Kirby moved to Texas from Georgia<sup>17</sup>. By 1860, he owned 139 slaves and 8,000 acres on both banks of the Brazos River, including Alta Vista Plantation<sup>18</sup>. The plantation house at Alta Vista was built between 1858 and 1861 and by this time the plantation employed 400 slaves<sup>19</sup>. Years later, Kirby’s widow sold Alta Vista to the State of Texas and Prairie View A&M University was eventually established on the site<sup>20</sup>.

Liendo and Alta Vista Plantations were home to hundreds of slaves between 1822 and 1865. However, there are no written records of a slave burial ground for either plantation. Oral history and a few old headstones suggest that Wyatt Chapel Cemetery, along the northern boundary of the Prairie View A&M University campus on what was formerly the Alta Vista Plantation, served as the slave burial ground for both plantations.

### Wyatt Chapel Cemetery

Wyatt Chapel Cemetery is located along the northern boundary of the campus of Prairie View A&M University. The site is heavily vegetated with small brush, trees, and grass. Pond Creek flows around the cemetery to the west and north. Efforts to clear the area over the years have prevented the growth of large thick trees, but the dense low-lying brush and small trees have covered the area.

Students at Prairie View in the 1920s and 1930s reported the existence of a cemetery at the site, with fifty or more grave stones and metal markers<sup>21</sup>. Oral history indicates that the cemetery was the burial place of slaves from the Alta Vista and Liendo plantations<sup>22</sup>. Over the years, Prairie View A&M students and staff have continued to discover headstones in the dense brush. They also discovered a rusted metal fence that appears to enclose several burials.

In 1992, a historical marker was erected to recognize the significance of the site as the Wyatt Chapel Cemetery. The marker identifies the site as Wyatt Chapel Community Cemetery and states that



**Figure 1**

*Metal grave marker with inscription "MRS MAMIE WYATT, DIED 3 17 62"*



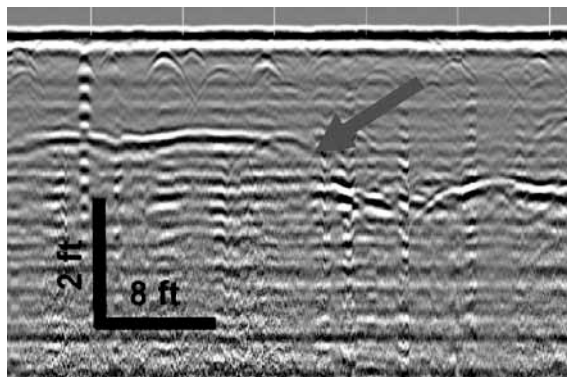
**Figure 2**

*PrairieView is located in southeastern Texas near the Brazos River, which provided fertile soil for many large plantations before the Civil War*



**Figure 3**

*Location map of the study site. The buildings are the northernmost portion of the PrairieView A&M University campus. Thick black line indicates the path of Pond Creek. Thin black lines indicate the locations of GPR profiles.*



**Figure 4**

*GPR profile showing the break in stratigraphy (indicated by the arrow) that was investigated as a possible anthropogenic feature.*



*This cemetery is located on land that was originally part of Jared E. Kirby's Alta Vista Plantation. According to oral tradition, the Kirby family set aside this land as a burial site for their slaves, as well as slaves from nearby Liendo Plantation, owned by Kirby's cousin, Leonard Waller Groce.*

The historical marker also states that “the cemetery became associated with and named for Wyatt Chapel, a nearby African American church”. Wyatt Chapel Baptist Church was established on April 29, 1894, with Reverend George W. Wyatt serving as the first pastor<sup>23</sup>. George Wyatt was born in Waller County in 1848, and family history suggests he was a state legislator from 1868 to 1900, while the Texas State Library Archives online suggest he served from 1883 to 1884<sup>24</sup>. Little else is known about George Wyatt, including the date of his death<sup>25</sup>. The fenced enclosure is thought to contain his grave, but there is no marker bearing his name.

One of George Wyatt's daughters was Mattie Wyatt Wells<sup>26</sup>. Prairie View resident Mrs. Ida Lou Wells Owens Pierce visited the cemetery in 1989 at age 82 and indicated that the grave of Mrs. Mattie Wyatt Wells within the wire enclosure was that of her mother<sup>27</sup>. She also noted that a headstone bearing the name Caroline refers to her grandmother, a former slave who died in 1898. Caroline must have been her paternal grandmother, since her mother's parents were George and Lizzie Wyatt. Her father was William Wells, but there is no additional information available about his family<sup>28</sup>. She indicated that many slaves or former slaves were buried at the site.

Some confusion arises from the text of the historical marker that states “The oldest marked grave is that of Mattie (Wyatt) Wells (d. 1882), the daughter of a former slave.” If Mrs. Pierce was born in 1907, then her mother could not have died in 1882. Perhaps the marker should read “b. 1882”. To add to the confusion, there is also a marker for Mrs. Mamie Wyatt, with a death date of 3-17-62 (Figure 1). This was previously recorded as Mrs. Mattie Wyatt, date 8-17-82 (interpreted as 1882)<sup>29</sup>.

Most excavations of African American cemeteries have been of 19th century burials, mainly post-emancipation<sup>30</sup>. Wyatt Chapel Cemetery straddles the emancipation boundary, after which former slaves would have been freer to bury their dead how they wanted. If some of those buried at the cemetery were born into slavery, then the cemetery would represent an interesting chapter in post-emancipation history. There do not appear to be any burials from the pre-emancipation era.

Wyatt Chapel Cemetery is one of numerous abandoned African American cemeteries in Texas dating from just after the Civil War. For example, Evergreen Negro Cemetery in Houston contains burials from 1887-1950, approximately the same time range as Wyatt Chapel Cemetery (except for one burial in 1984, thought to be part

of a family plot)<sup>31</sup>. Olivewood Cemetery, also in Houston, contains burials from 1867 (or earlier, some inscriptions are partially obscured) to 1961<sup>32</sup>. Efforts are underway to restore both of these cemeteries, and initial efforts focus on mapping existing surface features. The clay-rich soil in the Houston area makes geophysical work difficult, but ground-penetrating radar (GPR) did provide evidence of unmarked burials at Evergreen as well as the location of an old road through the middle of the cemetery.

## Field Work

The Texas Historical Commission (THC) has outlined a preservation plan for historic cemeteries<sup>33</sup>. One of the first recommended steps is to create a map of the cemetery grounds, including the location of landscape features and gravestones. The THC further recommends producing a description of gravestone material (concrete, marble, etc.), the name of deceased, vital dates, and the exact inscription on the gravestone. The THC also suggests recording vegetation and landscape features.

We utilized global positioning system (GPS) technology to record locations of key surface features, such as headstones, vegetation, and the creek. We used hand-held Garmin devices with average resolution in the heavily treed site of +/- 12 feet. These data were then loaded into a geographic information system (GIS) for interpretation. We used ArcMap 9.0 software and obtained georeferenced aerial photographs of the field site from 1930, 1956, and 2006. We also acquired ground-penetrating radar (GPR) data in order to obtain images of the subsurface. The locations of the geophysical profiles were also recorded with the GPS units. Geophysical methods such as GPR are excellent tools for this type of project because they are non-invasive and non-destructive. In Texas in particular, GPR has been shown to be an effective tool for locating unmarked graves<sup>34</sup>. We utilized a cart-mounted GSSI system with a 500 MHz antenna.

## Geologic Setting

Prairie View is located in Waller County in southeastern Texas (Figure 2). Wyatt Chapel Cemetery is located north of the town on the eastern bank of Ponds Creek, approximately 7 miles east of the current Brazos River channel. The site is located on the Pleistocene Willis Formation, consisting of 1-3 million year old fluvial sands<sup>35</sup>. Stratigraphically, the Willis Formation overlies the Lissie Formation of slightly older fluvial deposits, which in turn overlies the Tertiary (~20 million years) Fleming clay.

Several trenches were dug around the cemetery site in order to determine the stratigraphy. A layer of reddish-brown sand was found to overlie a hard gray clay. The sand ranges from 3 to 6 feet in depth across the area, with the depth generally changing gradually. We interpret the surface to consist of Pleistocene Willis sand overlying Tertiary Fleming clay.

