Forgetting and Remembering:
Cultural Memory Work Toward Racial Justice

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This paper considers processes that develop cultural memory and examples of how such processes can be put to work to serve racial reckoning and justice. Contemporary battles about the meaning of symbols such as the Confederate flag and statues of Confederate leaders reflect broader ideological contestations over the nation's cultural memory —the weighty matter of "who and what should be remembered" (Doss, 2010, p.2), and who and what should be forgotten. Forgetting such monuments is a matter of justice as their common presence in public spaces valorizes centuries of racial tyranny. Cultural memory scholars recognize that establishing various monuments are ideological and political in reflecting a group's shared affirmation that events and figures are worthy of representing in material form to help keep their memory alive in the narrative landscape. To enact such processes of affirmation, the practice of memorializing involves financial resources, decisions about location and access, and consideration of the contours of representation. They require collective labor to actualize their mission of remembrance. Peace museums can close without visitors and

[1] I am grateful to have been a member of SOPHE over the last 15 years and honored to be invited to give the Drake lecture. I was scheduled to give the lecture a few years ago but was unable to travel. The amazing Karen McKellips stepped in and gave a presentation on the value of biographies in her life which continued a theme we had presented on a panel together in a previous year. I remain grateful for this kind act still years later. Karen died suddenly and far too soon in September, 2020. I thought about Karen throughout the process of writing and preparing for this presentation. I wished she could have been present with us in St Louis this year, offering a fierce, incisive commentary on contemporary politics, wearing something bold and colorful aligned with her spirit, and gracing us all with another good story. And another. We won't forget you, Karen.

funding; cemeteries can decay without daily care; and monuments can sit silent without witnesses to hear their stories.

Here I consider the possibilities of cultural memory as a narrative practice in public, academic, and family spaces oriented to racial justice. I draw from cultural memory scholarship to consider both recognized sites of racial justice memory work (removal of confederate monuments) and other examples of local, academic and family memory as sites of consideration. I see memory work as a form of labor and responsibility. This work can occur through collective public practices oriented to forgetting some dominant memories and remembering subjugated ones, oral and written practices that repeat and concretize counter narratives, and the narrative semiotic teaching of material monuments and memorials (Brockmeier, 2002). In a field saturated with competing versions of history and popular memory and what Doss (2010) called, "memorial mania" (p. 2), the physical markers of cultural memory compete for public attention and sustenance. Interrupting dominant cultural narratives to enable layered and subjugated memories to surface demand attention and labor. I briefly situate this work in memory studies, then describe Brockmeier's (2002) conception of three narrative orders which can aid in forming cultural memories. I describe examples of contested cultural memories in the U.S., the state of Oklahoma, and in academia. I conclude with an example from family inquiry as a vehicle for dominant groups to explore their family's complicity historically in racial injustices that can reframe family and cultural memory (Bailey, forthcoming).[2]

[2] After presenting this talk in October, 2021, I have developed it further, which is the version presented here. I also developed a separate paper from the remarks in the family section to explore Ball's work in *Slaves in the Family* (1998) as family memory work in detail, which is forthcoming (Bailey, 2022).

Memory studies encompass diverse foci, academic disciplines, and theoretical orientations. Such studies can include positivist studies in the field of psychology or neuroscience which examine the slipperiness of human memory or the best processes for shoring up our storehouses of memory as they leak (e.g. Loftus, 2005). In feminist studies, memory work can refer to a research methodology through which women collaboratively explore patriarchal influences on their lives (e.g. Kaufman, 2002, et al). Within cultural geography, memory studies include how space and land can highlight or occlude aspects of human experience (Alderman & Inwood, 2013, p. 187). In cultural studies, memory studies can include the study of popular conceptions of the past as they manifest in the present in varied sociocultural contexts and community practices, rituals, and materiality enabling cultures to preserve a sense of identity over time.

Cultural memory studies embrace a range of investigations into how we as cultural beings collectively preserve, remember and forget some historical events and interpretations and how relationships between cultural memory and identities form, reform, and gain shape and substance through rites, sacred objects, rituals, archives, and gatherings. Such memories are consequential, as Alderman and Inwood (2013) describe, as "how we imagine ourselves in the present is intimately linked to how we remember ourselves in the past" (p. 186). In this sense, memory practices can facilitate imaginaries that contribute to creating "socially just futures" (Alderman & Inwood, 2013). This cultural orientation grounds my work here. I am interested in how to form cultural memory in ways that can contribute to historical awareness, reconciliation and healing through labor, attention, and diverse forms of narration.

