

## **Composing Counter-memories - Script for Video**

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The way we remember history reflects our values and judgments, and as a nation, we have struggled to accurately represent contested historical events. In light of the fact that we suffer from selective amnesia when it comes to remembering our histories, it is not a surprise that the memorials, historic markers, and historical societies present a sanitized perspective. As a result, as James Loewen writes, "America has ended up with a landscape of denial."

More specifically, I study spatialized racism in Pendleton, South Carolina, a rural Southern town, and its network of associated issues including historical markers that circulate a hegemonic narrative and a tourism industry that minimizes and in many cases erases Black history. Pendleton is a 227 year old rural town that wants to be known as a historic tourist destination, but beneath its friendly exterior, has deeper issues. Like many towns and cities across the United States, Pendleton is residentially segregated. But there are far more issues that complicate residential segregation in Pendleton including the existence of plantation homes in the town limits, historic markers and monuments, and countless historic homes and buildings. When the town hosts seasonal festivals at the Village Green, few people of color attend these events. Likewise, the West Side of Pendleton, where the majority of Black Pendletonians reside, is not a space where white residents spend any length of time unless they have to drive through the area. What is more, as Jenny Rice writes, "to write oneself out of the scene of public rhetorical action when we distance ourselves from the ugly side of American history."

To offset this tendency to distance from socio-political problems in our communities, I turn to Gregory Ulmer's argument that "Problems B Us." By incorporating Problems B Us into the current memorialization, I move from memory to memorial to MEmorial. MEmorial begins, as Ulmer argues, by noticing the abject loss within a community that has not been accepted as a sacrifice on behalf of a belief or a value structuring a group subject. In principle, then, the MEmorial begins where memorials leave off. It encourages participation by citizens to view digital spaces as civic spaces. As a result, MEmorial intervenes in the way we study and perform memory studies. Where traditional memorials cause us to look outward, MEmorial forces us to look inward and consider our personal association with socio-political issues.

In what follows, I will briefly define MEmorial and distinguish it as an inward/outward facing model. It causes us to look inward and simultaneously draws from the community. From there, I describe the oral histories that I collected from some of Pendleton's Black community to create a map and a 360 degree virtual reality tour called "Counter Tour: Remembering Pendleton, South Carolina's Black History." Ultimately, I argue that by retelling and remembering Pendleton's Black histories that we too can compose public facts and disrupt hegemonic historical narratives.

I want to position MEmorial as an artifact that is quite different from a memorial, monument, or historical marker in three distinct ways. First, most memorials represent the dominant narrative of a culture. In the case of the American South, this narrative is predominately one that still valorizes the Old South and minimizes or erases unpleasant historical events like the transatlantic and domestic slave trade, Jim Crow, and a persistent culture of segregation and racism. In contrast, MEmorial looks to represent the unrecognized abject suffering in a space or place, and in doing so, pushes back on dominant narratives.

Second, memorials usually cause us to distance ourselves from what is being remembered as the objective bystander, or as Dickinson, Ott, and Aoki explain it, "with a reverent eye" that encourages visitors to keep a distant eye that admires without contemplating the implications of white Americans in our nation's tragic history. MEmorial, however, is an inward-facing and contemplative practice that considers how we interact with spaces and places and how those spaces and places remember various historical events.

Third, memorials are generally placed in communities without the involvement or inspiration of those community members. They neither represent the values or goals of the community, and oftentimes, they are not welcomed. However, community engagement is one of the most compelling aspects of MEmorial. A true MEmorial represents both the individual and collective component, and without the input of the community, a MEmorial is just another navel-gazing academic practice. MEmorial creates what Stephen Legg calls "sites of countermemory" that disrupt stagnant narratives that tell one story and remember stories that have been suppressed.

As two iterations of MEmorial, I collected oral histories from members of the Pendleton Foundation for Black History and Culture and the Pendleton Community Center as well as from other residents of color for the purpose of mapping their

stories and crafting a virtual reality counter tour. The counter tour is housed on the foundation's website. The purpose of this counter tour is twofold yet interconnecting and represents the individual and collective element.