## Geophysical Survey

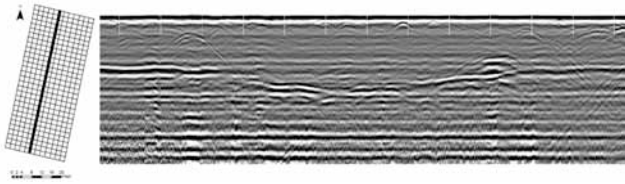
The use of ground-penetrating radar in archeology is well-established<sup>36</sup>. GPR is a non-destructive method for studying the subsurface that can provide information on buried features without digging or trenching. GPR works by sending a tiny pulse of energy into a material and recording the strength and the time required for the return of any reflected signal. Excavation of cemeteries to answer archeological questions can be considered desecration<sup>37</sup>. GPR provides a non-intrusive method for examination.

Ground-penetrating radar is useful for locating graves by detecting anomalies in the soil where graves were dug or for the detecting of buried coffins or vaults. If a vault or coffin does not exist, GPR can be used to study disturbed soil or other remains of the burial. Remains of burials are easier to locate in sandy soils that do not contain tree roots or stones. GPR is operated above the ground surface, and produces a cross-sectional image of the ground.

GPR can produce ambiguous results and is often used in conjunction with other methods, such as magnetic surveys<sup>38</sup>. Soil conditions and choice of antenna frequency are often responsible for this ambiguity. High clay content and water content can suppress the return radar signal<sup>39</sup>. Unknown depth and dimensions of targets can make antenna choice difficult. However, given the right soil conditions and antennae, GPR can provide an accurate and detailed picture of the subsurface.

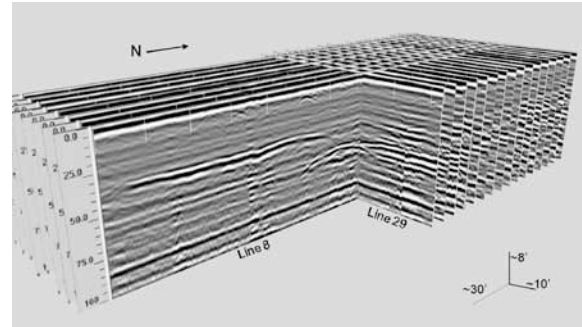
In July 2007, a group from Rice University's Department of Earth Science conducted a preliminary GPR survey of Wyatt Chapel Cemetery. A GSSI cart-mounted 500 MHz system antenna was used for this survey. The dielectric constant was determined to be 17 based upon depth to a known target. Records were 80 ns in length, which corresponds to a depth of about 105 inches (8.75 feet).

With support from Prairie View A&M's School of Architecture, the group was able to acquire and interpret 59 GPR profiles and 100 global positioning system (GPS) positions in a period of two weeks (Figure 3). Numerous geophysical anomalies were identified and two of them were excavated with the help of an archeology team from Texas A&M University. One excavation resulted in the discovery of a metal plank thought to be a burial cover, and



**Figure 6**

*On this GPR profile from the 2008 grid, the reflector is more continuous than on any other line. The anomaly is interpreted as a possible paleochannel of the nearby stream, rather than a man-made feature.*



**Figure 7**

*3-D view of the grid lines acquired in the main clearing. Note that the hyperbolic anomaly is apparent on both the inline and crossline, indicating excellent data quality.*



**Figure 8**

*Liendo Plantation House, Built circa 1853, Historic American Buildings Survey, James I. Campbell, Photographer March 10, 1934 FRONT ELEVATION (SOUTHEAST). Liendo, Farm Road 1488 & Wyatt Chapel Road Vicinity, Hempstead vicinity, Waller County, TX-  
Courtesy of The Library of Congress.*

the second excavation revealed a grave shaft. The first anomaly that was excavated was offset about 5 feet from the headstone of Milo Wilson, Jr., which appeared to be in situ. We suggest that there may have been a delay between the burial and the arrival of the grave marker, which led to the marker being placed slightly off the actual burial location. The second anomaly that was excavated was located about 20 feet southeast of the first and was not associated with any surface marker. Most of the anomalies were located in the main clearing of the cemetery.

## Survey Layout

In February 2008, additional GPR data were acquired at Wyatt Chapel Cemetery, along with magnetometer data. The main focus of this second data collection was to investigate a stratigraphic anomaly first identified on the 2007 data (Figure 4). In particular, we wanted to establish the boundaries of this anomaly and try to identify its cause as either natural or anthropogenic. Prairie View A&M students and the city of Prairie View had worked to clear the brush from the main clearing at the cemetery and removed much of the trash from the area in an effort to help facilitate the gathering of data by the GPR team.

The area of interest was identified based on the 2007 data. The main clearing that contains the excavated anomalies also shows a relatively deep stratigraphic anomaly. The real-time data display feature of the GPR system was used to locate the anomaly from the 2007 data and determine the best new site for data acquisition.

A 2-D grid of GPR profiles was acquired in the main clearing (Figure 5). A rectangular plot 24 feet by 60 feet was staked off and squared, and the perimeter was defined with string. The coordinates of each corner of the plot was obtained with a Garmin GPSMAP 60 handheld GPS unit, with accuracy of about 13 feet. The area was cleared of overhanging brush and limbs so that the GPR cart could be pulled smoothly across the site without losing contact with the ground. Stakes were placed along the perimeter line at increments of 2 feet and a string line was placed between opposing stakes to ensure that each run was straight. The equipment was pushed along the string line from the same starting line in each direction so that the lines were consistently North to South and East to West. A total of 44 lines were acquired in the main clearing, with 13 North-South lines (Lines 1-13) perpendicular to 31 East-West lines (Lines 14-44).

All the data was acquired in one day, so the field conditions were constant. The data were processed using GSSI's RADAN software. Processing included adjusting time zero to the ground surface, converting the time sections to depth using a dielectric of 17, and applying a gain function. Data were interpreted in ArcGIS and Google Viewer.

## Results

### *Aerial Photographs*

We examined aerial photographs of the cemetery site from 1930, 1956 and 2006. The photos were loaded into ArcGIS and georeferenced. The 1930 photo clearly shows very little vegetation at the site, which is now very overgrown. It also shows Pond Creek very clearly, including a tightly curving meander loop located just northwest of the main clearing. It appears that the outer loop is now abandoned and the creek has moved south and east, toward the main clearing, based upon GPS positions taken along the present day creek. We note that this meander loop would have been an easily recognizable landmark in 1930 and before, marking an area surrounded by water on three sides. The lack of vegetation would also have enabled easy access to the site. It appears that there were several clusters of vegetation north of the main clearing, which would have served as additional landmarks.

By 1956, there is more vegetation visible on the aerial photograph and the exact path of the creek is obscured, although the main clearing remains more sparsely vegetated than the surrounding area. By 2006, the entire area is densely vegetated and the ground is not visible on the aerial photo, with the exception of a small sinuous path that appears to coincide with the cluster of headstones. Some clearing had been done at this point by the city and university, so this may be an artifact of that clearing rather than representative of past use.

### Headstones

Prairie View personnel had noted the existence of multiple headstones and efforts were made by students and staff to catalog these headstones. We used these data as a starting point for our reconnaissance. We located all the previously noted headstones, as well as some additional markers. Very few of the headstones appeared to be in situ, but their locations were recorded as found. All headstone locations were loaded into GIS, along with additional information such as inscriptions, in order to examine these data in the context of the aerial photos. A total of 33 headstones were catalogued, covering an area of approximately 0.3 acres. This is significantly less than the 5 acres thought to be included in the cemetery<sup>40</sup>. If the area is extended southward toward the road, the area is about 4.6 acres.

Six of the markers are concrete headstones, two markers consist of concrete footstones only without associated headstones, three are US Army issue white stone, and seven consist of small rectangular metal plaques that are similar to modern day temporary grave markers. The remaining 15 markers recorded consist of stakes placed by earlier researchers to mark a burial. The three Army markers represent two veterans of World War I and

one veteran of World War II.

Many of the headstones displayed illegible inscriptions, but several showed clear dates. The legible death dates ranged from 1922 (Albert Colling) to 1953 (Milo Wilson, Jr.). The temporary marker for Mrs. Mamie Wyatt is labeled 3/17/62, which we interpret to be 1962. However, previous records by Prairie View personnel interpreted the label to be 8/17/82, with a death date of 1882. The historical marker at the site also states that a Mattie Wyatt Wells died in 1882 and represents the earliest known burial at the cemetery. We were unable to corroborate this information. One marker reads “In memory of Caroline” and possibly “Died June 24, 1898”. The first two digits of the year are difficult to read, but 1898 is supported by Mrs. Pierce’s statements. Additionally, a previously recorded marker for Darrie Williams reads “Died Feb., 28, 1898”, but we were not able to locate this marker.