We cannot recall, nor perhaps would we want to, the many events of our lives, and we cannot track or preserve the varied events of our familial or social histories.

Indeed, there are many memories we as individuals or communities might wish to forget. Cultural memory scholars recognize that processes of memorialization through which we foster and construct a shared sense of cultural identity or history are always selective, dynamic, and partial. Memory ebbs and flows as some events crystallize momentarily in cultural discourse through intense narration only to soon pass away, becoming faint or forgotten, as others replace them. In popular memory, forgetting and remembering involves networks of relation which expose us to some narratives instead of others or nudge us to consider one cultural memory as more or less persuasive and truthful than another.

A recent example of the stakes involved in which cultural memories persuade and achieve narrative dominance in the politics of truth is the explosive reaction to Hannah-Jones' 1619 project which narrates a "new origin story" of the United States. In this rich and controversial project, supported by *The New York Times,* Hannah-Jones (2021) strives to "reframe the country's history by placing the consequences of slavery and the contributions of Black Americans at the very center" of the national narrative (Serwer, 2019, np). Her work unsettles an often-beloved national story of the country's formation in enlightenment ideals of reason and freedom belied by the utter centrality of the slave trade in America's founding. The furor erupting in the wake of her work and the blistering critiques it has evoked (Serwer, 2019) reflect the deep investments in dominant cultural memories and origin stories. It also offers a glimpse of how groups can de-center dominant cultural memories and create others which can become vehicles for dialogue, justice and reconciliation.

Woven through these processes of resistance in creating new cultural memories are the power of affect and the politics of time—how the politics of emotion shape us

(Ahmed, 2014), how we choose to attend (Ingold, 2018) and which work we choose to do in the fleeting time we are given (Burkeman, 2021). In Burkeman's (2021), *Four Thousand Weeks,* he explores what he calls "time management for mortals." With compelling writing and good humor, Burkeman dismisses the dominant messages time management and organization books convey to discipline our bodies to become more efficient and productive. He believes timers and software that spur Pavlovian responses and endless instrumentalist check lists keeps us focused on minutia rather than a holistic view of our lives. Steadily insisting we reorient ourselves to the realities of our fleeting embodiment, he underscores the most motivational management framework of all—our mortality. He reminds us that in a life span of 80 or so years, which we know is never guaranteed, individuals have about four thousand weeks to live. We forget these sobering numbers amidst our daily demands. Burkeman's examination of time management from this philosophical perspective relentlessly returns him to the question of how he and the rest of us "want to spend those weeks—in all their mundane glory, as they pass" (Bailey, 2021, p. 143). This reminder of the politics of time relates to the labor of cultural memory work and narratives we choose to nourish with this time.

It is labor to forget, and it is labor to remember. Choose your labor.

Cultural Memory Work

Scholars have traced various ways we create and sustain cultural memory. For Brockmeier (2002), the cultural process of remembering and forgetting depends on an "interplay between individual and social organization of memory" (p. 16). He conceptualizes the process as "culturally mediated within a symbolic space laid out by a

variety of semiotic vehicles and devices" (Brockmeier, 2002, p. 25). In my reading, an implicit assumption underlying these arguments is that advancing some events and interpretations over others requires *labor*. Brockmeier's (2002) concepts of "*narrative* as cultural memory" nourishes my analysis of current examples of memory work that will help me speak to the collective labor involved in this narrative process. To Brockmeier (2002), the intricacies of effective memorials which support cultural memory engage three systems of meaning making—three "orders" in his framing—which allow us to craft, preserve, and amplify narratives that can become remembered. He describes these as linguistic, material, and discursive orders. I will use these orders to consider several contemporary sites of memorializing, most of which focus on the still unactualized potential of memory work for racial justice.

