

# S / t e L I N E S

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# Letter from the Editor

Paraphrasing William Faulkner, former president Barack Obama once declared in a speech about race in America, “The past isn’t dead and buried. In fact, it isn’t even past.”

Today this truth is being manifested by citizens engaged in protest marches, rediscovered in archaeological digs on the sites of Southern plantations, reimagined in prose by the novelist-heirs of Toni Morrison, and presented by museum curators in exhibitions such as that of Jacob Lawrence’s thirty-panel series *The American Struggle*, which was displayed sequentially this year for the first time since 1958 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Seattle Art Museum. In keeping with the ethos of our times, the current issue of *Site/Lines*, which is titled “Black Landscapes Matter: Race and Reckoning,” explores elements of Black history through the lens of place.

In “Re-Seeing Slavery: The Memorial to Enslaved Laborers at UVA,” Louis Nelson, a professor of architectural history at the University of Virginia, writes about the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers recently erected in proximity to the iconic Rotunda of the campus. The development of its design involved extensive interactions with descendants of the enslaved laborers as well as leaders and activists in the African American community in Charlottesville. As a result, the monument bears genealogical as well as political witness to the Black struggle for freedom in the South and the university’s own history of slavery as a social practice and economic system.

The essay “In Plain Site: The City as Monument,” by Craig Barton, a professor of the practice of architecture at Brown University,

describes Selma, Alabama, as a place of antebellum mansions, Confederate monuments, and formerly segregated institutional buildings that serve as markers of the racial inequality that shaped the city. As Barton explains, however, it is not one of these historic sites that captured the imagination of the American public and became a hallmark of the city. Instead, the Edmund Pettus Bridge, an unremarkable piece of modern urban infrastructure, acquired the status of an historic emblem after Black demonstrators, marching to the state capitol in Montgomery in 1965 to demand their right to vote, were mercilessly beaten by police officers as they tried to cross it.

Moving through space can be a form of experiencing place, and for certain landscape-focused observers, road trips reveal more than vernacular and natural scenery. In “Frozen in Time: Virginia Highway 64,” we

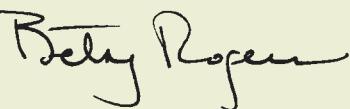
travel with Elgin Cleckley, an architect and educator at the University of Virginia, as he reflects on the passing landscape through two cartographic scrims – an 1890 map of plantation ownership that has been graphically overlain by the plan of contemporary Charlottesville’s urban fabric and John Smith’s 1612 map of Virginia, used by the Virginia Company and British colonists who settled in this area. After peeling back layers of Black and white meaning in the landscapes between Charlottesville and Richmond depicted on these maps and experienced on his walks and rides in and around the two cities, Cleckley returns to the capital’s controversial Monument Avenue in July 2020 to witness firsthand its transformation. There

he discovers that the traffic circle surrounding the Robert E. Lee monument at the avenue’s terminus has become a symbolic Black landscape of hope.

Eliza Fawcett, a journalist at the *Hartford Courant*, draws our attention to the opposed polemical politics of writer James Baldwin and New York City urban planner Robert Moses in “Riverton: ‘An Oasis in Harlem.’” Castigated as a Black ghetto by Baldwin and sponsored by Moses as an antidote to his “slum-clearance,” whites-only, middle-income urban-renewal projects elsewhere in the city, Riverton, which was built in 1947 by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, stretches from 135th Street to 138th Street between Fifth Avenue and the Harlem River. Operated for and managed by Black New Yorkers, with well-kept grounds and security guards, Riverton quickly became a close-knit middle-class community.

As readers of *Site/Lines* can see, the motto on its masthead is “A Journal of Place.” Look also at our website and take note of the mission statement: “to promote an active understanding of the meaning of place in human life.” This aim is evident in the ways our contributors to this issue have written about Black landscapes. As always, I would like to remind you that essays such as theirs are made possible by donations from friends of the Foundation for Landscape Studies. For this reason we urge you to send us a contribution in the enclosed envelope.

With good green wishes,



Elizabeth Barlow Rogers  
President

## On the Cover:

Marcus David Peters Circle,  
Summer 2020. Photograph by  
Elgin Cleckley.