### Geophysical Data

The GPR data were of very high quality and allowed a detailed interpretation of subsurface horizons. The depth of penetration was between 6 and 8 feet. The boundary between the sand and clay is evident as a bright reflector at 4-6 feet below the surface. Its appearance varies significantly on the GPR profiles acquired. GPR data acquired over anomalies first identified in 2007 showed the same anomalies, providing evidence of repeatability. Despite heavy rain one day before the field work was conducted, the surface was not wet and the quality of the GPR data was excellent, suggesting that the soil in this area drains efficiently.

Sharp breaks in the sand-clay boundary reflector are observed on some of the GPR profiles, but the majority of the data indicate a continuous horizon (Figure 6). Three-dimensional displays indicate excellent correlation between in-lines and cross-lines (Figure 7).

### Discussion

The headstones in Wyatt Chapel Cemetery provided the first clue that the area was a burial ground. Many headstones are broken and not in situ. Inscriptions on headstones suggest the earliest burial to be either 1898 or 1922. As mentioned earlier, students at Prairie View in the 1920s and 1930s reported the existence of a cemetery at the site. If the earliest burial was in fact 1922, then the students would most likely have been aware of a new cemetery and not reported their “discovery” of an old cemetery. This suggests that the cemetery did in fact originate many years before. The partially legible death date of 1898 on Caroline’s marker is corroborated by her granddaughter Mrs. Pierce.

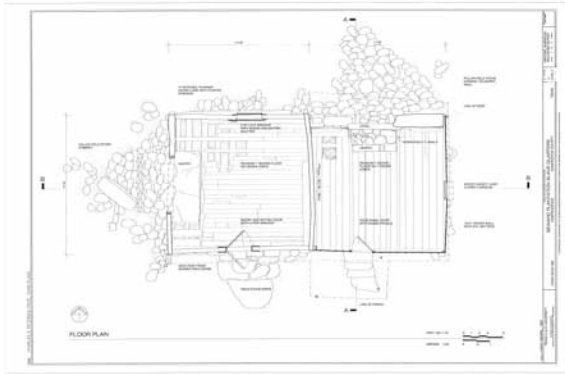


Figure 9

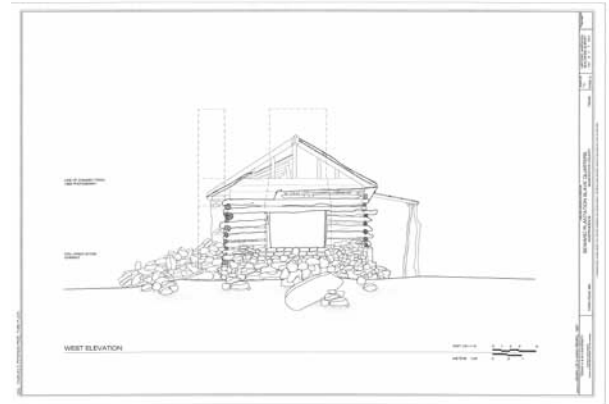


Figure 10

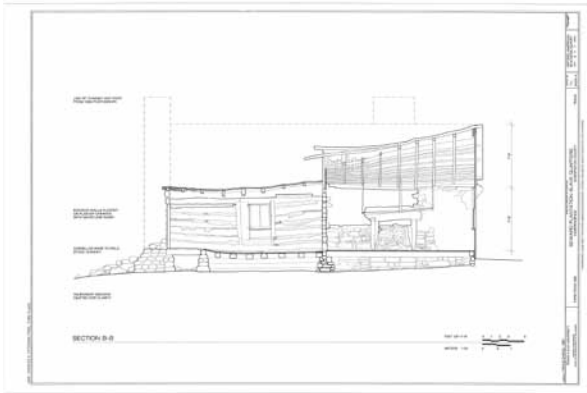


Figure 11

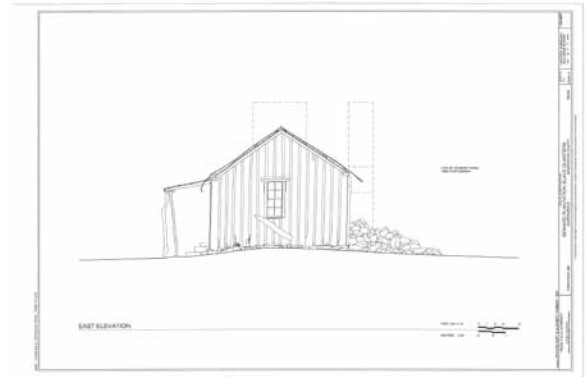


Figure 12

*Seward Plantation, TX, Slave Quarters, Courtesy of the Library of Congress.*



Whether burials began in 1898 or 1922, the site is a likely place for a slave burial ground. The soil is very sandy and therefore would not have been suitable for agricultural purposes, which would have made the site a good candidate for a slave burial ground. It is bounded to the north and west by Pond Creek, making it easy to locate. And there are several large trees at the northern edge of the site, along the boundary of Pond Creek and near the fenced enclosure, that may also have served as location markers.

The geophysical data indicate that Wyatt Chapel Cemetery contains numerous unmarked graves. Excavations confirmed two geophysical anomalies to be burials. We also used geophysical data to investigate a subsurface anomaly to determine whether it had any cultural significance. We traced the extent of the sand-clay boundary where it suddenly deepens on the GPR data in an attempt to determine whether this deepening of the horizon was the result of natural processes or human activity. The southern limit of the deep horizon was identified, but dense vegetation prevented identifying the edges of the horizon in the other directions. The northern extent of the deeper horizon appears to coincide with the large trees that bound the main clearing at the site. This was initially interpreted as evidence that the deep horizon may have been man-made, since a paleochannel feature would have pre-dated the trees and should therefore not be affected by their placement. Tree roots appear as deep as 30 ns at the northern ends of the GPR profiles (see Figure 6), but the sand-clay boundary is significantly deeper than that (~60 ns) and therefore not likely to be affected by the roots.

The variability in the sand-clay boundary in the main clearing of Wyatt Chapel Cemetery has several possible interpretations. Anthropogenic causes for the change in this reflector are not entirely consistent with the data collected. The continuous horizon lies undisturbed for most of the bottom of the trench indicating a stream bed or a slump from subsidence. The geometry of the surface displayed in Figure 6 is consistent with a channel. Anthropogenic causes for this trench would not leave a continuous horizon; it would leave the horizon broken and disturbed. Therefore, the abrupt depth changes in the sand-clay boundary are most likely related to a paleochannel of Pond Creek rather than a large excavation or other man-made feature.

We were able to demonstrate the efficacy of utilizing 3-D grids of GPR lines at this site (see Figure 7), which should be followed up in future studies. 3-D grids of GPR lines can provide detailed pictures of the subsurface that can reveal additional information about burials at the site. We also recommend clearing a larger area to acquire more GPR data and map the boundaries of the cemetery.

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# HUMAN ACTIVITY AND SYMBOLIC STRUCTURES

## *A Qualitative Study of People's Experiences and Activities at the Bonfire Memorial*

ARSENIOT. RODRIGUES, PH.D.

### **Abstract**

*The purpose of this study was to explore the deeper meaning of visitor's experiences and activities within structures of symbolic and cultural significance. The Bonfire Memorial at Texas A&M University was chosen as the setting for this study. Direct observations, kinesics, proxemics, and photography were used as methods to determine how people interacted with the physical characteristics of the Bonfire Memorial. Phenomenological interviews were conducted at the Memorial to determine 'personal' experiences of the physical characteristics of the Memorial, and to determine the chronology of peoples' experiences within the setting. A total of six observations and six interviews were conducted at the Memorial. The study concluded that Bonfire Memorial was associated with (among other experiences) the 'memory of Bonfire Ceremony', 'tradition', 'history', 'pride', and 'sadness'. People appreciated the Memorial and thought of it as a 'wholesome' and 'unified' place. In addition, the Memorial was appreciated for being a contemplative setting to reflect on one's own life.*

### **Introduction**

The Bonfire Memorial is dedicated in remembrance of 12 Aggies who lost their lives, including 27 Aggies who sustained injuries when the bonfire tragically collapsed on November 18, 1999. The Memorial is made up of 3 distinct spaces – Tradition Plaza, History Walk, and Spirit Ring and is widely visited by students, staff, faculty, visitors and other members of the community, interested in its traditional, solemn, and monumental significance.