Figure 1: The field of chairs at the Oklahoma City National Museum and Memorial. Photograph taken by Lucy E. Bailey

Cultural memory is supported through a *linguistic order,* such as oral and written stories, in which people mobilize plot devices (actors, events, predicaments, and resolutions) in writing about events and places, describe to others the meaning of those

events and places, and bend and collapse registers of time to link aspects of past and present in dynamic narrative configurations. Cultural memory work requires framing events in a cohesive story that fosters a sense of belonging to a cultural group, however defined (Brockmeier, 2002, p. 18). When, for example, pilgrims journey to the Oklahoma City National Memorial as I have dozens of times without realizing its narrative memory work (see Bailey & Kingston, 2020) and *read* the plaques detailing the Murrah bombing in 1995 which killed 168 people, *listen to* the audio recordings preserving survivors' stories, and *describe to others* those events, they engage in this kind of linguistic order of cultural memory work. This narrative order might include sharing through social media, family conversations, or group museum tours who enacted the violence, the resulting losses and survivors, the meaning of those events, and the journey to create the peace memorial, museum, and annual marathon marking these events. In this sense, cultural remembering of the Murrah bombing is fueled by what we visitors—and it must be a "we"—describe, speak about, and write about**.**

Brockmeier's (2002) second order, a semiotic order, can extend the linguistic order to support narrative integration which fuels cultural memory and belonging through the materiality of a given site or space—whether an art exhibit, a museum, a monument, a book, or another marker of some kind. An example familiar to many in Oklahoma would be the physical space and gardens of the Oklahoma City National Museum and Memorial (Figure 1). Community members and architects envisioned, designed, and dedicated this site of remembrance within a city block of space to the memory of the Murrah bombing. Its material elements reflect spatial and relational configurations which narrate a cohesive story of events before, during, and after the bombing. A grand survivor tree flourishes near remains of the building, two massive

arches etched with the times the bombing began and ended frame two entry points to the grounds, a shimmering rectangle of water stretches between the arches, and a field of 168 empty chairs facing the water represents the lives lost.

Visitors recognize and contribute to the site's semiotic order through interactions such as touching walls, leaving objects, and writing messages of tribute. A fence edges the ground on which visitors affix an ever-evolving array of tokens of remembrance including messages and stuffed toy animals and the chalk pads in front of the museum welcome visitors to scrawl drawings and messages. These dynamic forms of materiality engage visitors in a narrative of remembrance and tribute which nourishes the cultural memory of the bombing and their connection to these events. To Brockmeier (2002), such markers function within a semiotic system to coalesce as a narrative text that works alongside linguistic and performative orders to form cultural memory. Material symbols can also convey absence to inform a symbolic order, such as the empty chairs on the grounds signaling the loss of lives.

The third component of the process of narrative integration central to cultural memory work is discursive and performative (Brockmeier, 2002, p. 35). These orders are not always discrete, as the semiotic order noted above also has discursive components. The discursive order of narrative requires enacting a process in which the site design engages the viewer, pilgrim, or visitor in its narrative goal. Brockmeier (2002) describes this process as involving discursive practices that present historical facts to "symbolically activate [the material] installation and turn it into an agent in a cultural system" (p. 35). The discursive practice encourages actions aligned with the installation's goal. The memorial marks the unspeakable violence that led to such widespread suffering and destruction and pays tribute to lost lives. It was also intended

to “achieve something” (Brockmeier, 2002, p. 35)—a call to peace, *a demand to remember*, a calling out of “you,” the witness, the visitor, as a necessary actor in accomplishing those goals. To Brockmeier (2002), the discursive work of a material site “draws visitors and viewers” into a particular “position” in relation to the linguistic and semiotic orders to enable actualizing the memorial’s cultural memory work beyond the site (p.35).

The enactment of this discursive work relies on meanings embedded in the marker’s social-geographical context. The precise placement and size of memorials can matter here (see Alderman & Inwood, 2021). In the example of the Oklahoma City Peace Memorial and Museum, the dedication of a full city block to the memorial at the very site where the bombing of the federal building took place is consequential. Deemed the largest act of domestic terrorism in the country’s history, the bombing was massive in its loss of life, material destruction—and in targeting a federal building—its symbolic and actual threat to the nation. Among the messages of the memorial’s placement and scope is the weighty reminder of the threat of violence, the power of the state’s organized response, the need to stand vigilant to threats, the responsibility to remember the innocent lives lost, and the power of remembering to offer peace and comfort. The discursive order invites varied actions aligned with these orientations.

