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Boston's King Memorial

In 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. gave his final speech, "I've Been to the Mountaintop." Delivered in support of striking sanitation workers in Memphis, Tennessee, the speech is driven by a spatial metaphor: the mountaintop, the point of view of the struggle from which one can see the history of past struggles, as well as a future community to come. King imagines taking a panoramic view of human history and argues that the present is the crucial point, the point at which a Promised Land has become visible on the horizon.

As a metaphor, the mountaintop crystallizes a moment of possibility. It informs our proposed design for Boston's King Memorial: an overlook in black stone, projecting out from Beacon Street to embrace and overlook the Common below. From the summit of the memorial, visitors are invited to regard America's oldest city park and new mountainous sculptures below, which together compose a radical amphitheater. The open structure bridges over the Common's walking path, spanning between the sidewalk and a landscape berm on the far side of the path. It is accompanied by a gentle handicap-accessible ramp which leads visitors from the upper street-level down to the lower-level of the existing walking path. On the lawn beyond, sloped stone sculptures engraved with the words of Coretta Scott King and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. act both as terrain as well as provide seating for the public.

The memorial is woven into Boston's existing urban environment: parallel to Liberty Mall, its ramp and overlook continue the trajectory of the path that leads from the State House's John F. Kennedy statue across Beacon Street, opening up to the Common. This northeast side of the park is steeply sloped and is currently not accessible from Beacon Street other than via a handful of stairways. The memorial's gentle ramp provides much-needed handicap access and ensures that this historic place becomes a site for all.

As an immersive record of the Kings' vision, the top surfaces of the stone memorial are engraved with text from their speeches. A custom typeface, designed specifically for this memorial, emulates the typed manuscripts of the era, and visually brings the Kings' voices to life. In addition, an integrated passive digital platform for mobile devices provides annotated transcripts and audio of the Kings' speeches, along with images, unlocking a deeper dive into the Kings' powerful messages.

In keeping with the Kings' commitment to equality, activism, and social mobilization, we conceive of the memorial as an open site, much like the Boston Common itself: a public space to be used for gathering, assembly, and public programming, as well as for contemplation and reflection. Not solely recapitulating the past, nor solely honoring two monumental lives, the memorial will embody a broader sense of urgency and solidarity in the present.