First, this counter tour is a direct response to the problem of erased or forgotten histories in Pendleton. While the town relishes the opportunity to speak about its famous residents like Anna Calhoun Clemson or Thomas Green Clemson, and takes tourists and residents on ghost tours in the plantation or to Gallows Hill, Pendleton limits its discussion about Black history including its enslaved residents as well as its many significant entrepreneurs, civil rights leaders, and public figures. The secondary purpose of the counter tour is to develop an awareness for the Pendleton Foundation for Black History and Culture, and to promote this organization's mission to the community and beyond. These are just a sampling of the stories that have been erased from public memory but are now just beginning to circulate once more.

Throughout the years, the Pendleton Community Center has served the community in a variety of ways. First, it is not just a building but a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting civil rights and creating a safe space for youth. Once federally mandated integration finally changed the educational environment in Pendleton, Riverside and other schools became integrated. This was not an easy transition in Pendleton or elsewhere, so there were frequent issues between students and between faculty and students as well. The community center acted as a liaison between the community and the school. If there were incidents where Black students experienced racist treatment, the community center would step in and meet with school officials. It was commonly known that if there were racial problems at school, that parents could call the community center to intervene. It was a local chapter of the NAACP. Along the same lines, the Pendleton Community Center served as an educational function for young people on the West Side of Pendleton. Throughout the summer, there were programs so the children could enjoy recreation, reinforce skills from school, as well as receive free breakfast and lunch daily.

Prior to the 1970s, the area behind the community center was used as a garbage dump for the town. Dump trucks drove right up and several times a week, dumped the town's refuse right on the West Side of Pendleton. During this time, the community center was used as a trade school, as well as a summer program for area children. The odor was overwhelming at times, especially during the hot summer months from May to October. After many years of protesting this injustice,

the town finally agreed to move the dump. However, instead of a proper waste removal, they covered it with grass and transformed the dump into a sports field for the West Side. Currently, neighborhood kids that play on those fields are actually playing on top of a garbage dump. This dump and its remnants is a material representation of the town's explicit and implicit racism as well as how little value Pendleton has historically placed on the West Side.

Throughout the years, parents of Black children in Pendleton have defined clear boundaries where they were allowed to ride their bikes--all within the boundaries of the West side of town where people of color lived. One resident, Terence, who is also the director of the foundation now, was only allowed to leave these boundaries with specific permission from his parents, usually to go to the small grocery store located on the town square or for a treat at one of the two convenience stores. At any time when Terence did leave the boundaries, it was only for a specific purpose, and he was expected to immediately return to the West Side with no side trips or lingering where the white folks lived. When Terence and his friends rode their bikes to either of the convenience stores located outside the confines of the Black community, they were to make their purchases and immediately return to the West Side. They were not allowed to stop over and drink their Slurpees on the town square. Most of the time, their drinks were melted by the time they got back to their neighborhood. One day, Terence and his friends decided that they were done with all the rules and stopped at the Village Green and ate their snacks. After not much time, the mayor came to them and told them they weren't allowed there and needed to move along. They refused, and the only reason why the sheriff didn't come and haul them away was because Terence and the other boys had families who were well known in the community. If he was any other Black boy, the mayor would not have hesitated to call the police.

It is significant that few Black bodies populate the town square today, whether it's a town festival or just a quiet Saturday morning. It is rare for a person of color to spend time on or around the Village Green. While this is something I've noticed since I've lived in Pendleton, it is stories like Terence's that clarifies why this space is unfriendly to Black residents.

Because memorials tend to be misleading and dishonest and position white individuals as outside the problem, I argue that MEmorial is a true disruption--a necessary disruption--into the way that we remember. Because MEmorial

incorporates both the individual and the collective, participants look inward instead of merely outward. The outward look is distancing; it's formal. But the inward look insists that Problems B Us. As Ulmer writes, "*Theoria* does not rely only on chance to bring tourists to sore spots (repulsions)." Thus far, Pendleton has avoided its Black histories, and it's only by chance that anyone would know about the sore spots in Pendleton. Most white residents do not even know that the West Side of Pendleton exists, that it was the centerpoint for the fight for Civil Rights, or of the significant men and women of color who have lived in the town.

This is where the counter tour enters into the discussion. These narratives that I have included, as well as the images, represent a counter story, a counter tour that is meant to put a finger on Pendleton's sore spots for the purpose of awakening a sense of true community--one that both Black and white residents can openly acknowledge. There is no doubt about it, the narrative has to change, and the MEmorial counter tour is the first step for Pendleton