The coalescing work of these orders enable the forming of cultural memories we deem worthy, salient, or sacred to nourish and inherit. They can shape what we notice, narrate, remember, and pass on (Brockmeier, 2002, p. 23) as inheritances. Because our social moorings and communities, such as our family, our racial, ethnic, and religious communities, and our activist or academic allies, frame and shape our memory work, the process is riddled with power relations. As feminist theorist Sara Ahmed (2017)

notes in relation to her critique of institutional norms, “The more people travel along a path…the more our lives might be directed in some ways, rather than others because of this easing of progression” (p. 46). In fact, “once a flow is directed, it acquires a momentum. Once a momentum is acquired, it is directive … what is in front of us depends on the direction we have already taken” (Ahmed, 2017, p. 45).

Cultural memory can work in similar ways. The visible and invisible power relations fueling the multiple orders enabling remembering and forgetting are all around us reconfiguring great swaths of history in new temporal relations through these narrative orders. They invite us to follow the flow and direction of the cultural memory and imagine ourselves as part of the community of belonging it symbolizes. They can also reflect forms of collective labor inviting and even demanding us to create more bearable memories for others to inherit as our four thousand weeks pass by.

Cultural Memory as Inheritance

We can turn our attention to the cultural battles surrounding the removal of confederate monuments across the United States in recent years for a glimpse into the value and fragility of cultural memory and the labor involved in sustaining it. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, more than 2,000 memorials in the U.S. honor the confederacy (Splcenter.org). The markers include statues of Confederate generals and buildings, and schools bearing leaders’ names. Since the late 1990s, intensifying in the wake of George Floyd’s murder in 2020, robust activism has targeted their removal (Cox, 2021). To many, such memorials sustain a cultural memory of the Confederate South steeped in White supremacy and the enslavement of millions of innocent African-ascendant (Dillard, 2006) people. The common presence of such monuments in public

spaces where diverse people live, learn, and move normalizes and valorizes a government which fought to uphold racial tyranny for centuries.

The sites in which these memorials, or semiotic orders of narrative, reside—such as state capitol grounds, public lands, schools, parks, or any spaces supported by public funding—further imbue them with the message that they speak the state's desires. Such public markers require ongoing embodied labor, care, and resources on the part of the state for their upkeep. In spurring the removal of a total of 168 symbols between 2015-2020, protestors have asked "Whose Heritage" do such memorials represent? (Splcenter.org). What are the daily psychological and spiritual consequences of such memorials? Where are their counternarratives visible? Indeed, whose cultural memories do we privilege and sustain?

Figure 2: A 2021 map of confederate monuments and removals. Southern poverty law center (Splcenter.org)

Many such memorials have been in place in the U.S. for decades. Yet a lesser-known story of how some entered public spaces in the first place—an active cultural forgetting, perhaps—is that many were erected in decades after the Civil War, during Jim Crow, or in some cases, even a century after, during the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s (see Cox, 2021). Confederate general Robert E. Lee, for example, did not want

memorials constructed in his honor or dedicated to the confederacy. Recognizing their symbolic power, he believed they would fuel rather than soften divisions after the Civil War (Cox, 2021, p. 39; Romeros, 2017). After his death, groups invested in his status erected monuments to him and other leaders during the ongoing post-war struggle for civil rights. Thus, baked into the semiotic narrative origins of some confederate statues, through their temporal and spatial placement in primarily southern states during Jim Crow and the Civil Rights Movement after the Civil War, as well as the funding and labor invested in erecting them, is an intentional virulent narrative reminder of White power. Lee and others became symbols for "the lost cause" vision of cultural memory in which the South fought heroically to sustain state's rights. The monuments' establishment post-Civil war exemplifies the power relations collapsing time in memory work to nurture connections between the present and past and the semiotic and discursive orders of cultural memory work that worked to glorify the Confederacy. Discursively, these monuments enacted symbolic violence through their warning for Black activists to 'remember their place.'

