EDITED BY CRAIG E. BARTON

sites of memory

PERSPECTIVES ON ARCHITECTURE AND RACE



presented in text, images, and music, offer invaluable insights into the mem-

es black Americans have supplemented narratives of history with memonurtured, and shaped into expressive artifacts as chronicles of their powerful the American landscape. Contemporary scholarship has begun to make nese artifacts, including literature, music, dance, art, film, vernacular archiural geography, to explore the construction of a modern cultural landscape 1 by memory as by physical artifact.

ivotal moment to explore the issues of spatial identity and representation of the contemporary urban landscape. Thirty years ago the Civil Rights movethe customs and the traditions which defined both the black and white culs. Today, we as planners, designers, writers, artists, and historians continue to blems of America's urban landscape, confronting its multiple histories as well and cultural elements that separate us by race, class and gender.

s in Sites of Memory present the recent fruits of such research and collectively y address these crucial questions: How are the ideology and political history of ed visually and spatially in the built environment? What are the visual and spahat distinguish the black cultural landscape, and by what means can these al, cultural manifestations be documented, preserved and interpreted? Sites of critical and provocative responses by those who view the built environment as pable of rendering a more complex interpretation of the influence of black culistory and memory of place.

one

duality and invisibility

RACE AND MEMORY IN THE URBANISM OF THE AMERICAN SOUTH

scape of black America.

"I am an invisible. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywoodmovie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and a mind. I am invisible ... "1

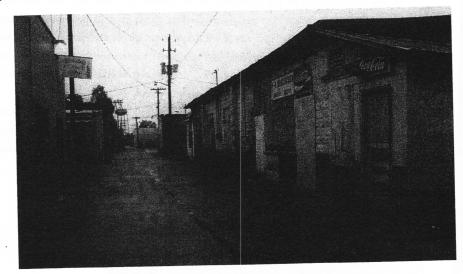
resonates with the contemporary architect or urban- the social construction of race.

In his 1947 novel Invisible Man, Ralph Ellison ist seeking to explore the historic and contemporary chronicled the tension and ambiguity that per- effects of race upon the development of the built vades black life and culture in America. Two pas- environment and to examine the realities and myths sages from that text articulate his interpretations of America's dual racial landscapes. Ellison later of the physical and ephemeral landscapes occu- articulates the importance of spatialized memory to pied by blacks in the twentieth century. In the the comprehension and interpretation of twentiethprologue Ellison characterizes the cultural land- century black culture. In this later passage the narrator suggests that black history is invisible because of where it resides and may be interpreted through selected vernacular landscapes.

In order to explore some of the effects of race bone, fiber and liquids—and I might even be said to possess upon the development of the black cultural landscapes in the late nineteenth- and twentieth-century Describing a nation bound by both institu- South, it is critical to examine how Ellison 's contional and traditional racism, Ellison defined the cept of invisibility was built and spatialized. For black landscape in terms of the visibility (or lack Ellison, the ability to render the world visible and thereof) of black culture. This interpretation still invisible is a concrete form of power, and is a part of

The author would like to thank Mrs. Louretta Wimberly and Mr. J. L. Chestnut for their contributions to and assistance with this essay.

1 Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man, (New York: Vintage Books 1995), 3.



Franklin Street, Selma, Alabama

Ask your wife to take you around the gin mills and the barber shops and the juke joints and the churches, Brother. Yes, and the beauty parlors on Saturdays when they're frying hair. A whole unrecorded history is spoken then, Brother.2

RACE AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION We understand race to be a means of establishing cultural hierarchies, determined by social rather than biological criteria. In America, race defines us in terms of skin color (and all its associations) and we have historically conceived of "blackness" in terms of negation and opposition. Black culture has been defined not so much by what it is but by what it is not. To be black is to be not white, and as such to be inferior, politically powerless and culturally impoverished. Defining blackness exclusively in terms of opposition is a useful strategy, for it reduces black life and culture to a series of generalities far more susceptible to subjugation by established authority. The irony, of course, is that black culture serves as an avant-garde testing ground for popular culture in America. Fashion, music, art, and even language draw heavily and directly from historic and contemporary aspects of black cultural practices.

