

# Displaying Race

## *Cultural Projection and Commemoration*

On the outskirts of Atlanta stands Stone Mountain, the site of an honorific memorial to three Confederate heroes. Stone Mountain Park's commemorative walk, devoted to the secession of the Confederate states from the Union, and its re-creation of plantation life contrast starkly with the Chapel of All Faiths, the eternal flame, and the tomb at the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial and Center for Nonviolent Social Change, located just forty-five minutes away in the Sweet Auburn Historic District of downtown Atlanta. While both are designated as parks, the former contains elements of a theme park: water slides, a petting zoo, cable car and paddle-wheel boat rides, a nightly laser show during the summer months, and hosts of other amusements. The latter, by contrast, is a set of buildings, walkways, and architectural features devoted to the memory and mission of one man and the social movement of which he was a part. If, as Michael Kammen argues, memory is activated by contestation and amnesia by the desire for reconciliation, these two sites would seem to provide very different means for shaping visitors' sense of racial and cultural identity, past, present and future.<sup>1</sup> But do they? And, more important, how are our racial identities tied to the images we encounter, interact with, and present, both in day-to-day life and in public, commemorative activities?

Political scientist Richard Merelman argues that racial identity is informed by cultural projection, defined as "the conscious or unconscious effort by a social group and its allies to place new images of itself before other social groups, and before the general public."<sup>2</sup> The goal of this chapter is to further our understanding of how racial identities are tied to commemorative activities by (1) extending and critiquing Merelman's model of cultural projection and (2) using the resulting theoretical framework to analyze the rhetorical manifestation of racial identities in these two southern memorial sites. Comparing and contrasting their symbolic, material, and linguistic elements reveals how each site displays particular visions of racial identities and social relationships. Specifically, such analysis reveals how Stone Mountain has come to enact a commodified, "de-raced" reinvention of the South, a reinvention that is made possible, to a large extent, *because* of the King memorial's syncretic, albeit "raced," qualities.

This chapter unfolds in two sections. In the first section, I explore theoretical issues related to commemoration, cultural projection, and display and use the insights garnered to

formulate a theoretical framework. This framework encourages a comparative analysis between various forms of cultural projection and/or displays of racial and cultural identity. In the second section, I use this framework to guide analysis of the two sites.

### *The Rhetorical Display of Race*

In his book *Representing Black Culture: Racial Conflict and Cultural Politics in the United States*, Richard Merelman asserts that there is a growing debate about American national identity due to changes in American culture. Merelman argues that the last thirty years have witnessed a growth in black cultural projection, particularly in the areas of entertainment media, schools, universities, periodicals, research foundations, and, to a lesser extent, government. Thus, according to him: "The scene is set for a struggle between a changing American Culture—in which black cultural projection plays an increasing role—and white domination exerted through the normal processes of American politics."<sup>3</sup>

Merelman describes four forms that cultural projection may take and reads various events and artifacts, including the establishment of the Martin Luther King Jr. national holiday, through this framework.<sup>4</sup> *Syncretism* is a form of "mutual projection" that occurs when "dominants accept some of the subordinate cultural projection, and subordinates accept some of the dominant projection."<sup>5</sup> Because it incorporates subordinate (as well as dominant) cultural imagery, syncretism may work to "weaken the cultural foundations of political domination in a society." *Hegemony* is an exclusive form of cultural projection in which "dominant groups control the flow of cultural projection." Thus, the dominant group's cultural imagery becomes the "common sense" for all groups. As a result, "Hegemony . . . undercuts the ability of subordinates to resist domination." *Polarization* is described as a failed form of cultural projection that occurs when groups both "experience the pain of having their own projections rejected by others" and "struggle to fight off the projections of these same others." Finally, *counterhegemony* is a form of cultural projection that involves the conversion of "dominants to subordinate versions of the world." Dominants gradually become more accepting of subordinates and thus begin to adopt a worldview that "immediately and definitively questions their right to power and which demands they cede power to subordinates."

The cultural projection model is important because it focuses attention on the extent to which power struggles among dominant white and subordinate nonwhite racial groups, especially blacks, have taken on a "cultural dimension, as opposed to traditional forms of economic struggle (over, say, the distribution of income) or political struggle (over, say, the distribution of elected representatives)."<sup>6</sup> The cultural projections that Merelman maps with his model, including Spike Lee's films, the discourse of multicultural education, and television news, also function as rhetorics of display that advance some cultural images while concealing others, thereby imbuing particular individuals, communities, social groups, and practices with value and significance. Until recently, according to Merelman, black cultural projection has typically been restricted to entertainment media, sports, and music. However, the number and types of images of blacks that invite "respect, commendation, debate and engagement" rather than negative stereotyping is increasing throughout the society. Among the rhetorical sites of cultural engagement that have proliferated over the last fifteen years are civil rights museums and memorials. Significantly, the images presented both visually and verbally at/in these sites are of black people engaging in political action in the

face of great opposition and danger—images that command attention and invite rhetorical inspection.

A rhetorical perspective on cultural displays, including displays of racial identity, can address some gaps in Merelman's project. A rhetorical analysis, for instance, would examine the cultural projections of different groups that compete for public attention and approval. Merelman, though indicating all cultural groups engage in cultural projection, devotes little attention to comparative examination of dominant and subordinate group projections. He defines dominant and subordinate groups as follows:

A politically, economically and socially subordinated group engages in cultural projection when its allies put forth new, usually more positive pictures of itself beyond its own borders. By inviting respect, commendation, debate and engagement, these new images contest the negative stereotypes that dominant groups typically apply to subordinates. For its part, a dominant group engages in cultural projection when it and its allies develop a newly positive set of self-images, and put forth such images to subordinate groups. These new images not only contend that dominant groups deserve the right to rule, but also ask subordinate groups to approve rather than resist or distrust rule by dominants.<sup>7</sup>

A rhetorical perspective on cultural display also involves examining both the substance of the images themselves and the formal, structural features that audiences use to make meaning. Merelman's approach, in contrast, focuses on "apparent outcomes" or effects of cultural projection (for instance, polarization is characterized by cultural projection that fails) with the consequence that it is difficult to account for the multiple kinds of experiences and readings that result when people encounter artifacts and sites of memory. Finally, a rhetorical study of display attempts to understand the specific means through which cultural projections come to influence specific audiences, as well as the culture at large. Merelman's model does little to explain these inner workings of cultural projections; instead the model is deployed to determine whether a particular image or set of images—verbal, visual, or material—has succeeded or failed at converting dominant group members to subordinate perspectives. In my view, it would seem more profitable to determine what kind of resources these often-competing projections provide for diverse audiences who must act together to construct social meaning, including social meanings related to racial identities.