# Black Landscapes Matter: Race and Reckoning

## Re-Seeing Slavery: The Memorial to Enslaved Laborers at UVA

**V**irginia Mist is quarried less than an hour away from campus, just north of Orange, Virginia. A haunting, grey-black granite with wispy white veins, it has coursed through the rolling hills of the Virginia Piedmont for millennia. Ever present but long overlooked as a resource for the region's architecture, this granite was the ideal material for the University of Virginia's new Memorial to Enslaved Laborers. Virginia Mist now rises in a strong but gentle arc across an open lawn between UVA's Academical Village – a UNESCO World Heritage Site – and the beginning of the community's commercial main street. There is a sharp disjunction between the low, graceful curve of the hypercontemporary memorial and the university's classically inspired architecture as well as between its black stone and the otherwise red-brick and white-columned structures on the grounds. Just behind the memorial, giant columns on a Jefferson-era façade rise in bold emulation of an ancient Roman tradition. In this space the memorial's simplicity of form and material evokes not only the theft of tradition but also the strength to persevere through untold horrors. Its materiality simultaneously disrupts the curated homogeneity of the white landscape and renders visible long-buried veins of history.

As with the selection of the building material, the memorial's formal qualities were very carefully considered. Seen from above, the dominant form is a circle – of the same diameter as the university's iconic Rotunda. The monumentality of the latter is answered by the breadth and airiness of the former. But the design is not

simple. At the moment of tangent with the sidewalk the circle is broken, allowing visitors a point of access to the encased open space while symbolically evoking the broken shackles of freedom. The form rises from that tangent and swells to eight feet only to descend quietly to its starting point. A circular path inside gradually descends and then rises, amplifying the rising wall above.

Even adjacent pathways bear the weight of symbolic power. The sidewalk aligns with the setting sun on March 3, Charlottesville's Liberation and Freedom Day, and another pathway of stone "steps" embedded in the grass curves around the monument and heads north, reminding visitors of the way toward freedom and the footsteps of those who sought escape. If the architecture of the classical tradition is inextricably fused with the long history of Virginia's white supremacy, the architecture of this memorial is a first and bold counterpoint, a disruption of whiteness, a paean to Black courage and community, and an important step towards truth telling in history.

The process that realized this memorial was long and fraught. Although African Americans had applied for

admission to UVA as early as the 1930s, they were not admitted with any regularity until the early 1970s. In the years following, those admitted Black students agitated for greater recognition and support, submitting a formal report to the president in 1987, followed in the ensuing decades by frequent calls for inclusion and equity in a series of public declarations and documents. In 2010 the students' appeals expanded to encompass a demand that the university acknowledge its own history of slavery.

The following year, in a bold and creative strategy, students launched a design competition entitled "Preserving our Past, Framing our Future," calling for proposals for a Memorial to Enslaved Laborers. Attempts to visualize a memorial had a profound effect on the university – including university administrators – catalyzing responses that earlier studies and declarations had not. Over the next two years, Dr. Marcus Martin, then Vice President for Diversity and Equity at UVA, built a case encouraging then president Terry Sullivan to form the President's Commission on Slavery and the University. When that commission was established, cochaired by Dr. Martin and history professor Kirt Von Daacke, I was one of its twenty-nine members. We were charged to investigate the interpretation of historically significant buildings and sites related to slavery at UVA, promote historical conferences and exhibitions, produce an interactive media center, consider memorialization, and propose additional projects that would illuminate the lives of the enslaved individuals who worked at UVA. Comprising faculty, staff, and students from the university but also – and more importantly – known descendants of the enslaved laborers and leaders and activists in the African American community, the President's Commission invested years of collaborative work, listening sessions, and broad community engagement in order to earn enough trust even to begin a conversation about truth telling and repair.

In November of 2016 the university selected the winning design team for the memorial, including architects Meejin Yoon and Eric Höweler, historian and designer Mabel O. Wilson, landscape architect Gregg Bleam, community facilitator Frank Dukes, and artist Eto Otitigbe, who joined the team after the project was under way. Theirs was a nearly impossible task: to introduce into the landscape of a UNESCO World Heritage Site a new feature that could stand up to the extraordinarily powerful traditions of UVA. The memorial



View of the newly completed Memorial to Enslaved Laborers, UVA, from the southeast.  
Photograph by Sanjay Suchak.



Detail of the wall of names, Memorial to Enslaved Laborers, UVA.  
Photograph by Sanjay Suchak.

had to be monumental, strong, and capable of contesting false histories, while also creating a social space for gathering and an individual space for contemplation and even healing.

Critical to the success of the project were the collaborative practices that had already been established through the President's Commission. Building on that preliminary scaffold, the design team hosted numerous community forums, each planned to encourage conversation and engagement. Rather than presenting preconceived ideas, the design team listened. When reviewing the hundreds of responses collected through these community forums and an online platform, the team looked for major themes, consistent threads, and critical values, and these became the basis for the preliminary designs. Returning to the community, they presented these designs, along with options for sites, strategies for memorialization, and other details, always listening for the major chords in the collective feedback. Only then did they chart a course for the final design.