The underlying objectives of the research were: 1) To determine how people interact with the physical characteristics of the Bonfire Memorial; 2) To determine peoples' experiences of these physical characteristics; and 3) To determine the chronology of peoples' experiences within the setting. Qualitative research methods proved to be advantageous for the research, since spatial and social interactions of participants are crucial to the study of experiences that a particular place can evoke. Through qualitative research methods, the study of social interactions can prove fruitful to understand the socio/cultural aspects of the participant's daily lives<sup>1</sup>. Multiple qualitative research methods (mixed methods) were utilized in this study. Mixed research methods are increasingly gaining favor as an alternative to the exclusive use of a single method, particularly when addressing multi-faceted research problems<sup>2</sup>.

Additionally, an integrative approach towards research involving various research methods from diverse traditions is being advocated by researchers across various disciplines, including architecture<sup>3</sup>. Mixed methods, when used appropriately, achieve more comprehensive and therefore, more reliable research<sup>4</sup>.

To determine how people interact with the physical characteristics of the Bonfire Memorial, direct observations were conducted at the site. Direct observations at settings are based on the assumption that behavior is purposeful and expressive of deeper values and beliefs<sup>5</sup>. Based on this assumption, direct observations assisted in the evaluation of recurring patterns early in the research. These observations were used to discover complex interactions in the study. Field notes were recorded to comprehend patterns associated with people's interactions' and movements' within the setting. Photography was used as a method to document body movements, movement patterns, and location of individuals visiting the site. Photography, as a method, has been historically used to describe how people move through a space<sup>6</sup>. A very important observation technique for this study was kinesics, i.e., the study of an individual's body motion communication. Kinesics as a method is based on the assumption that all individuals are engaged constantly in adjustments to the presence and activities of other persons<sup>7</sup>. Another useful method incorporated in the research was proxemics, i.e., the study of peoples' use of space and its relationship to culture. This was necessary in the research, since people from various cultures visited the Bonfire Memorial. A researcher using proxemics, documents the space in terms of interpersonal distance, the arrangement of furniture and architecture<sup>8</sup>. Since the Bonfire Memorial is an exterior architectural setting, used with other qualitative methods, proxemics proved to be an appropriate method of research.

To determine people's experiences' of the physical characteristics at Bonfire Memorial, and to determine the chronology of people's experiences' within the place, phenomenological interviewing was conducted at the site. Phenomenological interviewing is a type of in-depth interviewing that is founded on the principle of phenomenology, i.e., the study of lived experiences and the manners in which individuals understand those experiences to help develop a view<sup>9</sup>. It rests on the conjecture that there is a certain structure to collective experiences that can be recounted<sup>10</sup>. The intent here was to describe the significance of a phenomenon, i.e., the experience, that many individual's share of the Bonfire Memorial.

### **Descriptive Overview of Bonfire Memorial:**

Tradition Plaza demarcates the entrance to the Memorial. On initial approach from the parking lot, a quote from Spirit of Aggieland on a vertical granite slab known as Spirit Wall, greets visitors as they enter.

On moving past the Spirit Wall, one encounters the Last Corps Trip Wall, which is engraved with a poem that was traditionally read prior to the lighting of the Bonfire each year. These features collectively make up the Tradition Plaza space. Toward the end of Tradition Plaza begins History Walk.

History Walk accounts for/is the culmination of the 90 years of Bonfire ceremony, preceding the 1999 tragedy. It serves as a connection between Tradition Plaza and Spirit Ring, i.e., the location where the 1999 tragedy occurred. A time line composed of 89 granite stones, extends due north. The time line begins with the year 1909, i.e., the first year that the Bonfire was built on campus. History Walk is flanked with a grassy mount on the west. Towards the end of History Walk is Spirit Ring.

Three previous Bonfire-related deaths are remembered on the time line, in the years that they occurred. These three incidents are expressed in the form of a slit in the granite stones. The three slits contain a metal plate which is engraved with the person's name. An amber light embedded in the granite stones within each of the slits, illuminates the walkway at night. A gap in the time line acknowledges the year 1963, i.e., the year that John F. Kennedy was assassinated. It is the only year that the Bonfire ceremony was not celebrated.

Spirit Ring surrounds the site, where the 1999 Bonfire tragedy occurred. The ring's twelve Gateways face the hometowns of those who lost their lives in the collapse. Twenty-seven curved granite stones with bronze inlays, represent the students who were injured in the collapse, but survived. These stones connect the Gateways, forming a complete circle. The diameter of the Spirit Ring is the same as the 170' perimeter of the traditional Bonfire. Amber lights, placed on the underside of the curved granite stones, illuminate the ring at night. Spirit Ring is surrounded by a circular grassy mount on all sides.

Bronze portals inside each of the Gateways were designed in collaboration with each of the families, to reflect the events, emotions, life, and spirit of the lost family member. A circular shaped, black granite stone at the center of the ring, marks the exact location of the 1999 center pole. This marker is inscribed with the date and the time when the tragedy occurred. The marker also serves as the center point to orient visitors to the twelve hometowns. Bronze, granite, gravel and sand are used as materials in most areas of the Memorial.

### **Peoples' Interactions with Tradition Plaza:**

The poem on Last Corps Trip Wall was observed to be the most important feature of Tradition Plaza. The time spent in Tradition Plaza (mostly reading the poem) averaged about 3 minutes. Observations showed that upon entering Tradition Plaza, most people stood facing the Last Corp Trip Wall at a distance of 10 feet to 15 feet, while

reading the poem, except on the night of the anniversary of the Bonfire tragedy, when people stood facing the Last Corp Trip Wall at a distance of 6 feet to 12 feet. When visiting the Memorial as a group, people assumed a straight line, parallel to the Last Corp Trip Wall, while reading the poem.

Couples were observed holding hands while reading the poem on the Last Corps Trip Wall. However, upon reading the poem, the couples let go of each other's hands, until reaching the beginning of History Walk, where they held hands again. On the night of the anniversary of the Bonfire tragedy, people were also observed hugging other people from the side with one arm, while reading the poem.

Most people had to assume at least two different spots (while standing) in the Tradition Plaza to read the entire poem, since it is divided into five parts across the Last Corps Trip Wall. On the night of the anniversary of the Bonfire tragedy, people were also observed crying, while reading the poem.

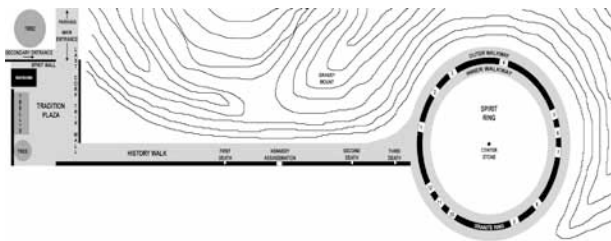
### **Peoples' Experiences of Tradition Plaza:**

Structured interviews showed that most people appreciated Tradition Plaza for the poem on the Last Corps Trip Wall. The poem was associated with a 'special, unique, and moving experience', and with feelings of 'enthusiasm', 'sadness', and 'bonding'. Some related comments regarding the experience and significance of the poem and Tradition Plaza were (excerpts from separate interviews):

*... there is something about the poem that moves me. I read it every time I come here... it makes me feel good about being an Aggie. It gets me all charged up... like we normally feel, with all the yelling during a football game here... like we all belong to the same family...*

*... the poem on the wall out there (Last Corps Trip Wall) was pretty cool... it makes you feel special... especially the last part of the poem. I felt sad after reading it... but it made me feel special about being an Aggie...*

*... I felt different... after walking through this place (Tradition Plaza). There is something different after you get through this place. I think it (poem) was read before the Bonfire was lit... I can see how other people might get broken up about it... I understand its significance and I can really appreciate it that way... it means something deep... I get sad whenever I read it... but also thrilled about being an Aggie...*



**Figure 1**

*Site plan of Bonfire Memorial showing Tradition Plaza, History Walk, and Spirit Ring*