To address these issues, and thereby extend Merelman's model, I turn to recent scholarship on genre theory and public memory. As communication becomes increasingly multimodal (oral, written, visual, material), genre theory can provide a framework for describing and theorizing this complexity as well as the patterns of regularity that cut across artifacts.<sup>8</sup> This is particularly important for sites of memory, because they are not exclusively linguistic in nature. Rather they are composed of layers of oral, written, visual, and spatial "statements" that combine to form complex wholes, simultaneously symbolic and material in nature. Because an emphasis on genre requires looking comparatively across discourses and artifacts, considering similarities as well as differences between what Merelman would classify as dominant and subordinate forms of cultural projection is important. This is particularly the case when dealing with sites of memory such as Stone Mountain and the King memorial because, as historian W. Fitzhugh Brundage points out, "The recalled past of all

societies is inherently relational; no group fashions its memory [and, we might argue, its racial identity] without reference to others.”<sup>9</sup>

Genre is also helpful to understanding how cultural projections related to public memory lead to the development of social, racial identities, since, as individuals, we “reproduce patterned notions of others.” Carolyn Miller proposes that genres “help do our rhetorical thinking for us” by providing the “mutual, cultural knowledge that enables individual actors to communicate as competent participants.”<sup>10</sup> She argues for an understanding of genre as a “specific, and important *constituent* of society, a major aspect of its communicative structure, one of the structures that institutions wield.”

Genre we can understand specifically as that aspect of situated communication that is *capable of reproduction*, that can be manifested in more than one situation, more than one concrete space-time. The rules and resources of a genre provide reproducible speaker and addressee roles, social typifications of recurrent social needs or exigencies, topical structures (or “moves” and “steps”), and ways of indexing an event to material conditions, turning them into constraints or resources.<sup>11</sup>

This emphasis on patterns of regularity across artifacts and sites as essential to our participation in social life is echoed by Brundage in his attempts to explain how historical and personal memory interact to form an essential component of the social identity of groups and individuals. He writes:

Expressions of historical memory require precise articulation. Culturally influential historical narratives typically acquire an accepted form that is free of the idiosyncrasies and nuances that shade personal memory. Memories that deviate too much from convention are unlikely to be meaningful to large audiences or to be spread successfully. Consequently, groups labor to create stable social memories that are resistant to eccentric or unsanctioned interpretations. . . . Yet in any collective memory there is an inherent dialectic between stability and innovation. . . . The identity of any group goes hand in hand with the continuous creation of its sense of the past. No enduring memory can be entirely static. . . . For a historical memory to retain its capacity to speak to and mobilize its intended audience, it must address contemporary concerns about the past. Consequently, although the crafters of historical memory often resolve to create a vision of the past that is impervious to change, their very success depends on its ongoing evolution.<sup>12</sup>

Brundage goes on to argue that “power and access to it are central to the creation and propagation of historical memory,” an argument very similar to Merelman’s regarding cultural projection. Both note that representations of African Americans have often been conspicuously ignored, while white social memory and representations have been treated as both public and universal in their claims.<sup>13</sup> Not until the 1960s, according to Brundage, “did blacks command the political power necessary to insist on a more inclusive historical memory for the South.”<sup>14</sup> However, it has taken even longer for museums and memorials that feature any type of black and/or African American perspective to emerge. And, as Donna Graves notes, it is only in the last decade that there has been an increase in scholarly attention devoted to identifying and analyzing the “symbols and patterns that characterize attitudes toward race and difference in American culture.”<sup>15</sup>

These three perspectives, on cultural projection, genre, and public/collective memory, indicate that there is an important shift occurring in the public arena, namely that epideictic discourses of display are being foregrounded even as the culture is experiencing significant changes in demographic makeup and in social and political structures. Certainly, discourses related to values tend to predominate when conflict and/or diverse perspectives emerge within social groups. And in times such as these, productions and uses of the past as means to assert values deserve thoughtful consideration. Building on the insights of the three perspectives summarized briefly above, the following questions provide a guiding framework for examining the Stone Mountain and King memorials:

What are the patterns of regularity between the two memorials/parks? What do they come to mean, and how?

How is the dialectic between stability and instability, similarity of structure and unique instantiation, played out at the sites? How does this dialectic relate to the issues of power and access?

What types of relationships between dominant and subordinate groups are displayed and/or constructed at the sites (syncretic, hegemonic, counterhegemonic, polarized)?

Are particular visions of social relationships and civic participation displayed at each site? If so, what are these visions?

### *Displaying Race in the New New South*

In his comparative discussion of the memorial sculptures in Kelly Ingram Park and the Montgomery Civil Rights Memorial, Dell Upton argues that the commemorative activity surrounding the civil rights movement of the twentieth century promotes a rehabilitation agenda similar to the creation of the "New South" at the end of the Civil War period. He writes: "A century later, Southern leaders frame the civil rights movement as a second painful rebirth—'the payments our history required,' in the words of one tourist publication—that transformed the New South into a New New South."<sup>16</sup> Most major southern cities now feature both the Confederate memorials that were erected in great numbers in the early part of the last century, as well as the more recent memorials and museums that honor and recount the experiences of African American leaders and the civil rights movement. This results in what Brundage terms "a symbiotic relationship between the remembered past of dominant groups and the counter memories of the marginalized" within these cities.<sup>17</sup> Certainly, both Stone Mountain and the King memorial participate in a common genre of commemoration, and both are tied geographically, historically, and culturally to the city of Atlanta and the state of Georgia in symbiotic ways.

### Commemorative Contexts

From the beginning, it appears that the Stone Mountain memorial was conceived as an "answer" to the memorial building of the northern or Union states. As David Freeman notes in his history of the Stone Mountain memorial, William Terrell first suggested (in May 1914) building a memorial at Stone Mountain because he was "disturbed by the perception that the Southern perspective had been neglected in modern histories and that Northern states and the Grand Army of the Republic ha[d] spent millions of dollars on memorials to their heroes while the South had not."<sup>18</sup> Geographically, Stone Mountain was

perfect because it was visible from downtown Atlanta and large enough to fit the grand scale with which its originators hoped to "answer" their Northern counterparts.