These assemblages of concrete and bronze, just like configurations of red, white, and blue colors in various versions of U.S. flags, hold no inherent meaning. We breathe complex meanings into them which solidify and shift over time in various geographies and in dialogue with other symbols. Yet their symbolic fields of operation limit their interpretations. As Carlson and Schramm-Pate (2003) noted in their research on the Confederate flag, despite some groups' efforts to dislodge the flag's racist hauntings with messages of a rebellious spirit or a regional identity salient to all who lived there, semiotic machinations with the flag could not shake loose the racist history to which it remains tethered today. Similarly, some have decried the removal of these figures

because of their beauty, their historic meaning, or their representation of a "shared heritage." Yet, the origins of their production, the meanings they carry across a century, their creation to intimidate and wreak symbolic violence, and their contemporary mobilization by White supremacist groups carry entrenched cultural meanings of hate that defy new interpretations. Some have suggested they belong in history museums, as has occurred with Nazi symbols, to better contain their virulence.

Not only the semiotic and discursive orders of the statues are consequential for creating cultural memory and narratives of belonging among Americans. Subjugated cultural memories gain visibility through removing, painting, or projecting images of Black visionaries onto these monuments in public celebrations, in renaming schools (Brown, in process), and in erecting statues of Black freedom and triumph (Schneider, 2021). It is also occurring through public dialogue about their absences that cultivate new imaginaries of who we want to be. In *No Common Ground*, a study of Confederate monuments, Cox (2021) describes the justice-oriented organizing that finally led to removing them. The 2021 removal of the 12-ton, 21-foot high, bronze statue of General Lee in Richmond, VA that sat atop a 40-foot pedestal of granite after its 130-year reign in this public space leaves light and sky behind, and Air to Breathe. Other removals have led to murals, gardens, and new statues honoring freedom.

Both the materiality of the Lee statue and its active removal signals how cultural remembering and forgetting are always in motion and in tension. They are always shifting in their material expressions, always scripting different temporal relations between then and now, always in danger of—or in need of—erasure, and always reflecting competing visions about which cultural memories we should solidify with materiality and which we should choose to let crumble. That Lee's statue cost 10,000

dollars (a quarter of a million dollars today), was unveiled to a crowd of 150,000 people (Brumfield, 2017; Cox, 2021) and sat in glory for more than a century speaks to the powerful interests its cultural memory served and reflected. That it came down in 2021 to the cost of 2 million dollars also demonstrates the collective labor and power involved and invested in its forgetting.

Academic Memory Work

Figure 3: Image of book cover of Hemmings, Why Stories Matter

Hemmings,

Why Stories matter

There are entire social histories of forgetting, to use Klein's (2007) term. He analyzes popular memory in Los Angeles and the bulldozing of districts which are now forgotten and replaced by glamorous narratives of the creation of Hollywood. Higher education, too, is riddled with cultural memories and inheritances, dominant cultural frames and subaltern frames that operate simultaneously or shift over time. Concerned community members and citizens have advocated for changing the names of campus buildings with racist histories, for example, and removing statues and markers as well (Alderman & Reuben, 2020) to help cultivate the orders necessary to form new cultural memories. Academic memory can sustain and forget varied memories. For example, feminist historian Clare Hemmings, in *Why Stories Matter* (Figure 3), analyzed dominant feminist accounts of women's history noting the politics of the many stories

feminists tell about our history obscure alternative narratives which non-feminists might easily coopt.

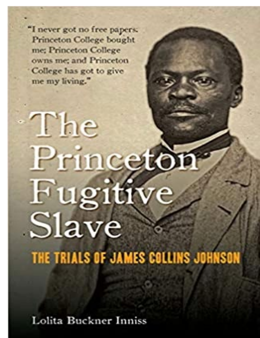
The practice of academic citation is another vehicle for nourishing memory involving all three narrative orders. The linguistic order is evident in discussing, writing, and disseminating dominant memories; the semiotic order is visible in which physical materials, books, artifacts, podcasts, and other vehicles of value are dedicated to one set of memories or another; and the discursive order is visible in the implicit call to others to value, use, and circulate them. Citation practices might reflect affection for certain narratives which create well-worn grooves and orientations (Ahmed, 2017). Scholars can perpetuate forgetting and remembering through concretizing in their writing whose work is visible and valuable and thus dominant in this semiotic system. One well-worn narrative groove in Women's Studies, for instance, is the familiar wave metaphor of the women's movement (first, second, third, fourth waves, etc). However teachable, the metaphor obscures the bubbling waters and deep hues between waves and forms of resistance manifested in women's history that can reframe popular memory of the movement.