During that process I came to meet and then work very closely with two members of the descendant community, DeTeasa Gathers and Cauline Yates. Through them I've learned a great deal about the vitality and resilience of those descendants who remained in Charlottesville through the century and a half since Emancipation.

I first met DeTeasa Gathers when she called my name from the front of the bus I had just boarded. She was the bus leader on a weeklong pilgrimage I'd joined, which would take us from Charlottesville through civil-rights sites across the

before us, we carried the soil from a local lynching site to be installed in the Legacy Museum in Montgomery. Over that week together, we laughed, we cried, we danced. Community was building. I later learned that Ms. Gathers's mother had trained to be a nurse though UVA's then segregated nursing program, but was never given a diploma.

Cauline Yates, who has also honored me with her friendship, is pleased that her ancestors will finally be recognized by the university. She hopes that the memorial will "enlighten young and old and remind everyone that slavery was a very evil part of our history." In accord with so many others in the descendant community, Ms. Yates wants this memorial to be a site of education. Recognizing the false history that has for so long been taught, this site must, she argued, start the work of telling a truer and more honest story.

The local African Americans that I've met through this process are deeply invested in memorializing not an abstract history but the very real past of their forebears. Their ancestors having survived enslavement, later generations forged ahead through Reconstruction, the racial violence of lynching, and the reconstituted oppression of Jim Crow segregation, working as skilled laborers, mothers, barbers, child-care workers, and custodians, but also as doctors and dentists. In the face of unequal education, deficient voting rights, and inhumane health care, they built tightly knit Black neighborhoods only to see them later bulldozed for urban renewal and university expansion. "Remember their names" and "Say their names" were constant refrains in both in-person discussions and online feedback.

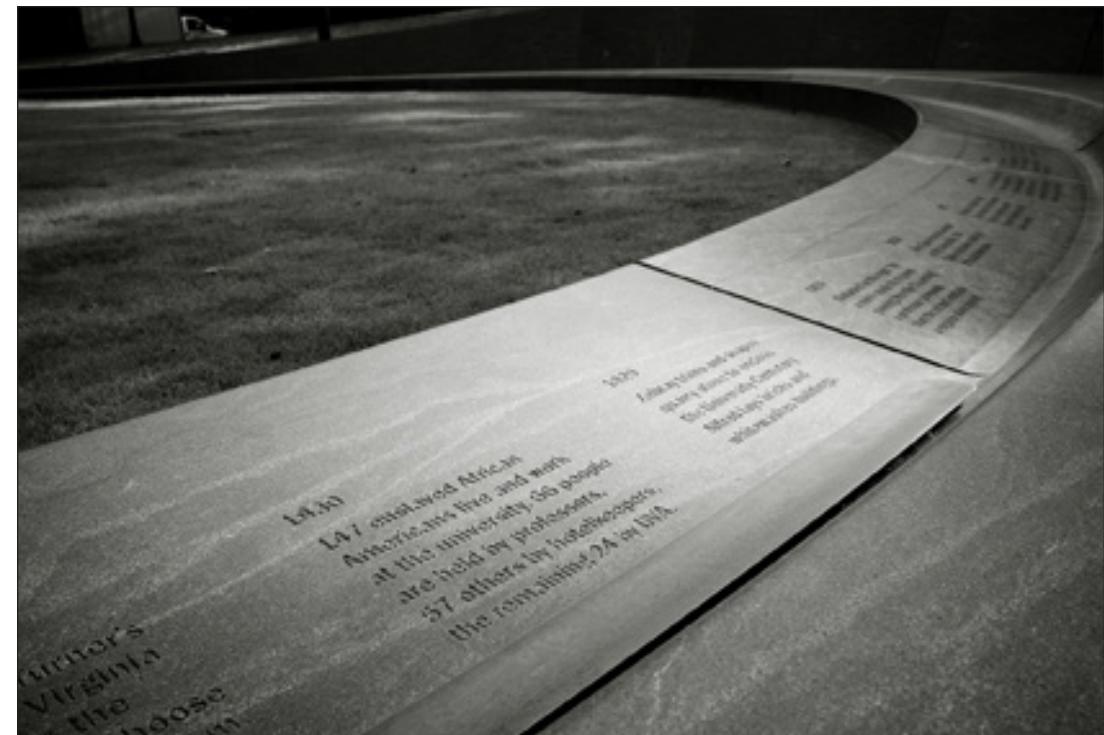
As a result, the memorial's most prominent feature is its interior face, which