Stone Mountain had also become the annual gathering site for the newly revived (at the time) Ku Klux Klan organization headed by "Colonel" William Simmons. Freeman downplays the connection between the Klan and the Confederate memorial as circumstantial, yet he notes that Simmons "possibly selected Stone Mountain as the place for the nocturnal ceremony [of cross burning] precisely because of the planned Confederate Memorial" and that Sam Venable, the owner of the majority of the mountain, was also a Klansman.<sup>19</sup> In addition, he recounts that just three weeks after Simmons burned the first cross on the mountaintop, Helen Plane, the woman who was most influential in getting the Confederate memorial project off the ground, wrote to Gutzon Borglum, the initial sculptor, with the following news and suggestion: "The 'Birth of a Nation' will give us a percentage of the next Monday's matinee. Since seeing this wonderful and beautiful picture of Reconstruction in the South, I feel that it is due to the Ku Klux Klan which saved us from the Negro domination and carpet-bag rule, that it be immortalized on Stone Mountain. Why not represent a group of them in their nightly uniform approaching in the distance?"<sup>20</sup>

The project was besieged by difficulties almost immediately. In quick succession, World War I, the Great Depression, and World War II intervened to halt or delay its progress. But there were also financial difficulties, infighting, and possible corruption within the Stone Mountain Confederate Monument Association (an audit conducted in the wake of the Great Depression revealed that only 27 percent of the expenditures up to that point in time had gone for actual construction).<sup>21</sup> Borglum (who himself joined the Klan in the 1920s) completed the head of Lee and an outline of his horse by 1924 but refused to continue working unless he was paid. When he was offered, and then accepted, the Mount Rushmore commission, the Stone Mountain association fired him and brought in Augustus Lukeman, who basically started over. He, too, produced a head of Lee, but the Great Depression and a general lack of funds put an end to the carving. It was not until 1958 that the State Park Authority brought back to life the dream of a Confederate memorial carved into the face of Stone Mountain.

That year saw the creation of the Stone Mountain Memorial Association, which engaged in a lengthy study regarding whether and how to proceed with the carving.<sup>22</sup> The design and technical issues were not resolved until January 16, 1964, when Walker Hancock was chosen to complete the Lukeman carving and to design and oversee the building of a memorial plaza. While Hancock's design work was important (he corrected several flaws in Lukeman's original design), his other projects kept him from visiting the actual site more than two or three times a year. It was George Weiblen (who had served as superintendent of the carving thirty-five years earlier and who made the successful bid for the carving contract this third time around) and Roy Faulkner, one of Weiblen's crew, who brought the project to completion. It is not clear to what extent, if any, the Ku Klux Klan was involved in the project at this point, but the Klan was certainly active in Atlanta and other areas of Georgia during this time, particularly in "responding" to the activities of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. In his address at the dedication of the memorial, May 9, 1970, then vice president Spiro Agnew made a connection between the memorial and the cause of civil rights in the South, albeit in a convoluted manner, warning, "just as the South cannot afford to discriminate against any of its own people, the rest of the nation cannot afford to discriminate against the South."<sup>23</sup>

In 1996, when Stone Mountain was designated as an Olympic venue, the Stone Mountain museum exhibit "removed all mention of the Ku Klux Klan, in a hasty cleaning up of its image before the world."<sup>24</sup> Stone Mountain had been transformed, in the words of Louis Harlan, from a country village into "a suburb of the Atlanta megalopolis, a playground for yuppies."<sup>25</sup>

By contrast, Coretta Scott King founded the Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Non-violent Social Change in order to carry on her husband's work and honor his memory. Concerned about the impact of urban renewal on the neighborhood in which her husband was raised, she purchased property on Auburn Avenue, just east of the Ebenezer Baptist Church in downtown Atlanta, and in 1971, King's remains were moved to the site. Coretta Scott King worked successfully with the National Park Service to have the area declared a historic district. In October 1980, federal legislation established the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site and Preservation District to "protect and interpret for the benefit, inspiration, and education of present and future generations the places where Martin Luther King, Junior, was born, where he lived, worked, and worshiped, and where he is buried."<sup>26</sup> As described in the *National Historic Site Historic Resource Study*, the site is located "in an urban area that has suffered significant deterioration in recent decades and continues to be threatened."<sup>27</sup>

It was not always so. Between 1853 and 1906, the Auburn street district was primarily a white residential and business district that included a substantial black minority.<sup>28</sup> However, following the bloody September 1906 race riot, during which whites attacked many blacks and black-owned properties in downtown Atlanta, Auburn Avenue became a haven for black businessmen who were fleeing the increased hostilities and rising rents in the central downtown business district. Between 1910 and 1930, "Sweet Auburn" became the center of black culture in Atlanta: "Black Masonic leader John Wesley Dobbs tagged the area 'Sweet Auburn' because its churches, homes, and commercial buildings were highly visible emblems of black achievement. The avenue and its vicinity was the site of influential black businesses, churches, and a diverse black residential community."<sup>29</sup> While the area remains residential with a mix of primarily black-owned businesses, it has indeed deteriorated. In writing about the impact of the civil rights movement on black neighborhoods in the South, Dell Upton describes the kind of scenario that led to Sweet Auburn's current state:

As downtown services and accommodations were opened up to African Americans, black merchants could not compete, the black banks and insurance companies that financed urban development declined and collapsed, and the former black business district was transformed into a "blighted" landscape ripe for redevelopment. The devastation of the landscape that was so painstakingly built through the efforts of the black middle class is shocking. The few churches and commercial structures that survive among the open fields and parking lots—and even more appropriate, the fields and parking lots themselves—constitute another kind of monument to the movement, for it is commemorated at the site of its significant events, but in a setting that bears virtually no resemblance to its historical self.<sup>30</sup>

The geographic locations of these two memorials—one in a beautiful park with stunning natural features, including the mountain itself (583 acres of exposed granite), trees, wildflowers, and a lake; the other in an urban neighborhood that reflects the tumultuous