Though largely considered a regional phenomenon, race as a social construction has had a broad and pervasive influence upon the spatial development of the American landscape. The connotations conveyed through the perception of race in America have created separate, thou imposed cultural landscapes for bla landscapes were initially "construct quently "designed" by the custor Supreme Court's "separate but equa eth-century "Jim Crow" statutes. T phy in which black Americans occ frequently marginalized cultural lar

In the introduction to his 197 Process, A. Leon Higginbotham as which have defined the state of I the text he describes the various juc special limitations imposed upon f aspirations of blacks that might three

The legal mechanisms of con spatial, reinforcing the visible and i space. These boundaries have effect tive space available for occupation a

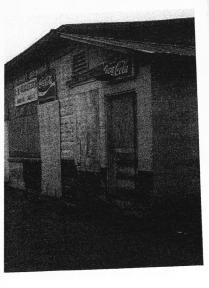


Wilmington, North Carolina, 1950. © Elliott Erwitt /

before the United States Supreme court in April of 1896 and decided in favor of the plaintiff later that year. In this case the court affirmed a lower court ruling supporting the constitutionality of a statute enacted Fourteenth Amendme by the State of Louisiana which provided for separate railway cars for white and black

3 Plessy v. Ferguson was argued travelers. The ruling by Supreme Court provide revised reading of the of the Thirteenth Ame (which made illegal th of slavery) and modifie scope of the language U.S. Constitution (which vided for equal protec the law for all citizens?

2 Ibid



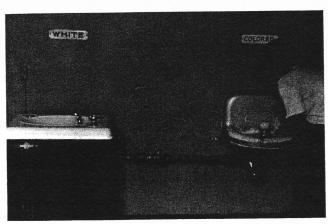
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America have created separate, though sometimes parallel, overlapping, or even superimposed cultural landscapes for black and white Americans. The spaces forming these landscapes were initially "constructed" by the politics of American slavery, and subsequently "designed" by the customs, traditions and ideology emanating from the Supreme Court's "separate but equal" finding in Plessy v. Ferguson, 3 as well as twentieth-century "Jim Crow" statutes. The result was a complex social and cultural geography in which black Americans occupied, and often continue to occupy, distinct and frequently marginalized cultural landscapes.

In the introduction to his 1978 text, In the Matter of Color, Race and the Legal Process, A. Leon Higginbotham aptly summarizes the legal and political structures which have defined the state of black men and women in America. Throughout the text he describes the various judicial and statutory "mechanisms of control...the special limitations imposed upon free blacks...generally restricting any activities or aspirations of blacks that might threaten groups in control."

The legal mechanisms of control to which Higginbotham refers are implicitly spatial, reinforcing the visible and invisible boundaries distinguishing white and black space. These boundaries have effectively established the political, social and productive space available for occupation and control by the black population.



Wilmington, North Carolina, 1950. © Elliott Erwitt / Magnum Photos, Inc.

3 Plessy v. Ferguson was argued before the United States
Supreme court in April of 1896 and decided in favor of the plaintiff later that year. In this case the court affirmed a lower court ruling supporting the constitutionality of a statute enacted by the State of Louisiana which provided for separate railway cars for white and black the law for all citizens).

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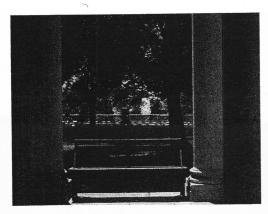
In the case of the Fourteenth
Amendment the interpretive
revisions of the scope of the
amendment's language allowed
the doctrine of "separate but
equal" to be articulated.

4 A. Leon Higginbotham,
In the Matter of Color Race and
the Legal Process: The Colonial
Period, (New York: Oxford
University Press 1978), 14.

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Ironically, one of the subtle implications of these boundaries in the South was that, while the social distinctions and hierarchies of race remained intact, whites and blacks often were required to inhabit the same physical space. The necessity to co-exist in the same room, building, or city required strategies for the construction of space, which by delineating social and spatial hierarchies could differentiate visibility. These spaces reiterated the relationships of power to space and obscured the presence of the black population.