**Figure 2**

*View of Spirit Wall from main entrance.*



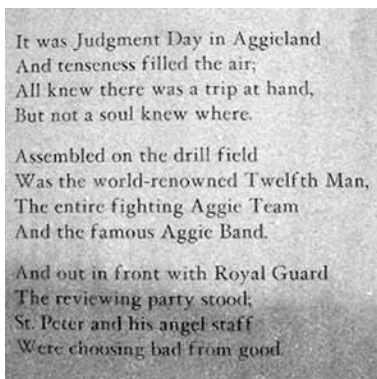
**Figure 3**

*View of secondary pathway leading to entrance.*



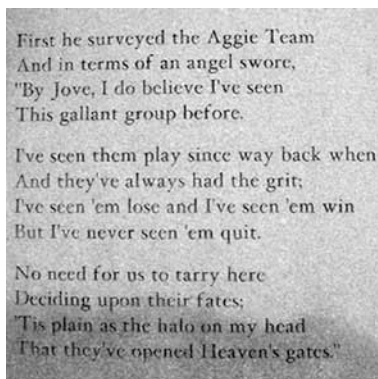
**Figure 4**

*View of Tradition Plaza.*



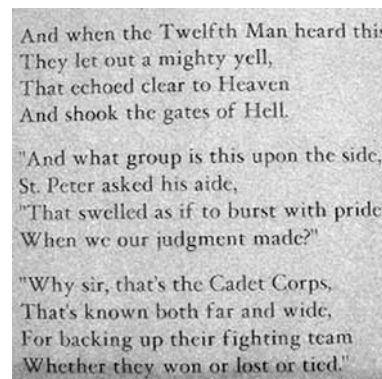
**Figure 5**

*Poem (first portion) on Last Corps Trip Wall*



**Figure 6**

*Poem (third and fourth portion) on Last Corps Trip Wall.*



**Figure 7**

*Poem (third portion) on Last Corps Trip Wall.*

### **Peoples' Interactions with History Walk:**

Most people (closest to the granite stones) walked along History Walk at a distance of 2 feet to 3 feet from the granite stones. Couples were observed holding hands while walking along History Walk. It was observed that most people walked at a very gradual pace (about 2 feet to 4 feet per second) along History Walk. The time duration required to traverse the entire length of History Walk averaged 1 ½ minutes. This was dependent on the amount of stops, duration of time spent at a particular stop, and the general pace of movement along History Walk. The use of gravel and the resultant sound produced while walking, was perhaps also responsible for slowing down the pace of people traversing History Walk.

Observations showed that most of the stops occurred at locations that coincided with previous Bonfire related deaths (slits in granite stones), and with Kennedy's assassination (low black granite stone) along History Walk. The duration at each of these stops ranged between 5 seconds to 20 seconds. Most people acknowledged the previous Bonfire related deaths and Kennedy's assassination along History Walk by either coming to a complete stop and then facing the granite stones (parallel or inclined), or by pointing their arms (in the presence of other people), or by simply turning their heads and looking at it (slowing their pace slightly). Most of the stops along History Walk coincided with Kennedy's assassination (low black granite stone), possibly because it stood out as a distinct feature along History Walk.

At the end of History Walk, most people followed the gentle curve to their right towards the nearest Gateway (Gateway One) of Spirit Ring, rather than the sharp turn to their right towards Gateway Twelve. This occurred either because of the suggestive nature of the gentle curve, or the shorter distance between the end of History Walk and Gateway One, compared to the longer distance between the end of History Walk and Gateway Twelve.

On the night of the anniversary of the Bonfire tragedy, people walking along History Walk maintained an average distance of 6 feet, between individual groups. Within groups, people maintained an average distance of about 1 foot from each other. Several individuals and some couples were observed stopping along History Walk. The black granite slab representing Kennedy's death was where the majority of people stopped. The stop lasted very briefly for about 10 seconds to 15 seconds.

### **Peoples' Experiences of History Walk:**

Structured interviews showed that most people appreciated History Walk, for expressing a sense of 'history' and 'appreciation for the Bonfire tradition', i.e., appreciation for all the Bonfires held since 1909. Some related comments regarding the experience and significance of History Walk were (excerpts from separate interviews):



*... It tells you how old Bonfire Ceremony really is... To walk besides it is like walking along with the history of Bonfire...*

*... That's (History Walk) nice too... all those stones represent all the Bonfires that were ever held... that's a nice way to show it... I can relate with it so easily... it's nice to be able to walk and slowly approach the portals... it's like you're actually going back in time... to the year that Bonfire was first held... and then moving forward slowly, as you walk. It makes you appreciate the Bonfire tradition...*

*... I feel like I'm going somewhere through that... the History Walk...*

### **Peoples' Interactions with Spirit Ring:**

It was observed that most people entered Spirit Ring through Gateway One after reaching the end of History Walk. This occurred possibly because Gateway One is located closest to the end of History Walk. An added incentive for using Gateway One for entering Spirit Ring could also be the gentle curve that connects History Walk with Spirit Ring.

The time spent by most people inside the portals varied from 10 seconds to 1 minute. At any given point in time, people inside the Gateways (reading the contents on the Portals) had either their left side, or their right side facing the center of Spirit Ring. Inside the Gateways, most people spent about 5 seconds to 10 seconds viewing the embossed faces of the deceased on one side of the bronze Portal, and an average of 50 seconds to 55 seconds reading the contents (dedication by family and friends, personal quotes and poems by the deceased, character description of the deceased) on the other side of the bronze Portal. Within the Gateways, most people first turned and faced the side that showed the embossed face of the deceased on the Bronze Portal. Additionally, within the Gateways, people spent more time (50 seconds to 55 seconds) facing the side of the bronze Portal that showed the dedication by family and friends, personal quotes and poems by the deceased, and character description of the deceased person.

Couples were observed holding hands inside the portals and while walking along the inner walkway on the inside of Spirit Ring. However, when entering or exiting the Portals, the couples let go of each other's hands.

It was observed that the duration of time spent within each portal decreased gradually after the first entry. The gateways were acknowledged either by actual entry or by standing (with upper body bent slightly forward) at

their threshold and viewing them for 3 seconds to 10 seconds, from the inner walkway on the inside of Spirit Ring. On a few occasions, people acknowledged the Portals by merely turning their heads (slowing pace slightly) in the direction of the portals, while walking along the inner walkway on the inside of Spirit Ring.

Most people stood upright within the Portals, with their legs unbent, and their arms to their sides. Of all the people observed, only one person was seen touching the granite Gateway and the bronze Portal. These actions lasted only 1 second. Once inside Spirit Ring, people used the inner circular path, next to the curved granite stones to walk to the next Gateway. Most people walked in the clockwise direction (inside Spirit Ring) maintaining a steady distance of about 2 feet from the curved granite stones at the periphery of Spirit Ring.

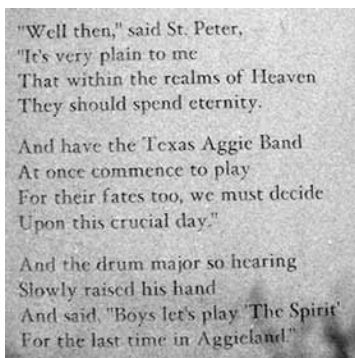
It was observed that people approached the black granite stone at the center of Spirit Ring, only after walking in and out of a few Portals. At the center of Spirit Ring, people either stood upright (looking down), or half bent over, supporting their body weight with their palms on their thighs (looking down), or knelt down on one knee (looking down) to view the markings on the black granite stone. The time spent at the center of Spirit Ring next to the black granite stone varied from 20 seconds to 1 minute. People used the black center stone to orient themselves with the direction (framed view created by the Portals) of the hometowns of the deceased. At the center of Spirit Ring, people either pointed to the Portals at the periphery (in the presence of other people), or physically looked in the direction of the Portals. People were also seen rotating themselves (very gradually) at the center and looking physically in the direction of the Portals.

People were also observed leaving coins on the black granite stone at the center of Spirit Ring. When visiting the Memorial as a group, people were observed assuming a semicircular formation around the black granite stone at the center of Spirit Ring, except on the night of the anniversary of the Bonfire tragedy, when people assumed a complete circular formation in the form of concentric rings.

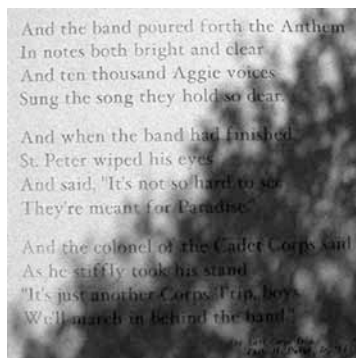
Most people used either Gateway One (closest to the end of History Walk along the gentle curve), or Gateway Twelve (on the other side at the end of History Walk) to exit Spirit Ring. Most people spent an average of 15 minutes inside Spirit Ring.