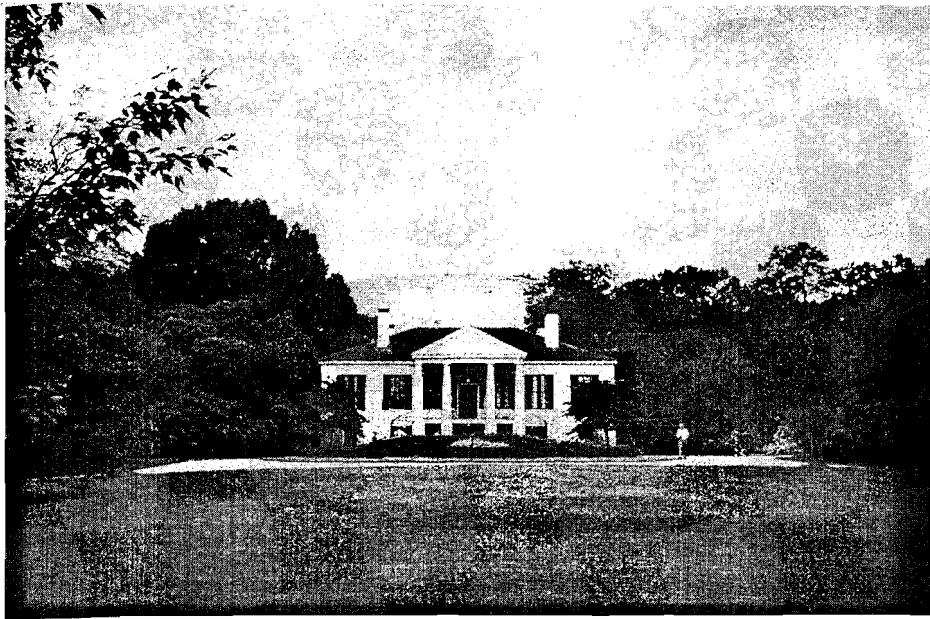
path of race relations in the South—are indeed symbiotic. There is no little irony in the suburban versus urban context, the natural beauty of a real park versus the ugliness of urban renewal and housing projects around a constructed “park.” Indeed, it would be striking if the King memorial were located in a part of town where middle- and upper middle-class blacks and African Americans are clearly living out the opportunities gained as a result of the civil rights movement. Instead, the King memorial and its related structures exist in an ambivalent relationship to the neighborhood that surrounds them. The newness of some of the buildings and the ideals embodied in the site are made all the more poignant by the fact that they are located in an area where black people continue to strive to eke out a living.

The fact that, after years of financial problems, political bickering, and technical difficulties, the Stone Mountain memorial was finally brought to completion during the 1960s (with heavy state involvement) and dedicated in 1970 is also indicative of the symbiotic nature of these two memorials. The Confederate memorial did, after all, serve as an answer to something, but in the timing of its completion, it would appear to have become the Old South’s answer to the modern civil rights movement.

#### Patterns of Regularity and Unique Instantiations

As indicated above, these two memorials share a common commemorative purpose: they seek to honor purportedly virtuous persons and/or events, thereby shaping historical memory and asserting values to inform current and future deliberations. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that the two memorials share certain formal features in common, although the instantiations of these structures are distinctive at each site. For instance, both parks feature a birth home of sorts. In the case of the King memorial, the birth home is the actual structure in which King was born and where he lived his young life. The home has been preserved and restored, as have many neighboring homes and buildings. Tours of the home, provided by the National Park Service staff, and a video that features the home (*Our Friend Martin*) present King as a hero who was also just a regular child, a regular person. King’s mythical, larger-than-life status in contemporary culture is intentionally downplayed somewhat in order to create the impression in visitors’ minds that they, too, like King, could and would do the heroic thing, if called upon.

At Stone Mountain Park, the birth home is a restored plantation, the generalized symbolic birth home of the Confederacy or, certainly, of the “lost” way of life that is so central to nostalgic, romanticized visions of the antebellum South. While the houses and other buildings were carefully selected after “years of research and planning” and purportedly provide a “realistic view of the lifestyle of antebellum Georgians,” very little information is provided as to how these buildings would have actually fit together in a real plantation or about the people who lived there. Freeman provides some interesting and, again, from a comparative perspective, highly ironic, historical context: “The plantation, originally dubbed Stone Acres Plantation, opened to the public in April 1963. The star attraction was not the plantation itself, but Butterfly McQueen, the actress who played the role of Prissy in the film version of *Gone with the Wind*. McQueen worked there as one of the tour guides on weekends until July 1965, when she ran into conflict with the management.”<sup>31</sup> While Freeman claims that once McQueen departed, all overt references to *Gone with the Wind* at the park disappeared, as recently as Labor Day 2001 the plantation featured an exhibit of

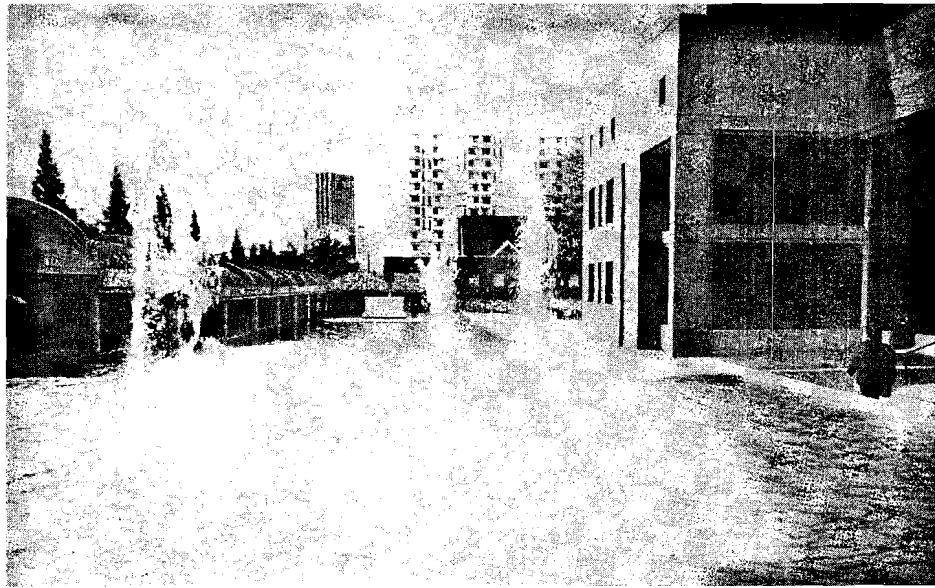


12. Plantation home, Stone Mountain Park. Photograph by Victoria J. Gallagher

Margaret Mitchell's clothes and artifacts in the main house. In addition, the museum at Memorial Hall, billed in promotional literature as a symbol of the park's commitment to history and education, featured an exhibit devoted to *Gone with the Wind*, and the author of a book on Margaret Mitchell's life was the featured guest.

The placement of the Margaret Mitchell display in the main plantation home implicitly leads visitors to experience the plantation through the images of a fictionalized story (*Gone with the Wind*) and/or through the lens of Margaret Mitchell's own life. Even without the special displays, it is difficult to construct an adequate historical sense of plantation life. Did more than one wealthy family live on any given plantation, as this layout seems to suggest? Would there really have been only two slave quarters for a plantation of this size? The descriptive narrative texts in the homes refer to servants and the work they would have done. The word "slave" appears only on the placards at the two slave cabins. Were there really two separate classes on plantations, slaves and servants? Or, as most historical accounts suggest, were there two types of slaves: field slaves and house slaves? In the main house there is a reference to the mammy who raised the children of the house and taught them table manners. Clearly, plantations were defined by race/class, yet there is no effort to describe these issues—and the silence is deafening. Instead, a mythical, fantasy version of antebellum life is strongly perpetuated.