Descriptions of Thomas Jefferson's plantation home, Monticello, often refer to eclectic and idiosyncratic qualities contained within the building and of the Jefferson's skillful manipulation of building and landscape. Much has been said about the views and vistas Jefferson created through the thoughtful placement of windows and doors. Typically, Jefferson is credited for a design sensibility often elevating the mere pragmatic to the level of the sublime. A close examination of the view created from Monticello's east portico provides insight into the pragmatic issues of power and control negotiated through the design of the landscape. The view from the portico looks out over the various sections of Monticello's diverse landscape. Like other working plantations, Monticello was dependent upon an enormous labor force of black slaves. Yet the views created from the east portico actively deny the presence of the black body. Through the manipulation of the landscape section and placement of the volume of the winged dependencies, Jefferson skillfully rendered invisible the slaves and their places of work from the important symbolic view of the property. Ironically,





left: Monticello view to the south from West Portico; above: Monticello view of south wing of dependencies.

there are few locations within the closer proximity.

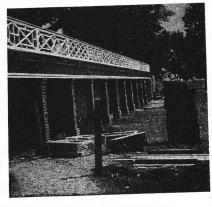
Whether it was Jefferson's mar ceal from view the black slaves wor to the cinema, or simply the denial der the black person invisible. Neg bility became central to a construct

SPATIALIZING RACE IN THE URB where it is possible to discern lan structions of race. In the American tion, analysis, and the interprebecause of the historic presence o its agricultural productivity, the reg Movement, because of its large pol like Selma, Alabama, which were movement, provide an opportunit racial landscapes.

Set on the banks of the Alaba William Rufus King (a former Pierce). Its riverfront location and Orleans and Mobile established Se and manufactured imports. This City of the Black Belt," was desti Movement's most significant strug

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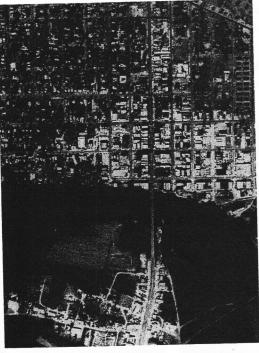
there are few locations within the composition where black and white bodies were in closer proximity.

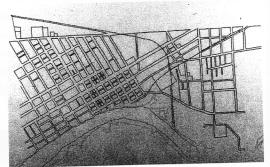
Whether it was Jefferson's manipulation of the landscape and his program to conceal from view the black slaves working at Monticello, the separate "colored" entrance to the cinema, or simply the denial of access to certain facilities, the effect was to render the black person invisible. Negotiating both the concept and the realms of invisibility became central to a construction of black cultural identity.

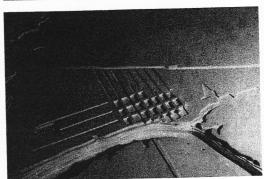
where it is possible to discern landscapes charged with the social and political constructions of race. In the American South's Black Belt region, questions of identification, analysis, and the interpretation of racial landscapes preternaturally exist because of the historic presence of a large black population. Identified primarily by its agricultural productivity, the region was also closely identified with the Civil Rights Movement, because of its large politically under-enfranchised black population. Cities like Selma, Alabama, which were critical to the staging and the development of the movement, provide an opportunity to examine the evolution and transformation of racial landscapes.

Set on the banks of the Alabama River, the city of Selma was founded in 1820 by William Rufus King (a former U.S. Senator and Vice-President under Franklin Pierce). Its riverfront location and development of railway links to the ports of New Orleans and Mobile established Selma as a major transfer point for agricultural exports and manufactured imports. This riverfront town, sometimes known as the "Queen City of the Black Belt," was destined to become the site of one of the Civil Rights Movement's most significant struggles.

In Selma, the spatial legacy of *Plessy v. Ferguson* and the various ensuing Jim Crow statutes led to an urbanism of duality, and a city composed of two distinct urban land-scapes, which as they evolved became codified by race.







clockwise from left: Aerial photo, Selma, Alabama; Diagram of town plan and river, Selma, Alabama; Model of Selma circa 1820 showing original plotting and development of civic core.

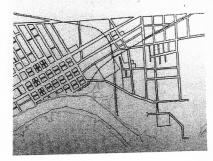
Early maps of the city illustrate a number of key elements that fostered the city's growth and the evolution of its dual landscapes. In its original 1820 plan for the city, the Selma Town and Land Company laid out a grid of streets forming a square that became the civic core of the city. Surrounding this area are two street grids. West of the core there is direct access to the river, while the street pattern to the east of the core runs perpendicular to the river. An 1866 map of the city clearly shows this 12-block plan, the two grid patterns, and the nascent beginnings of the city's racial division.