Historian Maggie Nash (2019) has directed her analytic gaze to the history of land-grant universities in recent years to contribute to countering the widespread amnesia of U.S. settler colonialism related to higher education. She has traced U.S. governmental machinations and legislation leading to the forced removal of American Indians from the very land on which public universities came to be built and flourish—supporting "the wide public" of the state while the vision of "the public" remained narrow. The mission of land grants was to "teach agriculture, military tactics, and mechanic arts (and classical studies) so members of the working classes could obtain a

liberal, practical education" (aplu.org, para 1). Land grant institutions were imagined to be places of service oriented to increasing educational access.

Nash traces the practices of "claiming" "unclaimed" Indigenous land to establish land-grant institutions. Much celebrated for their visionary public promise, land-grant institutions actually emerged from coercive policies, warfare, and dispossession of Native peoples. This history relentlessly falls out of cultural memory. Some universities now render visible these Indigenous roots through land acknowledgments on plaques, email signatures, and mission statements. These are all steps in the linguistic and semiotic orders of establishing cultural memory. They can aid in reframing origin stories and amplifying counternarratives about the terrain on which land grants reside. Yet there is more work to do in addressing such dispossessions beyond acknowledgements; reparations and returns can accompany cultural memory work.

Figure 4: Image of the cover of Innis' book, The Princeton Fugitive Slave



Other memory work in higher education focuses on rendering visible the intersections between the institution of slavery and institutions of learning. Legal scholar Lolita Buckner Innis' work surfaces these intersections in her innovative biography of James Collins Johnson, a fugitive who lived in Princeton New Jersey for 60 years (Figure 4). Innis works to remember a forgotten institutional memory of the constitutive intersections between slavery and higher education historically. For

example, the finances to support Princeton in the 18th and 19th centuries and the White Southern students who attended, often came from plantation households. The institution, in turn, relied on Black workers to fuel its educational mission. They supported White male students' education through laundering their clothes, emptying their chamber pots, chopping their wood, and cooking and cleaning.

Johnson's livelihood, Innis reveals, depended on this service. She discusses other intersections as well.[3] Such institutional forgetting can weave the erasure of financial origins and the human beings that made them possible into their glowing origin stories and replace them with narratives of enlightenment, access, and possibility. Historical studies can surface information that can be woven into new cultural memories to capture more complex narratives in the interests of racial justice. Brasher, Alderman, and Inwood's (forthcoming) language of campuses as "wounded places" seems also fitting for the processes Innis' and Nash's work make visible. The linguistic order evident here also discursively calls for healing directions of acknowledgement and reparations in cultural and geographic memory work.

It is labor to forget, and it is labor to (re)member. Choose your labor.

Place-based Memory Work

Cultural memories are often situated within geographic landscapes with place-based meanings which underscores the importance of local, place-based memory work. Alderman and Inwood (2013) use the term "landscapes of memory" to convey how

[3] See Bailey (2021, forthcoming) for a full review of Innis' book in *the Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Education* (JISE).

landscapes have a “normative power” in which they give “voice to certain versions of the past,” grant them “legitimacy,” thereby “ordering and controlling the public meaning of the past” (p. 188). Such ordering and controlling manifests in narratives about the Land Run in Oklahoma and the Centennial Land Run Monument in Oklahoma City which memorializes it. These massive bronze statues of galloping horses, wagons, and determined riders straining in their saddles and charging into Oklahoma territory celebrates the early settlers who fought harsh conditions to claim ostensibly uninhabited land in 1889. It is a powerful set of sculptures created by a Norman, Oklahoma artist, Paul Moore, situated in a semiotics of Western survival and triumph, created over many years with much family labor and commitment. The city land on which it sits is a fitting aesthetic home framed by water and the vast Oklahoma sky.