Another feature found at both sites is a commemorative walkway. At the King memorial, the Freedom Walkway extends up the side of the reflecting pool where King's tomb is located. Visitors walk from the base of the pool, having passed through the Chapel of All Faiths, up the side past the fountains, and to Freedom Hallway, where they can view exhibits pertaining to the lives of Martin Luther King and Coretta Scott King, as well as Gandhi. The initial plans called for the walkway to feature commemorative art, but that phase has



13. Freedom Walkway left of reflecting pool, King Memorial. Photograph by Victoria J. Gallagher

not been completed. In the new visitors' center, completed by the National Park Service just prior to the 1996 Olympics, the main display room also features a freedom walkway, with life-size statues marching together on a road that begins at ground level and angles upward toward a wall of tempered glass windows. Given the extent to which freedom marches were used as modes of political action during the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, the inclusion of these freedom walkways makes rhetorical and symbolic "sense." They also evoke the ongoing journey metaphor that is often used to depict the struggle for civil and human rights.<sup>32</sup>

At the Stone Mountain memorial, the commemorative walkway extends down both sides of the lawn between Memorial Hall and the carving. There are thirteen viewing terraces along the walks, representing the states of the Confederacy. At the entrance to each terrace, there is a granite stone on which is carved an outline of the state and its date of secession, admission to the Confederacy, and readmission to the Union. Each terrace also features a low rock wall, trees, shrubs, and flowers. Facing Memorial Hall and proceeding up the left walkway, the states are positioned in the order of dates of secession, beginning with South Carolina and moving on: Florida, Louisiana, Virginia, Tennessee, and North Carolina. To preserve the order, one must go back down to the right side of the lawn and begin again, this time with Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama, Texas, Arkansas, Kentucky, and Missouri. A special placard stands beside both of the last two viewing spots. It reads: "Kentucky and Missouri were not 'readmitted' to the Union because they did not officially secede. Splinter groups in these Border States declared for the Confederacy and were recognized by the Confederacy but they did not represent the official state government. The Confederacy claimed thirteen states but the Union recognized eleven as being in secession." At the base of the walkways, on both sides of the lawn, are two memorial plazas, each



14. *Valor*, Stone Mountain Park.  
Photograph by Victoria J. Gallagher



15. *Sacrifice*, Stone Mountain Park.  
Photograph by Victoria J. Gallagher

containing a statue and blocks of stone inscribed with quotations from key heroes of the Confederacy and of the American states. Freeman describes the statues as follows:

*Valor* measures seventeen feet tall and stands on a five-and-a-half foot high base of pink granite. Carved in the base are the words, "Men who saw the night coming down upon them somehow acted as if they stood at the edge of dawn." This is attributed to a Confederate soldier just before his death. The statue of *Sacrifice* stands fourteen feet high, or over nineteen feet on its granite pedestal. Inscribed in the base is the phrase, "The country comes before me," uttered by the wife of General P. G. T. Beauregard.<sup>33</sup>

The commemorative walkway at Stone Mountain Park thus appears to fit the larger-than-life scale of the figures memorialized on the face of the mountain. In promotional accounts of the memorial, much is made about the scale and permanence of the carving. One such publication, titled *Georgia's Stone Mountain Park*, features the following quote, taken from then Virginia governor E. Lee Trinkle's dedicatory address on June 18, 1923:

We shall have erected a monument which will outlive the centuries and which will carry the history of our Southern War to a Future so distant that the mind of man is not gifted to grasp it . . . Centuries will be born to die—age will follow age down the unending pathway of the years; cities, government, people will change and perish—while yet, our heroes carved in stone, still stand on guard—custodians of imperishable glory, the sentinels of time.<sup>34</sup>

Louis Harlan, however, provides a very different reading of the monument in relation to the larger context of the mountain and of history: "[T]he chief problem of carving the Stone Mountain monument was not that it was too large a feat, but that the scale was too small to make a big impression. . . . Today, the three Confederate leaders on horseback, seen from the distance below, appear too small for grand effect, about the size of a postage stamp or the Stone Mountain commemorative half-dollar. The men do not match the mountain" (see figure C11).<sup>35</sup>

Certainly, the commemorative walkways and the related statuary and structures at both sites are imbued with a similar sense of reflective purpose, yet the actual experience of the walkways at these sites is quite different. At the King memorial, the walkways serve to aid visitors in contemplation and, as a result, they are part of the main attraction—this is what people come to see and do. At Stone Mountain, however, the walkway serves as a sort of framing structure: it prescribes the boundaries of the wide-open lawn stretching in front of Memorial Hall, the staging area for the nightly laser show. In my visits to the site, I have rarely seen visitors follow the commemorative walkway from start to finish or gather at the commemorative statues, yet all summer long, families and groups of friends set up chairs and blankets on the lawn hours before the start of the laser show, picnicking on food brought from the many concession areas in the park.<sup>36</sup> The commemorative walkway and even the carving, to a certain extent, serve as a backdrop for these other activities.

Thus, at Stone Mountain, the memorial's (and, as a result, the park's) theme and purpose are diffused in many respects. In fact, park management personnel have struggled over the question of the primary mission/message of the park—educational, historical, amusement?—as well as how to appeal to various audiences. Publications and promotional

materials emphasize a mix of all three missions, but amusement tends to be featured most centrally, with history and education programming thrown in.<sup>37</sup> This diffuseness is also seen in the rather strange relationship between the park and the state: all publications, the Web site, and other official references describe the park as "Georgia's Stone Mountain Park." Indeed, the state played a significant role in getting the project off the ground the third time around, purchasing the land and forming the association that brought the carving to completion.<sup>38</sup> Yet, the park is privately run and dominated by private, for-profit concessions.

At both sites, the dynamic between what is amplified and what is muted is central to visitors' experience of the memorials. The invited reading or experience at Stone Mountain, as indicated above, is one of nostalgia and mythology wherein issues of race are muted while the virtues of valor, sacrifice, and genteel living are offered as foundations of the Old South. Yet there are gaps in the "text," and visitors get glimpses of the complexity of race relations in the South. For example, the ubiquitous Confederate flags—in display cases, on flagpoles, on souvenirs, on T-shirts, including one with sparkles and sequins that reads "GRITS (Girls Raised in the South) Rule"—promote a form of southern pride which may be seen, by at least some people, as exclusionary, if not divisive. At the same time, however, African American families hold weddings and reunions on and near the plantation site. Over Labor Day weekend 2001, an African American couple was married in the formal gardens of the plantation house, and two African American families held reunions in the picnic areas adjacent to the plantation grounds.