### **Peoples' Experiences of Spirit Ring:**

Structured interviews showed that most people appreciated Spirit Ring and thought of it and the Portals as being 'powerful' and 'monumental' (compared with the anthropomorphic scale). The Portals were associated with feelings of 'sadness', 'solemnity', 'remembrance', 'tradition', and 'heroism' (memory of the deceased). The



**Figure 8**  
*Poem (fourth portion on  
 Last Corps Trip Wall.*



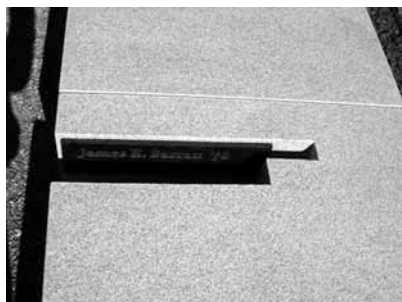
**Figure 9**  
*Poem (fifth portion)  
 on Last Corps Trip Wall.*



**Figure 10**  
*View of HistoryWalk from Tradition Plaza.*



**Figure 11**  
*View of HistoryWalk from Tradition Plaza*



**Figure 12**  
*View of slit in granite stone (demarcating  
 death) along HistoryWalk.*



**Figure 13**  
*View of black granite stone (signifying  
 Kennedy's death) along HistoryWalk.*



**Figure 14**  
*View of Spirit Ring with the  
 twelve Gateways..*



**Figure 15**  
*View of grassy mount adjacent  
 to Spirit Ring.*



**Figure 16**  
*View of gateway with interior  
 bronze portal.*

portals were also associated with a sense of 'orientation' for serving as a representative marker of the direction of the hometowns of the deceased. One person associated the Portals with 'Life' and the inner walkway inside Spirit Ring with 'Death'. Some related comments regarding the experience and significance of the Portals and Spirit Ring were (excerpts from separate interviews):

*... It (Portal) makes you feel sad, reading about the lives of the people who died. But, at the same time, it turns them into heroes. It makes me feel so small when I am inside one of those doorways... each of them point in the direction of their hometowns...*

*... I really like these things (the portals)... I definitely like these portals more than anything else here. It (Portal) makes you feel different when you are inside them... you feel different when you are inside there... It reminds me of Stonehenge... the Spirit Ring kindda looks like that... it makes you feel sad, to read about the people who died... within the portals... there are all these memories about these people. I just felt sad reading it and looking at their photographs. But then, that's the only way the rest of us will ever know who they were. It's only when you go inside the portals that you realize that they actually died for the sake of a tradition... they were just students... like you and me... and they had friends... and families... I cannot imagine how their families and friends must have dealt with this. I really liked walking around, along the circular path inside, and being able to experience the portals... the Spirit Ring feels so solemn and powerful... it turns the tragedy into a solemn experience...*

*... it (Spirit Ring) never ends. It's a never-ending circle. I can go inside and outside of it for as long as I like... I love the Spirit Ring... and the center stone. They remind me the most... that people died for aggie tradition... those portals... they are so huge and they have smiling faces. You can relate with the life of the person who died... and they are not sad... they are happy... they are transitioning from death to life through their portals... those portals are kindda like bridges... maybe they signify life... and maybe the walkway inside the ring is like death... you can go in and out of the portals... all*

*the way around the circle... from life to death and then back to life again... the Spirit Ring... that's important... it's everything... death... life... remembrance... tradition, all in one... death... because of the tragedy... life... because you get to see the people through the Doorways (Portals) ... it's their portal... from death (inner walkway inside the Spirit Ring) to life (Portals) through remembrance. The ring is empty now... earlier, the bonfire used to be there... now, it is empty... because the bonfire tradition... the ceremony has died off...*

Structured interviews also showed that most people liked being at the center of Spirit Ring and thought of the black granite stone at the center as a 'focal point' for experiencing the Memorial. The center stone was thought of as an 'orientation point' with relation to the Portals, for locating the hometowns of the deceased. One person associated the center stone with 'death'. People had also begun a ritual of leaving coins on the center stone, possibly as a sign of remembrance and well-wish. Some related comments regarding the experience and significance of the black granite stone at the center of Spirit Ring were (excerpts from separate interviews):

*... You need to stand at the center of the circle... to locate the hometowns... It is quite amazing... to stand at the center and look within the doorways...*

*... people have begun leaving coins on that stone in the center... its kindda like a remembrance thing... it may be an act of externalizing the fact that you remember the people who died there, by placing a coin... it may actually evolve into an aggie tradition... to leave coins like that. The center... allows you to locate their hometowns... it feels really weird standing in the center there... weird in a good way. I don't really know whether words can describe the feeling... six years back, that was exactly where the center of the Bonfire was... to think that it was this very place where it all happened. It give me goose bumps just thinking about it...*

*... it feels kindda strange being at the center... they put the center stone in... but they didn't put any pathway leading to it. You feel like you are in the open there... but that's the*

*only place from where you can get a glimpse of the entire ring... I mean all the portals... my friend and I were just discussing about how weird it was that people were leaving coins at the center... kinda like a wishing well. I guess people just start their own traditions that way... it (leaving coins) must have some significance. It must be important... the tradition of throwing coins. It must be. Why else would they (people) do it? Being at the center makes you feel so insignificant in comparison to the rest of the circle. You feel kinda lost... you're an insignificantly small part of a significantly greater thing... you're not really sure where to go from the center... you can move in any direction, but you don't feel like moving in any... maybe because there is no pathway... at the center, you can see in all directions through the portals. And that's where the students who died are from... their portals point in the direction of their home. You can only experience this at the center... I suppose that's special... their death was significant... seeing the portals from the center, reminds us of that...*

### **Peoples' Experiences of the Memorial as a whole:**

Most of the visitors to the Memorial were either students or alumni. The time duration spent at the Memorial (Tradition Plaza, History Walk, and Spirit Ring) ranged from 10 minutes to 20 minutes. In the month of November, most people visited the Memorial on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays in the late afternoons, between 4:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m., except on the night of the anniversary of the Bonfire tragedy, when people gathered at the Memorial by the hundreds after midnight.

Structured interviews showed that most people preferred visiting the Memorial after dark, when it was lit up. Some related comments regarding the experience of the Memorial at night were (excerpts from separate interviews):

*... I really like to come here during twilight, or when it is dark... because of the lights... It's magical. It looks like the Memorial is built on fire...*

*... My friends told me things like... it's a wonderful place at night...*



**Figure 17**  
*View of gateways.*



**Figure 18**  
*View of bronze portals (left-hand-side looking toward center) within the gateway.*



**Figure 19**  
*View of bronze portals (right-hand-side looking toward center) within the gateway.*



**Figure 20**  
*View of black granite stone at the center of Spirit Ring.*



**Figure 21**  
*View of black granite stone showing date and time of tragedy.*



**Figure 22**  
*View of gateways from the center of Spirit Ring.*

*... I specifically remember coming here at night... the lights are brilliant at night... the central ring even glows...*

Most people associated the Memorial with the ‘memory of the Bonfire Ceremony’, ‘tradition’, ‘history’, ‘pride’ and ‘sadness’. Some related comments regarding the significance of the Memorial were (excerpts from separate interviews):

*... It (Bonfire Memorial) makes me feel proud about being an Aggie. It's about tradition... it's about the Bonfire ceremony that used to be held here... I like the way it shows Aggie history... the poem (on the Last Corp Trip Wall)... the fact that each year is represented with a separate stone... (HistoryWalk)... I really like those doorways too (Portals in the Spirit Ring)... this place really makes me feel proud...*

*... My friends told me things like... it makes you feel sad... but proud at the same time... Proud about being part of the Aggie family... Its quite awesome actually... the Memorial somehow negates all the bad stuff that happened here...*

*... I really like it... I felt different about it after I visited it for the first time... before, I felt like it was something intriguing, but when I first entered the Memorial... I felt different... especially after walking through this place (Tradition Plaza). There is something different after you get through this place (Tradition Plaza)... I was a little sad... there is still that sense of quiet you get... you feel like you need to be somber or something... it's tradition that started this whole thing... like burning the Bonfire every year... from past to present... and present to future... that's the reason for the Memorial...*

Structured interviews showed that most people appreciated the Memorial and thought of it as a ‘wholesome’ and unifying place, with a general preference for the Spirit Ring, compared with the Tradition Plaza and History Walk. One person liked the Memorial for being a contemplative setting to reflect on one’s own life. Some related comments regarding the experience of the Memorial as a ‘whole’ were (excerpts from separate interviews):



*... I like the whole thing... the portals out there (Spirit Ring) are monumental, probably because of the walkway (History Walk), and this space here (Tradition Plaza)... each of them, add something and define the other... the walkway would be redundant without the poem... the Spirit Ring would not make sense without the Walkway and the poem... all of them have a meaning with the Bonfire ceremony... you need all of them to give meaning to this place... but, if you really asked me to choose... it would be the portals out there in the Ring (Spirit Ring)...*