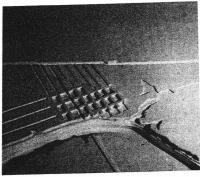
The original town plan established the city's primary residential enclave of west Selma, positioning it between the civic core to the east and Live Oak Cemetery to the

west. Race played a significant a Nineteenth-century census records resident black population. Because of property lots with limited stree largely invisible.

Race also configures the hieral precinct's cultural landscape. The othe interred remains of many of the link to portions of Selma's antebel provides poignant insight to the cograves of the cemetery's black occur of their white counterparts, they offered by a surname, these heac occupied in antebellum Selma. I wholly visible. With its physical coast he presence of sites celebratin Civil War, West Selma was positic for Selma's white population.



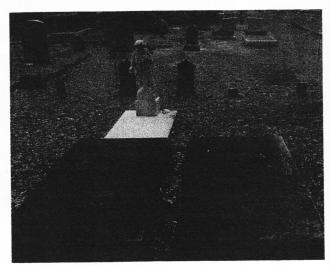


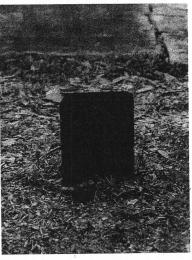


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west. Race played a significant role in the spatial organization of this precinct. Nineteenth-century census records indicate that this neighborhood had a significant resident black population. Because their residences were typically located at the back of property lots with limited street access, West Selma's black population remained largely invisible.

Race also configures the hierarchy of Live Oak Cemetery, a key component of the precinct's cultural landscape. The cemetery contains the city's Confederate Memorial, the interred remains of many of the city's founding white residents and is a critical link to portions of Selma's antebellum history and memory. Live Oak Cemetery also provides poignant insight to the dual landscape occupied by blacks and whites. The graves of the cemetery's black occupants are not clearly recognizable, for unlike those of their white counterparts, they carry no surnames. Deprived of the recognition offered by a surname, these headstones illustrate the peculiar limited space blacks occupied in antebellum Selma. It was a space in which they were present yet not wholly visible. With its physical connection to both the historic and civic cores as well as the presence of sites celebrating the history of its founders and defenders in the Civil War, West Selma was positioned as a cultural landscape of power and authority for Selma's white population.

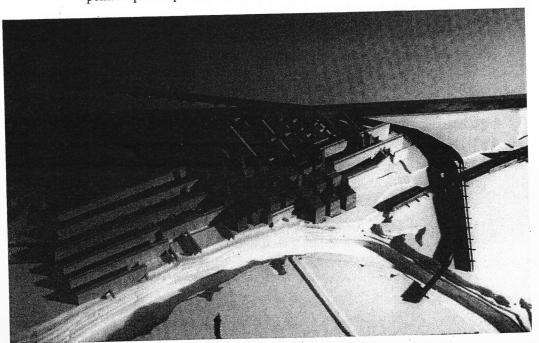




left: Live Oak Cemetery.
above: A headstone of a black man.

The eastern portion of the city lies east of the twelve-block core and continues to the city's eastern boundary, differing in many significant respects from West Selma. The grain of its major streets run north to south, effectively connecting the Alabama River with the city's major commercial and industrial precincts and the rural sites to the north. Initially platted as another residential precinct for the white community, East Selma evolved into a mixed-use area containing commercial, industrial, and residential components. The presence of industrial and commercial facilities undermined the value and the quality of the adjacent residential areas, making them less desirable for whites and therefore available for occupation by the city's black population.

While it is possible to point to similar aspects of racialized geography in American urbanism, what distinguished Selma's dual racial landscapes was the manner in which the city's black population was isolated from both Selma's formal political center and its cultural zone. West Selma contained the city's significant public political spaces, such as the county and federal courthouses which were both located west of Broad Street in the 12-block core area. East Selma evolved into the landscape of the black community because it was disconnected from these sites. The result was to render the black population socially and politically invisible by both consigning them to a series of separate and inferior spaces and limiting their access to the city's symbolic political/public spaces.