By contrast, the invited reading or experience at the Martin Luther King memorial is highly functional, even ritualistic. The formal elements that mimic a mausoleum—the casket housing the remains of a dead loved one by an eternal flame and chapel of all faiths—combine with the buildings and the visitors' center to evoke memories of and to educate about the past. The homes and displays provide evidentiary support for the overarching theme that social change can occur through the lives and work of individuals. However, the emphasis on King's life and times, particularly when combined with the national significance granted to the site, serves to mute the complex story of the civil rights movement and the many individuals and events that contributed to social change. The journey or pilgrimage at the King memorial, ending as it does at the Freedom Hall, points to education as the essential tool or goal for the future. The road in the visitors' center has a less clearly-defined end and thus may suggest that the journey itself is the important lesson or goal.

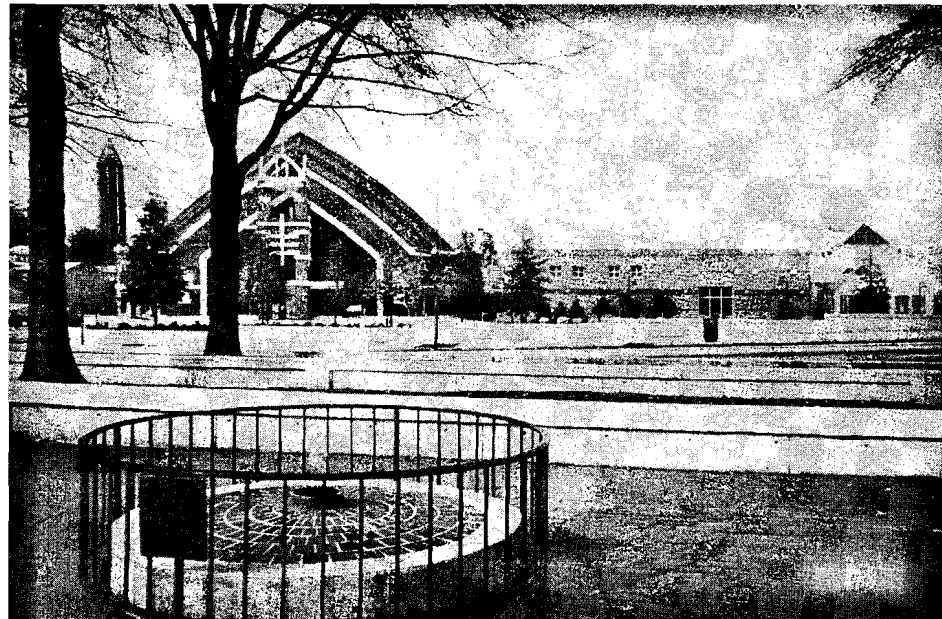
Reading these two sites comparatively demonstrates how instantiations of generic structures are always idiosyncratic and innovative even as they provide us the stability (via similar structures and forms) by which to interpret and agree on social experiences. In the case of Stone Mountain and the King memorial, the differences in instantiation suggest differences in the cultural projection as well as in the type of persons, events, and social practices that are imbued with value. While genre analysis provides the means for examining both the substance of images themselves and the formal, structural features that audiences use to make meaning, Merelman's model provides a way of understanding the impact of these meanings on racial identities and politics.

#### Cultural Projections and Social Visions

Using Merelman's model, we may characterize Stone Mountain as a form of hegemonic cultural projection since the dominant group—in this case, southern whites and/or the state

—controlled (and, for the most part, continue to control) the flow of cultural projection. However, as indicated earlier, simply looking at who “controls” a memorial site fails to account for the multiple kinds of experiences and readings that result when people encounter commemorative displays. What would be considered offensive racial projections in other contexts are no longer polarizing at Stone Mountain, because they have been sublimated underneath entertainment, nostalgia, and fun activities. The overt reliance on the theme park model, which serves to diffuse or mute the asserted commemorative focus, leads to a point of view geared toward entertainment and fun. A not-too-deep, de-raced, history “lite” becomes the “common sense” perpetuated by the park. Yet, the potential for reinvigoration, and therefore polarization, is still there. In addition, the extent to which Stone Mountain’s racial projections have been sublimated also provides the grounds for making a contrary case, namely, that segregationists have become a subordinate group and integrationists the dominant.

The King memorial, on the other hand, with the involvement of the National Park Service and the new visitors’ center, is characterized by a more syncretic relationship wherein dominants accept some of the subordinate cultural projection, and subordinates accept some of the dominant projection. The efforts of Coretta Scott King, the members of the Ebenezer Baptist Church, and the surrounding community led to the cultural projection of African Americans by African Americans. The partnership with the National Park District and historic preservation groups served to merge dominant group projections with subordinate group projections. Yet it is difficult today to interpret the King memorial site as a truly mutual projection for two reasons. First, the majority of people who visit the site are black and/or African American. In a sense, then, large numbers of whites reject, or at



16. Visitors' Center and new Ebenezer Sanctuary viewed from Eternal Flame, King Memorial. Photograph by Victoria J. Gallagher

least, ignore the images displayed at the site, one of the characteristics central to polarization in Merelman's typology. Secondly, the recent addition of new buildings across the street from the original site seems to separate the previously merged dominant and subordinate projections into two sides of the street. The King memorial and Center for Non-violent Social Change, the original Ebenezer Church Sanctuary, and King's birth home are all located on one side of Auburn Avenue. Prior to 1996, the view across the street from the King memorial was of an empty lot, designated in 1992 as the future site of a community center to be named after King. Instead, the National Park Service constructed a new visitors' center on this property. The contrast between the new, larger building, set back from the sidewalk and surrounded by extensive landscaping and statuary, on one side of the street, and the older, smaller structures, set directly off the sidewalk on the other side of the street, is quite noticeable. Additionally, in the King center, the birth home, and the original Ebenezer sanctuary, members of the community and church serve as hosts. At the visitors' center, uniformed park rangers greet visitors. The Ebenezer congregation has also built a huge new sanctuary across the street, adjoining the visitors' center, but the doors are locked to visitors except on Sunday mornings.