*... I don't think it would be fair to choose one... each of them (Tradition Plaza, History Walk, and Spirit Ring) is unique... the poem is more about the Aggie spirit, and... that walkway... is more about tradition and history. But, I definitely like these portals more than anything else here...*

*... the Memorial has something special that, not many other places have... like the Aggie spirit... you feel like you're a part of something bigger... it (Aggie spirit) shows in the poem on that wall (Last Corp Trip Wall)... and through the walkway (History Walk) with the dates and occasions of deaths and everything... and through the central ring (Spirit Ring)... I really like History Walk... I feel like I'm getting somewhere passing the dates through time... but not having to stop to read every date, and then ending up at the Spirit Ring... I like the Spirit Ring the most... everything here, seems to have a purpose... it (the Memorial) has everything... a beginning (Tradition Plaza), a middle (History Walk), and an end (Spirit Ring)... that's (Spirit Ring) not really an end... an end to a beginning maybe... because History Walk ends in a circle... there is something really quiet and special about it (the Memorial)... it's a good place to reflect on your own life... like I'm lucky to be alive... it makes me reflect on my life. I like that. It helps me realize that my everyday problems are really insignificant compared with the fact that I am alive and healthy... I think about death and life... it's infused with the Memorial, and the people who died...*

The grassy mount (next to Spirit Ring) was selected by one person as the most ideal place to sit and relax at the setting. Related comments regarding this were (excerpts from separate interviews):

*... that hill over there (grassy mount next to the Spirit Ring)... it just looks all nice and green... the middle top (of the grassy mount)... from that place you can see enough of the Memorial but be just below the sight of people in the parking lot and at school. I'd rather not know they are there... I like the peace and quiet of the Memorial...*

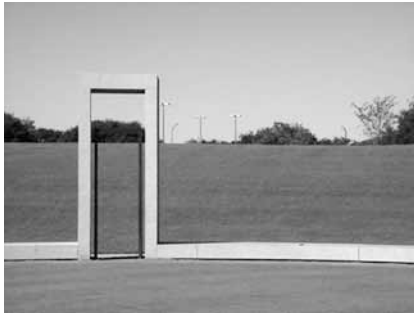
Some concern was expressed about certain features at the setting and the surrounding landscape that seemed to 'distract' people from experiencing the solemn quality of the Memorial. Some related comments regarding these features were (excerpts from separate interviews):

*... I really like the place (Bonfire Memorial)... but maybe not the lights out there (light poles in the parking lot adjacent to the Memorial)... at night the Memorial looks really... really beautiful and everything, but the lights out there can really kill the mood of this place...*

*... you can see all these other buildings from the Memorial (University Towers to the west, and the buildings on the campus to the south). They kinda distract you... there is too much clutter around. It would be awesome if the Memorial was just by itself... segregated...*

*... they ('University Towers' and the buildings on campus) aren't very pretty... it looks like they made an attempt to hide them with that hill (grassy mount around the Spirit Ring)... that phone stand (at the beginning of History Walk) is kinda awkward there. I don't think I like it that much... it doesn't seem to fit in this place... but I guess they need it for security reasons...*

People expressed a general preference for visiting the Memorial alone, with no strangers around or with few people around. There was some concern expressed by one person about visiting the Memorial at night, with no one else around. Some related comments were (excerpts from separate interviews):



**Figure 23**

*View of light poles in the parking lot adjacent to the Memorial.*



**Figure 24**

*View of University Towers to the west.*



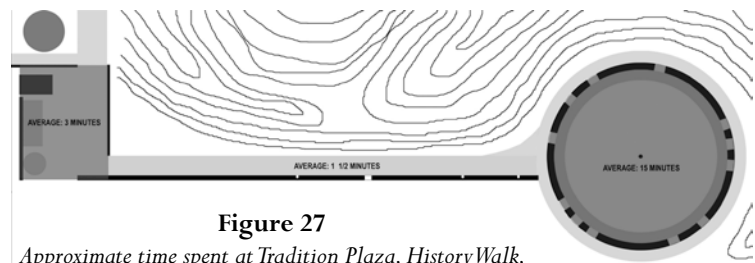
**Figure 25**

*View of buildings on the campus to the south.*



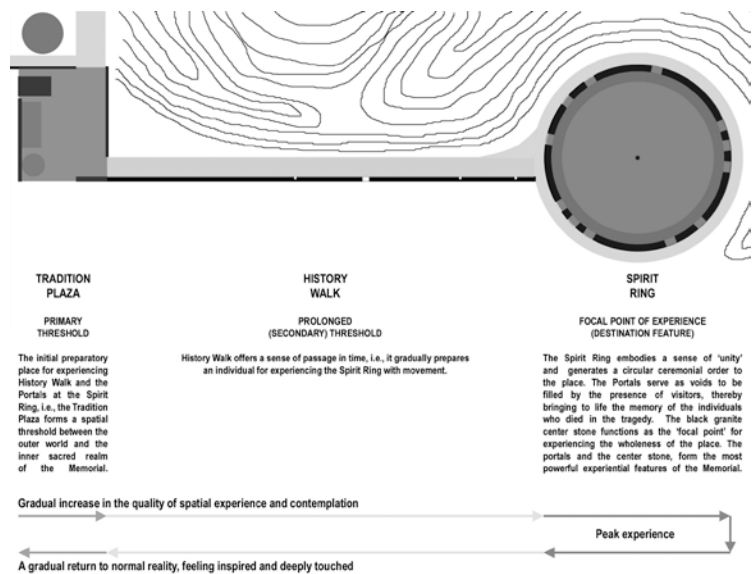
**Figure 26**

*View of phone stand at the beginning of HistoryWalk.*



**Figure 27**

*Approximate time spent at Tradition Plaza, HistoryWalk, and Spirit Ring*



**Figure 28**

*Chronology of peoples' experiences within Bonfire Memorial*

*... I like being here when no one else is around... I've noticed that people usually talk pretty loud when they come here... I even saw a girl jogging along the walkway and then around the circle (Spirit Ring). It really upset me... I like being here all alone...*

*... I don't think I would mind being here with people around... as long as there aren't too many... like being crowded... I don't think I would like that... it would be really distracting to have a lot of people in there (Spirit Ring) at one time. It wouldn't make sense being here... all the talking and the noise and the activity around. There needs to be some silence to appreciate this place... like stillness...*

*...I prefer visiting the Memorial when there are no people around... definitely during the day though. Its kinda scary on campus at night, when you're walking alone somewhere... and this place is no exception... I mean, I prefer being here at night, if I have company though... or if I am with friends... it's (the Memorial) in the middle of nowhere... and if there were no people around here at night... I don't think I would be like it that much... if I came here during the day... I'd like to amble through the place without worrying about other people... and how I need to act. I just want to be myself... and experience the place without anyone... without care...*

### **Chronology of Peoples' Experiences within Bonfire Memorial:**

The poem on the Last Corps Trip Wall, serves as an initiation feature meant to make people stop and contemplate. It initiates a primary bond between the visitor and the place. Tradition Plaza, therefore, acts as an initial preparatory place (primary threshold) for experiencing History Walk and the Portals at Spirit Ring, i.e., the Tradition Plaza forms a spatial threshold between the outer world and the inner realm of the Memorial.

History Walk functions as a type of prolonged (secondary) threshold, i.e., it offers a sense of passage in time, connecting individuals with the history of Bonfire with specific incidents (deaths) in the timeline. Thus, physical movement (passage) along History Walk serves as a means for gradual transition from Tradition Plaza to Spirit Ring, i.e., it gradually prepares an individual for experiencing Spirit Ring with movement. The slits in the granite stones (signifying previous Bonfire related deaths) and the low black granite stone along History Walk, function as resting

spots along this passage.

Spirit Ring embodies a sense of ‘unity’ through the form of the circle, i.e., it is ‘unending’. Through its circular form, it generates a circular ceremonial order to the place. The Portals serve as voids to be filled by the presence of visitors, thereby bringing to life the memory of the individuals who died in the tragedy. The scale of the Portal generates a feeling of ‘insignificance’ within individuals, when inside them. The black granite center stone functions as the ‘focal point’ for experiencing the wholeness of the place and for establishing orientation with the hometowns of the deceased. Thus, the experience of Spirit Ring, i.e., the Portals and the center stone collectively, form the most powerful experiential features of the Memorial. Additionally, the time spent at Spirit Ring, compared with the time spent in the Tradition Plaza, and History Walk, indicates that Spirit Ring serves as the main destination feature of the Memorial.