Yet, a writer representing Indigenous perspectives describes the marker as a “monumental monstrosity,” because the powerful statues and other markers in a public park deny the existence of Indigenous peoples on the land far preceding the settlers (Fowler, 2020). The cultural memory of the Land Run that helped establish the state now known as Oklahoma crafts an origin story that preserves and champions one set of memories and perpetuates the erasure, the forgetting, of another set of memories. And too often, the dialogue and arguments about statues such as the Confederate examples shared earlier can dissolve into armed contestations and fierce identity battles about mine and yours, us and them, worthy memories and dismissable ones. Whose memories get to win to be remembered? What might a counter-memorial look like alongside, complicating, or speaking back to these massive statues? What would it look like to establish multiple layered cultural memories in such spaces?

Figure 5: The Healing Walkway, Tulsa, Oklahoma, Photograph by Amanda Kingston.

The Tulsa Race Massacre that occurred in 1921 has a long history of active cultural forgetting and a more recent history of active and widespread remembering. Although some Tulsans never forgot the vibrant, nourishing, and active Black Wall Street community at the turn of the century (see Johnson, 2021), awareness of the mass of angry White Tulsans who burned the community to the ground which killed hundreds of Black citizens in 1921 has intensified in popular memory as more Oklahomans have learned and listened in recent years. In broader cultural memory, the community, and the violence, became forgotten. Descendants, staff writers of the *Black Wall Street Times*, and local historians have worked for decades to cultivate a linguistic order toward remembering both the massacre and the resilience of the community through writing, storying, classes, memory tours, scholarship, teacher education, popular histories, and the establishment of a center for tribute.

Beginning in 2020, a year of events led up to the one hundredth commemoration of the massacre which provided opportunities for people to gather in peace and pay tribute to the lives lost, the remaining survivors, and foreground the history and resilience of Black Oklahomans. Reflecting the discursive third order of narrative that

can help sustain this cultural memory's prominence in Oklahoma and the nation's history of racial violence, leaders also *called for others to act* beyond honoring and commemorating. As the organizing committee expressed, "We believe strongly in reparations. Our focus is on the larger scope of reparations, which means repairing past damages and making amends through acknowledgment, apology, and atonement. This process is central to racial reconciliation in Tulsa" (1921 Tulsa Race Massacre Centennial Commission).

Family Memory Work

The final example of the potential for cultural memory work toward racial justice I consider here is family inquiry. Families invested in a particular identity narrative can actively forget aspects of their family past through excising them from family storying or downplaying them at a reunion. They can toss pictures, change the subject, and repeat favorite stories they want to instantiate in the family narrative. Some seem to have taken up a call toward racial justice through reframing family memory in ways I read as using linguistic, semiotic, and discursive orders. I have been interested in how White scholars conduct historical family inquiries to engage in racial justice work, to acknowledge, apologize, and atone in their family's historical complicity in racial violence as an example of what cultural memory work toward racial justice might look like. I turn to one example here (e.g. see Bailey, forthcoming).[4]

There has been a robust turn to family inquiry in the last two decades which includes varied forms of identity work and creative engagements with one's own family

[4] After presenting this paper in October, 2021, I drew from these remarks to develop a separate paper exploring Ball's work in *Slaves in the Family* (1998), which is forthcoming (Bailey, 2022).

as a site of research. Scrutinizing how people engage in family inquiry, remembering and forgetting, is an ongoing form of interest to me because our narrations of family can reflect our identity investments through remembering some narratives and forgetting others. Family constructions can become part of a racial project because all of us have variable awareness of our ancestors, extended kin, or even closer relatives. As Brockmeier (2002) says of cultural memory more broadly (p.18), people narrate various versions of their families which reflect and create their sense of belonging. Work on family can become hagiographic when we encounter family members worth praising or angst-ridden when we encounter those we prefer to prune from our family trees.

Since 1998, with his publication, *Slaves in the Family*, Edward Ball's award-winning research into his family history has manifested his efforts to reframe and create new family memories oriented toward racial justice. The journalist has conducted extensive research on his Southern plantation-owning family to remember events some members of his family wished to "forget"—to ignore, cover up or actively push away. Ball (1998) describes the colorful stories he heard as a child about his family's Southern heritage as owners of numerous plantations. Family storying was a common cultural practice for the Balls aligned with the linguistic order of narrative necessary for cultivating a coherent picture of family identity and memory.