The original structures at the King memorial thus provide a vision of social relationships based upon individual motivation and purpose. As mentioned earlier, the structures are highly functional and direct in purpose: a casket, a building housing archives and displays, a church sanctuary, homes. While both sides of the street have bookstores where visitors can purchase postcards, posters, wall hangings, T-shirts, and books by and about African Americans and blacks in the United States, the activity and identity of being a consumer is clearly secondary. Instead, in the new visitors' center, individuals are offered the opportunity to participate as writers of history (there are stations within the display room equipped with pencils/pens and books of blank pages where visitors sit and write their reactions, experiences, feelings, memories). On the other side of the street, the Chapel of All Faiths, the eternal flame, and the tomb instruct visitors to reflect and remember the person and impact of Martin Luther King Jr. Ultimately, the memorial, in its coupling with the Center for Nonviolent Social Change, indicates both structurally and symbolically that an individual's commemoration can lead to social action and change.

A very different set of actions and relationships is encouraged by the structures and symbols of Stone Mountain. There, relationships are built on consumption, whether it is the consumption of "Southern" food (fried chicken, pork rinds, sweet tea, and lemonade are featured fare at the park) or the consumption of amusements (the cable car ride, the train ride, the laser light show, the paddle-wheel boat ride, and a host of others). This difference in activity between the two sites is indicated as soon as a person arrives at the park, since at Stone Mountain, you must pay to enter, pay to ride the rides, pay to eat. While at both sites the commemorative-related activities are free, Stone Mountain's commemorative features end up providing a kind of backdrop for a host of other activities. In this way, the commemorative features and what they commemorate (the "Lost Cause") become an omnipresent, albeit sublimated, background narrative for whatever other activities occur. Since no reflection is encouraged (at the park, you "do" rather than "think"), the strange ironies that pop out all over are left unexplored, and the assertion of a mythologized Old South system of social relationships and values is made to seem harmless, even desirable. After all, African Americans and whites, international tourists and locals, Olympians and

weekend joggers all share in the use of the park. Yet assertions of southern pride are ever present, and, unlike the King memorial, where the focus is on the relationship between the individual, his or her conscience, and his or her participation in the community and in history, at Stone Mountain the emphasis is on families and groups coming together to engage in activities of consumption and entertainment.

### *Conclusion*

As the analysis above indicates, Merelman's model of cultural projection provides an interesting point of analysis for artifacts that display images of social/cultural groups and their racial identities. It provides an explanation for why rhetorics of display increasingly dominate our cultural and political scene as well as a framework for understanding the impact of such displays on racial identities and politics. But a model based largely on who initiates the display and how or whether it is received provides little information regarding the types of symbolic and interpretive resources deployed or the experiences evoked by them—in other words, *why* they may be received and perceived in one way or another. A rhetorical, comparative analysis informed by the conception of genre as social action provides a more nuanced examination and thereby some explication regarding how sites of memory, such as Stone Mountain and the King memorial, may *come to mean*. Genre analysis does this by emphasizing comparative analysis across cases—cases that may share formal features and underlying exigencies in common, yet differ widely in terms of actual instantiations and substance. In this analysis, both sites have been shown to share features that enable them to be categorized collectively by all visitors as state-sponsored commemorative sites that seek to honor purportedly virtuous persons who served purportedly worthwhile causes. They also share, as described above, many formal characteristics or features in common—commemorative focus, designation as set-aside space (national park and historic site, state park), birth homes, commemorative walkways, visitor participation opportunities, bookstores / gift shops. However, the experience of these formal characteristics and the meanings that may be drawn are unique at each site: for example, the birth home as mythologized and romanticized (Stone Mountain) compared with the birth home as demythologized but ritualized (King memorial); the commemorative walkway as framing structure for diffuse activities (Stone Mountain) compared with the commemorative walkway as central to both commemoration and the actual activities of visitors (King memorial).

While genre analysis emphasizes formal and structural stability across rhetorical displays responding to similar exigencies, it also demarcates the constraints, the potential for generic violation or instability. As this analysis reveals, there are glimpses of instability in the display of values at each site. At Stone Mountain, the amplification of virtues of valor and sacrifice, southern hospitality, and a gloried past are undercut by the park's lack of a clear focus. The current amalgamation of many different activities and features has no one coherent storyline holding it all together, except the ubiquitous presence of symbols of southern pride. And, as a result, both GRITS and African American family reunion groups use the site, separately but equally. At the King memorial, the amplification of the role of the individual (King) and of communities in social action and change is undercut somewhat by the physical context, the overriding presence of the state in the form of the park rangers, and the experience of the two sides of the street evoked by the new visitors' center structure. And, while anyone could, theoretically, have access to either site, at Stone

Mountain the cost of things as well as the location out of town restricts particular people (city dwellers, the poor, those without transportation) in particular ways, while at the King memorial, the location in a "deteriorated area" is also seen as potentially restrictive by some people (suburban whites, the middle/upper classes).

Finally, genre-informed rhetorical analysis leads to a judgment regarding the success or failure of verbal, visual, and/or material images in accomplishing rhetorical ends. For Upton, the South's memorials dedicated to civil rights are

tombstones of racial strife and heralds of a new order. Taking their cues from the spectacular economic success of Atlanta, which billed itself during the years of the civil rights movement as "The City Too Busy To Hate," Southern urban leaders herald the birth of a (non)racial order that fulfills the "nation's commitment to liberty and justice for all" and forms the social basis for a reinvigorated, globalized regional economy.<sup>39</sup>

This comparative analysis of Stone Mountain and the King memorial reinforces Upton's judgment. Stone Mountain is able to enact an economic, commodified reinvention of the South by amplifying southern "virtues" and muting issues of race. Yet, without the heraldic, syncretic qualities of the King memorial, without the acknowledgment and documentation of progress, of social change, of history and memory that it provides, Stone Mountain (and the South itself) would be unable to sustain such "rehabilitation" in the eyes of the nation and world and instead would continue to be polarizing and polarized. As Brundage so aptly puts it:

At first glance, both white and black southerners have felt the tension between "what was" and "what ought to have been" in their pasts. For different generations of whites the Civil War and then, more recently, the economic and social transformation that C. Vann Woodward has called the "Bulldozer Revolution," have broken the ribbon of time, severing the present from the preceding eras. Twice over the white past has been rendered obsolete. The traumas of the southern past, as Woodward has explained, ensured that white southerners could not easily depict their history as one of unbroken success and progress. Yet the appearance of abrupt and wrenching change, especially the modern civil rights movement, has enabled white southerners to see parts of their past as conveniently obsolete. Their eagerness to forgive the past for the sins of the past is encouraged by regional boosters, southern politicians eager to erase the stigma of provincialism, and a tourist industry that promotes nostalgia.<sup>40</sup>

As examples of cultural projection, then, memory sites that participate in a commemorative genre instruct us as to our racial identities through the visions of civic participation and social relationships they display. At the King memorial, visitors are provided the resources for social action (the structural forms, their physical relationships with one another, the activities they "recommend," the geographical context), based on a syncretic view of racial identity and dominant and subordinate group relationships. We are invited to see ourselves as individuals who are raced but who can meet together and experience one another's viewpoint and, ultimately, make change. At Stone Mountain we are directed to act as if we are not raced, consuming and being entertained with no sense of who we are and where we have come from, while at the same time we are offered a permanent view of a

fantasized past in which everyone knew their place and the world was right. Comparatively analyzing dominant and subordinate projections such as these enables a clearer understanding of the process of amplification and muting that is central to rhetorics of display. And in both of these memorials, what is to be commemorated and valued is displayed, not solely via discourse or argument, but through enacted experiences of visual, material artifacts and environments.