Structured interviews showed that there is a gradual increase in the quality of spatial experience and contemplation, with movement through Tradition Plaza and History Walk, with the peak experience occurring at the Spirit Ring (Portals and the center stone). Subsequently, there is a gradual experiential decline with movement back from Spirit Ring, onto History Walk, and then onto Tradition Plaza.

### **Appropriate Human Behavior at the Bonfire Memorial:**

Some concern was expressed about the appropriateness of walking on the grass on the inside of the Spirit Ring to get to the center stone, physically standing on top of the black granite stone at the center, and sitting on the granite stones along History Walk. This was however not a concern, if the people were not present. Such activities were associated with feelings of ‘unease’, ‘violation’, and ‘guilt’. Some related comments were (excerpts from separate interviews):

*... I am not quite sure whether you are actually allowed to stand on top of the stone at the center... that's the place where it actually happened... that's exactly where the students died... I don't know whether it's appropriate to stand on that stone at the center... I did... just once. That was when no one else was around. It somehow did not feel right, though... it felt as if I was violating the Memorial... It's only after you do something like that... that you realize that you've done something wrong... it may not even be appropriate for us to sit on these stones (History Walk)... I've never seen anyone sit on them before...*

*... I don't even know if people are supposed to walk to the center. I guess they can... it feels special... like you're not supposed to go there in the first place. But people do anyway... besides there aren't any signs, so I guess its fine...*

Structured interviews showed that certain types of activities, such as talking in loud voices, and using the Memorial as a jogging route, were not well received and were in fact, 'upsetting'. Some related comments were (excerpts from separate interviews):

*... I've noticed that people usually talk pretty loud when they come here... I even saw a girl jogging along the walkway and then around the circle (Spirit Ring). It really upset me...*

*... it would be really distracting to have a lot of people in there (Spirit Ring) at one time. It wouldn't make sense being here... all the talking and the noise and the activity around. There needs to be some silence to appreciate this place... like stillness...*

## **Conclusion:**

The poem on Last Corps Trip Wall was observed to be the most important feature of Tradition Plaza. The poem was associated with a 'special, unique, and moving experience' and with feelings of 'enthusiasm', 'sadness', and 'bonding'. The poem on the Last Corps Trip Wall, served as an initiation feature meant to make people stop, and contemplate. It initiated a primary bond between the visitor and the place, thereby functioning as an initial preparatory place or primary threshold for experiencing History Walk and the Portals at Spirit Ring.

Data revealed that most people walked at a very gradual pace (about 2 feet to 4 feet per second) along History Walk. Observations showed that most of the stops along History Walk occurred at locations that coincided with previous Bonfire related deaths (slits in granite stones), and with Kennedy's assassination (low black granite stone). People appreciated History Walk, for expressing a sense of 'history' and 'appreciation for the Bonfire tradition'. History Walk functioned as a type of prolonged or secondary threshold. Physical movement or passage along History Walk, therefore, served as a means for gradual transition from Tradition Plaza to Spirit Ring. The slits in the granite stones and the low black granite stone along History Walk, function as resting spots along this passage.

People appreciated Spirit Ring and thought of it and the Portals as being ‘powerful’ and ‘monumental’. The Portals were associated with feelings of ‘sadness’, ‘solemnity’, ‘remembrance’, ‘tradition’, and ‘heroism’. The portals were also associated with a sense of ‘orientation’ for demarcating the direction of the hometowns of the deceased. The Portals were also associated with ‘Life’, while the inner walkway inside Spirit Ring was associated with ‘Death’.

People liked being at the center of Spirit Ring and perceived the black granite stone at the center as a ‘focal point’ for experiencing the Memorial. Spirit Ring embodied a sense of ‘unity’ through the form of the circle. Through its circular form, it generated a circular ceremonial order to the place. The Portals served as voids to be filled by the presence of visitors, thereby bringing to life the memory of the individuals who died in the tragedy. The scale of the Portal generated a feeling of ‘insignificance’ within individuals, when inside them. The black granite center stone functioned as the ‘focal point’ for experiencing the wholeness of the place and for establishing orientation with the hometowns of the deceased. Thus, the experience of Spirit Ring, i.e., the Portals and the center stone collectively, formed the most powerful experiential features of the Memorial. Additionally, the time spent at Spirit Ring, compared with the time spent in the Tradition Plaza, and History Walk, indicated that Spirit Ring served and as the main destination feature of the Memorial.

People preferred visiting the Memorial after dark, when it was lit. People also expressed a general preference for visiting the Memorial alone, with no strangers around or with few people around. Some concern was expressed about walking on the grass on the inside of the spirit Ring to get to the center stone, physically standing on top of the black granite stone at the center, and sitting on the granite stones along History Walk. This was however not a concern, if there weren’t other people watching, but was nonetheless associated with feelings of ‘unease’, ‘violation’, and ‘guilt’. Data also revealed that certain types of activities, such as talking in loud voices, and using the Memorial as a jogging route, were not well received and were in fact ‘upsetting’.

People associated the Memorial with the ‘memory of Bonfire Ceremony’, ‘tradition’, ‘history’, ‘pride’, and ‘sadness’. People appreciated the Memorial and thought of it as a ‘wholesome’ and ‘unified’ place, with a general preference for the Spirit Ring, compared with the Tradition Plaza and History Walk. The Memorial was appreciated for being a contemplative setting to reflect on one’s own life. Data revealed that there was a gradual increase in the quality of spatial experience and contemplation, with movement through Tradition Plaza and History Walk, with the peak experience occurring at the Spirit Ring (Portals and the center stone). Subsequently, there was a gradual experiential decline with movement back from Spirit Ring, onto History Walk, and then onto Tradition Plaza.

## ENDNOTES

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The Texas Black History Preservation Project (TBHPP) is documenting the comprehensive history of African Americans in Texas through a series of books and interactive DVDs. This is a landmark project in that no one has ever attempted a project of this magnitude and scope in regard to Black history in Texas. While there have been numerous works about various segments of the Black community in Texas, there is nothing that ties those stories together, nothing that brings those stories together in a central location.

The project will have a profound effect on education, specifically in the teaching of Black history. We will conduct scholarly research and promote the history of African Americans in Texas to the benefit of teachers, students, historians and also the general public, across racial lines, in Texas and beyond. We feel there are still large gaps in the teaching of Black history, and it is our hope that the fruits of this project will have a direct impact in classrooms, enhancing and increasing the ability of teachers to offer in-depth lessons about the statewide African American experience, and to present those lessons well beyond the boundaries of Black History Month.

Culturally, what we do will give African American youth an increased sense of self and pride, and a deeper knowledge of what generations before them have contributed to the growth of Texas.

The series will be presented in five volumes:

Volume 1 – 1528-1700

Volume 2 – 1700-1800

Volume 3 – 1800-1900

Volume 4 – 1900-2000

Volume 5 – 2000-Present

The series will span from Estevanico (Esteban, Stephen the Moor) wading ashore at Galveston Island with the Spanish explorer Cabeza de Vaca in 1528, to the triumph of Texas native Lovie Smith, who in 2006-07 became the first African American head coach to lead an NFL team to the Super Bowl. These are but two among hundreds of biographies, profiles, and interpretive essays from prominent scholars and historians that will address the people, places and events central to the African American experience in Texas.

Heading the project, as co-editors-in-chief, will be veteran journalists Roxanne Evans (Des Moines Register, Austin American-Statesman, deputy press secretary to Gov. Ann Richards) and Michael Hurd (USA Today, Austin American-Statesman, Houston Post, and noted Black college football historian).

For more information, visit the TBHPP web site: [www.tbhpp.org](http://www.tbhpp.org).



# TIPHC JOURNAL OF HISTORY & CULTURE 1:3

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- Architecture & Pedagogy at HBCU Institutions
- Human Activity & Symbolic Structures

**TEXT FORMAT:** Manuscripts for review should be no more than 5,000 words. Text must be formatted in accordance with The Chicago Manual of Style. All submissions must be submitted electronically, via e-mail to [tiphc@pvamu.edu](mailto:tiphc@pvamu.edu). Text should be saved in Microsoft Word format. Any accompanying images should be sent with a resolution of at least 300 dpi. Image captions and credits must be included with submissions. It is the responsibility of the author to secure permissions for image use and pay any reproduction fees. A brief author bio must accompany the text.

**SUBMISSIONS DUE:** November 30, 2009

Please send materials or correspondence to: ([tiphc@pvamu.edu](mailto:tiphc@pvamu.edu)) Dr. Akel Kahera, Editor, **JHC**; School of Architecture; Prairie View A&M University; Box 519 MS 2100; Prairie View, TX 77446.