As the years passed, and Ball began to wonder about the silences in his family storying—the part of his family history his father sometimes mentioned they don't talk about—he used his considerable research skills to begin an inquiry into his family's complicity in slavery. Ball (1998) notes how his family memory was inherently racialized in *inscribing silences* about his family's racial crimes, writing, "the Balls lived side by side with Black families for six generations" but "no one talked about how slavery had

helped us" (p.13). Six years, dozens of conversations, numerous trips across the nation and globe, and hundreds of pages later, Ball produced his National Book Award winning text. In what I have framed as his racial-justice oriented family memory work, Ball lays bare his family's past and narrates the history of the families his own family enslaved.

He works to "face the plantation" as he calls it—to be accountable to his family history—through tracing, uncovering, and reflecting on his family's involvement in the atrocity of slavery (Ball, 1998, p.14). Through an oppressive inheritance borne out of records necessary to run southern plantations, he relies on over 10,000 pages of documents on the Ball family preserved in archives throughout the South to help him conduct his research. To have even such an archive from which to script a family narrative inheritance reflects archival inequities and injustices related to which lives can emerge and gain substance and shape and become cultural memory. Who could write, with what materials, whose lives were worth recording, in what ways, and which remnants endure centuries later are tied to archival privileges and silences central to historical work today.

For scholars investigating subjugated histories, engaging with records in some periods of history requires extensive strategizing. For example, in her book, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (2005), Williams describes the necessary critical reading practices she brought to the archive to explore how African-American people pursued education historically. In the introduction to her book she writes, "I returned…to the same missionary archives that other historians have used, and I learned to read between the lines, to pull out people who are mentioned only in passing…they were present…in the interstices, in the negative spaces that comprise such a substantial part of the picture" (Williams, 2005, pp. 1-2). Ball's family records

were thus vital for Ball history as well as the histories of the men, women, and children his family enslaved.

Ball mined his haunted archival wealth to contribute to the linguistic and semiotic orders of family memory through writing three massive books (1998; 2001; 2020). His 1998 text also engaged in the discursive order of memory work through including a call for action for other southern families who may hold similar records in their family archives. In Ball's (1998) acknowledgments' section, he pled

> to the families of former slave owners and others with records from the plantation period…to release their records to the archives….because the lives of slaves were chronicled by their owners…not by government scribes….such private letters and papers [thus] contain the family history of millions." (p. 455)

The ethical urgency of his call for archival equity urges the reader to act, recognize, reframe, and make accessible any crucial resources they possess to enable Black family descendants to access ancestral records to enrich their own family memory. In the Ball family alone, he notes, "close to 4,000 black people were born into slavery in his family, or bought by them, during 167- year period" (1698-1865) when the Civil War ended, leaving as many as 75,000 descendants. It's a call to redistribute precious archival resources that should never have been his or others to own, possess or control in the first place.

This White racial project of family historical accountability necessitates grappling with many truths and, in my reading, methodologically destabilizes a Ball grand family racial narrative of white innocence or benevolence. His dual story eventually connects through discovering the shared bloodlines among Black and White Ball family

descendants, thereby expanding his and others' constructed sense of "family." Ball fuels the temporal reconfigurations necessary to cultural memory work that removal of confederate statues also accomplishes. He conveys that the racism underlying the plantation system is not in "the past," but continues to the present. He refuses a colorblind racial narrative of past harm that is now "over," and "irrelevant," in favor of foregrounding a dynamic legacy that blends past and present and persists in varied forms. Ball continues this line of family inquiry in subsequent books, *The Sweet Hell Inside* (2002), and most recently, *Life of a Klansman* (2020). This is family memory work that moves toward racial justice.

Conclusion: The *Work* of Cultural Memory

The cultural memory evidenced in Confederate removals, academic memory practices, and family memory work today, all speak to the labor and narrative orders involved in fostering more bearable cultural memories toward racial justice. Recognizing cultural memory as a project of power and formation through particular narrative orders (Brockmeier, 2002) allows us to better mark, trace, and excavate counter memories, forgotten memories, and partial memories that merit amplifying through sustained attention to these discursive, semiotic and linguistic orders. With Burkeman's (2021) reminders of the centrality of mortality to our choices and attention, to remember otherwise demands dedication to accountable memory work. And these potential transformational projects can happen in family, public, and academic spaces when we collectively consider the cultural memories we want to honor and to work toward those visions.

It is labor to forget, and it is labor to (re)member. Choose your labor.

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