#### Notes

1. Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 14, 704.

2. Richard M. Merelman, *Representing Black Culture: Racial Conflict and Cultural Politics in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 3.

3. *Ibid.*, 25.

4. In his analysis of the King holiday, Merelman argues both that it represents the ritualization of black cultural projection and that elements of syncretism are present in the various celebrations and ceremonies. However, he concludes that these ceremonies do not lead to complete syncretism since "[n]o single, qualitatively revised version of 'being American' emerges from" them.

5. These descriptions are summarized from Merelman, *Representing Black Culture*, 5-6.

6. *Ibid.*, 26.

7. *Ibid.*, 3.

8. Gunther Kress provides supporting arguments for this claim in his keynote speech, "Multimedia, Multimodality, and the Idea of Genre," presented at the Genre 2001 conference titled "Genres and Discourses in Education, Work and Cultural Life: Encounters of Academic Disciplines on Theories and Practices," in Oslo, Norway, in May 2001. In that speech, Kress suggested that genres provide a set of particulars in multimodal events, just as they do in primarily linguistic events. Yet, he warned, we must be careful not to treat images as if they are quasilinguistic or a parallel mode to language. Rather, representation in different modes reconfigures social interactions in particular ways. For instance, if speech is organized in time, visual images are organized in space, leading to the simultaneity of all things occurring in a picture. A picture, then, is not a story. Rather it is a display, an event structure. Writing and speech may appear in relation to it, providing a story line, a structure in time.

9. W. Fitzhugh Brundage, "No Deed but Memory," in *Where These Memories Grow: History, Memory, and Southern Identity*, ed. W. Fitzhugh Brundage, 22 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

10. C. R. Miller, "Rhetorical Community: The Cultural Basis for Genre," in *Genre and the New Rhetoric*, ed. Aviva Freedman and Peter Medway, 72 (London: Taylor and Francis, 1994).

11. *Ibid.*, 71.

12. Brundage, "No Deed but Memory," 9-10.

13. *Ibid.*, 11, and Merelman, *Representing Black Culture*, 5-6.

14. Brundage, "No Deed but Memory," 11.

15. Donna Graves, "Representing the Race: Detroit's Monument to Joe Louis," in *Critical Issues in Public Art: Content, Context, and Controversy*, ed. Harriet F. Senie and Sally Webster, 215, 220 (New York: Harper Collins Books, 1992).

16. Dell Upton, "Commemorating the Civil Rights Movement," in *Design Book Review* 40 (1999): 32.

17. Brundage, "No Deed but Memory," 22.

18. David Freeman, *Carved in Stone: The History of Stone Mountain*, (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1997), 56.
19. *Ibid.*, 61.
20. *Ibid.*, 61–62.
21. The historical information summarized here is based upon Freeman, *Carved in Stone*, and Louis R. Harlan, "Climbing Stone Mountain," in *American Places: Encounters with History*, ed. William E. Leuchtenburg, esp. 160, 161, 167 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).
22. The historical information summarized here is based upon Freeman, *Carved in Stone*, 157–77.
23. For a more complete account of the dedication ceremony, see Freeman, *Carved in Stone*, 176–77.
24. This is how Louis Harlan summarizes author Tony Horwitz's description of the preparation of Stone Mountain for the 1996 Olympics in the book *Confederates in the Attic*. Horwitz further noted that, as a result, "The Invisible Empire became, well, invisible." See Harlan, "Climbing Stone Mountain," 167.
25. *Ibid.*, 167.
26. Pub. L. No. 96–428, October 10, 1980, summarized in Robert J. Blythe, Maureen A. Carroll, and Steven H. Moffson, *Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site Historic Resource Study* (Atlanta, Ga.: Cultural Resources Planning Division, Southeast Regional Office, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1994).
27. *Ibid.*, 8.
28. Alexa Henderson and Eugene Walker, *Sweet Auburn: The Thriving Hub of Black Atlanta, 1900–1960* (Atlanta, Ga.: National Park Service, 1983), 5–10.
29. Blythe, Carroll, and Moffson, *Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site Historic Resources Study*, 19.
30. Upton, "Commemorating the Civil Rights Movement," 31.
31. Freeman, *Carved in Stone*, 149.
32. A visual depiction of the journey metaphor is found in the following civil rights–related museums: the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, the National Civil Rights Museum (in Memphis), and the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Visitors Center (in Atlanta). The journey metaphor, sometimes also described as a pilgrimage or exodus, is used in Martin Luther King Jr.'s writings and speeches, as well as in tourist publications geared toward African and black Americans. See, for instance, Wayne C. Robinson, *The African-American Travel Guide* (New Jersey: Hunter Publishing, 1998).
33. Freeman, *Carved in Stone*, 181.
34. Because Robert E. Lee, a native Virginian, was to be the first figure carved by Borglum, the Virginia governor was invited to dedicate the chisels and make the dedicatory address. For a full account of the day, see Freeman, *Carved in Stone*, 70. The quote is found in Deborah Yost, *Georgia's Stone Mountain Park* (Kennesaw, Ga.: Ariel Photography Services, 2000).
35. Harlan, "Climbing Stone Mountain," 167.
36. The secondary nature or role of the commemorative walkway and plaza is substantiated by Freeman: "Compared to the dedication of the Confederate Memorial, the one for the plaza was largely ignored. Most people viewed the plaza ["plaza" refers here to the two plazas and statues—*Valor* and *Sacrifice*—as well as the commemorative walkways] as a nicely appointed but ultimately unnecessary expenditure" (*Carved in Stone*, 182).
37. Freeman gives some examples of park management's efforts to determine the best balance between amusement, history, and recreation. He argues that recreation and entertainment have remained the primary focus. See *Carved in Stone*, 155, 183–88.

38. For a summary of the state of Georgia's involvement in the memorial project and park, see Freeman, *Carved in Stone*, 141-56.

39. Upton, "Commemorating the Civil Rights Movement," 32.

40. Brundage, "No Deed but Memory," 15.