Model of civic core and differential graining of urban fabric in West and East Selma.

INVISIBILITY AND THE CONSTRUCTE tural and spatial boundaries inscriracially distinct landscapes, comple schools. The private, and more imprentury reinforced the nineteenth-c separate facilities for each race was authority over the city's black population.

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The Dallas County courthous opposite sides of Alabama Avenue: public safety building, respectively city's historic twelve block core. E considered the white population's

5 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 199.

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INVISIBILITY AND THE CONSTRUCTED LANDSCAPE By the early 20th century, the cultural and spatial boundaries inscribed by the city's design had evolved into two racially distinct landscapes, complete with separate housing, street typologies, and schools. The private, and more importantly, public spaces created in the twentieth century reinforced the nineteenth-century traditions of Jim Crow, determining that separate facilities for each race was the preferred method of exercising control and authority over the city's black population.

Housing as defined by its location, typology, and quality, characterized one of the substantial boundaries between black and white Selma. Other features distinguished the black residential area east of Broad Street and north of Jefferson Davis Avenue, such as housing types, which were generally limited to shotgun houses and to public housing projects built in the late 1950s, though remnants of nineteenth-century middle-class housing survived. Among the most distinctive features of this land-scape were the streets, the majority of which remained unpaved as recently as 1960.

Perhaps the most important issue of these landscapes with respect to the issue of the invisible black population concerns the idea of dual political and civic spaces. Legalized segregation in the twentieth century sought to remove the black population from the public gaze by creating separate and distinct social and political spaces. While many black men and women regularly moved through the residential and commercial spaces of Selma's white community, negotiating these spaces was a complex affair. The public and civic spaces of West Selma describe a "space of appearance," a space which Hannah Arendt defined as a symbolic political realm where an individual may be seen through speech and through action. Political visibility and identity in this space were defined by Jim Crow laws, so that while blacks might literally occupy these spaces, their collective inability to vote and therefore access the political process rendered them invisible in these "spaces of appearance."

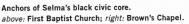
The Dallas County courthouse and the federal courthouse face one another from opposite sides of Alabama Avenue and, in conjunction with the former City Hall and public safety building, respectively mark the western and eastern boundaries of the city's historic twelve block core. Defined by short, square blocks, this area could be considered the white population's cultural, religious, and commercial center, distin-

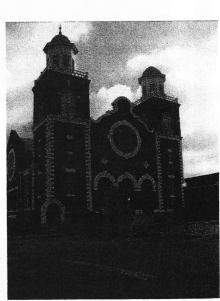
5 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 199.

guishing it as the symbolic public space, or "space of appearance" in twentieth-century Selma. Its location, scale, and collection of important buildings allow this space to be interpreted as the "real" civic center of Selma.

The fact that Selma is comprised of two racial landscapes extended the opportunity for the development of an equivalent symbolic civic and political space in its black neighborhood. In East Selma this space is found on the street which connects two of the city's oldest black congregations, First Baptist Church and Brown's A.M.E. Chapel. These churches served as markers in a landscape that emerged during Reconstruction when the black population was again politically disenfranchised. Like many other black churches, First Baptist and Brown's A.M.E. fulfilled a dual role, providing spiritual sanctuary as well as a symbolic political representation for the black community. Just as the courthouses charged the meaning of the street in white Selma, so too did these churches in East Selma. During the voting rights demonstrations their verve spilled out from the sanctuary and onto Sylvan Street, the street these two communities shared, claiming this space as the symbolic political space of the community.







While its counterpart in West directly from urban structure, the superimposed onto a morphologi. This space does not read as a "spathe city where access and visibility blacks, this is precisely the role that

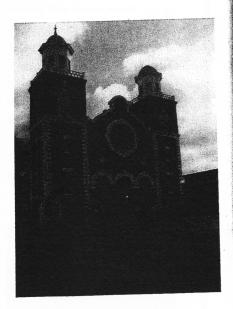
The voting rights movement and political space. The Dallas C became focal points of the mover city and county's large black popu Pettus Bridge represent compone easily adapted to the strategies o and political precincts the county black residents to be both figurat space of the city and the county.



above: Martin Luther King Street (originally Sylthe civic space of Selma's black community; right: View of Dallas Avenue, Selma, Alabama.

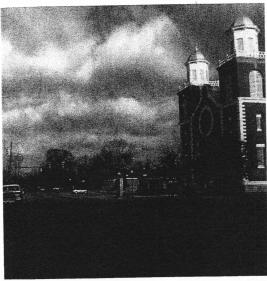
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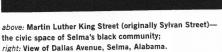
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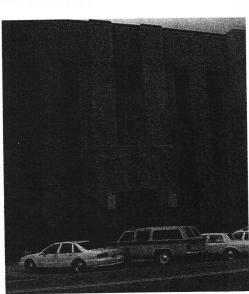


While its counterpart in West Selma derived its significance, visibility, and power directly from urban structure, this space was much less visible largely because it is superimposed onto a morphological structure that was never intended to support it. This space does not read as a "space of appearance," yet within the dual landscapes of the city where access and visibility to the more formal public realm were denied to blacks, this is precisely the role that it served.

The voting rights movement ultimately dissolved the boundaries of Selma's civic and political space. The Dallas County Courthouse and the Edmund Pettus Bridge became focal points of the movement's strategy to achieve political inclusion for the city and county's large black population. Both the Dallas County Courthouse and the Pettus Bridge represent components of Selma's political and cultural landscape not easily adapted to the strategies of duality and invisibility. Anchoring the city's civic and political precincts the county and federal courthouses represented the inability of black residents to be both figuratively and literally visible within the formal political space of the city and the county.









View of Edmund Pettus Bridge, Selma, Alabama

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The Pettus Bridge crosses the Alabama River and is the literal and symbolic entry into the city of Selma. Ironically, given its prominent position in the city's urban structure, it is one of the few components of the urban landscape that did not easily lend itself to the racialized geographies established throughout the city. Neither by design nor by traditions of use does the bridge avail itself of the distinctions of the dual, differential scale of the typological distinctions that define primary entry with white users and secondary entry with black users. In a city replete with redundant cultural systems and whose urban landscape was designed to create spatial, political hierarchies designated by race, the bridge is eloquent in its simplicity. It is in fact the bridge's lack of "flexibility" in negotiating the dual geographies of Selma's racial landscape that caused it to be the focus of the events of 'Bloody Sunday.' The Bloody Sunday confrontation and its aftermath were a challenge to the long standing political hierarchies established by the strategies which had previously rendered blacks "invisible."

6 On Sunday, March 7, 1965, a group of black residents of Selma and Dallas County attempted to march to Montgomery to dramatize their lack of political enfranchisement. This first march from Selma to Montgomery was led by John Lewis and was violently concluded at the foot of the Edmund Pettus Bridge by

Alabama State troopers. The date became known as "Bloody Sunday." A second unsuccessful march followed and ended peacefully. Two weeks after Bloody Sunday, a third march left Selma and was successful. The marchers, led by Martin Luther King Jr., followed Highway 80 to Montgomery, camping along the way. They arrived five days later at

the State Capitol. In 1996 Congress designated Highway 80 (including sections of Selma and Montgomery) a National Historic Trail. two

SPACES OF MEMORY AT THE

Train tracks crisscross Memphis, so that with clicking and clacking cars lumber goings, of goods and peoples who travel and crossing, echoing the blues and the s

Under the sway of slavery and rac of African-Americans were forced and communal bonds under the enslavement or expected to bury violence and anguish. As part of the and in hope of securing a better African-Americans re-imagine to This imaginative effort permeates cal, and artistic traditions. For African-Americans and lore have the passed on through non-monument means—for instance, the haunting Memphis blues. As novelist Maya Arrivales.

If we were a people much given to might raise monuments and sacrifice me but slavery cured us of that weakness. however, to have it said that we surviviship to the dedication of our poets (in musicians and blues singers).

I would like to thank Craig Barton and Ulrick Désert for their helpful comments on this essay. 2 Nancy C. Curtis, Heritage Sites, the South, (New York: 1996); Beth L. Sav American Historic (New York: Preserv 1994); Wayne C. Rt The African-Americ Guide (New Jersey Publishing, 1998).

¹ Maya Angelou, "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings," *The Anatomy of Memory.* ed. James McConkey, (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 1996), 264.