south to our final destination, the Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama. Like so many had

slopes away from the viewer as it rises and is gouged with thousands of "memory marks." This cloud of marks represents the thousands of individuals who lived, loved, worked, and died as enslaved people at the University of Virginia. While some of the marks have names above them – Sam the Carpenter, Moses, Isabella Gibbons, and a few hundred others – the vast majority do not; the erasure of individual identity from the historical record is yet another legacy of the violence. In a profound gesture to preserve the dignity of the many unnamed, some of them are denoted by their kinship with others – "mother," "son," "husband" – or by their skills – "carpenter," "midwife." This collective community of names, relationships, and vocations stands in for those who labored to build the university, daily animated its landscape, and sustained its operations from 1817 to March 3 of 1865, when Union troops marched into Charlottesville and liberated over fourteen thousand enslaved people. Necessarily incomplete, the inscriptions were designed so that additional names can and will be added to the wall as they surface – either through further historical research or through descendant engagement. Five new names were added in January 2021.

In 2020 Ms. Gathers, Ms. Yates, and other descendants organized and founded an independent nonprofit

Detail of the historical timeline, Memorial to Enslaved Laborers, UVA. Photograph by Sanjay Suchak.



organization – the Descendants of Enslaved Communities – to better advocate for respectful and responsible engagement from the university and to insist on the work of repairing its relationship to its Black student body and Black Charlottesville residents. In partnership with a genealogist, they are reaching out to other descendants – many scattered across the country and unaware of their own history – inviting them to join their efforts. This possibility, too, is suggested by the memorial: the design shelters an inner circle of grass, a space dedicated to the necessary work of congregating and taking collective action.

The grass circle is bounded by stone slabs that become a bench as the inner walkway gradually descends. Inscribed on the surface of this stone bench is a timeline that stretches from the first arrival of enslaved Africans in Virginia in 1619 to 1889, the year that marks the death of Isabella Gibbons, a formerly enslaved woman, whose biography plays an important role in multiple features of the memorial. I was deeply honored to be a member of the small team of historians that composed this timeline of sixty-nine entries that speak to the extraordinary and the ordinary in the lives of the enslaved. When possible, the timeline includes the names of the enslaved: “1818: Sam, a carpenter, leads a group of enslaved laborers constructing roofing for pavilion VII and other buildings.” It amplifies their courage and attempts at self-determination: “1822: Willis runs away. The UVA overseer pursues and captures him in Louisa County.” It questions the perceived inevitability of the peculiar institution: “1831–32: In the wake of Nat Turner’s slave uprising, the Virginia legislature debates the fate of slavery. They choose to uphold the slave system.” And it reminds readers of the violence against women that was so pervasive in this landscape: “1850: Three students attack a twelve-year-old enslaved girl in a field near UVA. The students are expelled” and “1856: An enslaved eleven-year-old girl is beaten unconscious by a UVA student. Claiming his right to discipline any slave, he suffers no consequences.” And the timeline highlights the agency of the Black community in pressing toward self-determination: “1863: Charlottesville Baptist Church’s Black congregants, including those enslaved at UVA, successfully petition white church leaders to establish separate services for African American members.”

Given the anonymity of so many of the formerly enslaved, it seemed very important to amplify the biography of one person to remind visitors that each of these people had a long complicated life history, even if we do not now have a record of it. The entries for Isabella Gibbons help to cohere the timeline around a more fully explored biography: “1853:

Isabella Gibbons, a cook who works in a pavilion kitchen, marries William Gibbons, a butler enslaved by another UVA professor. They teach themselves to read and write.” We know more about her because she remained in Charlottesville as an important educator after the war: “1866: Isabella Gibbons, formerly enslaved at UVA, teaches at a freedmen’s school in Charlottesville with 42 students. One month later the school has grown to 63 students. It will become the Jefferson School.”

Gibbons is especially important as well, because we have a rare surviving photograph of her, taken while she was a teacher. Of the thousands of people enslaved at UVA, we have photographs of only a handful. Ms. Gibbons’s countenance is so particularly striking that Eto Otitigbe opted to artfully inscribe a relief of her eyes on the outside surface of the memorial – a woman once enslaved, then freed; once forcibly diminished, now rendered monumental. Those approaching from the north might, in the right lighting conditions, note her eyes watching them in return. Her vigilance is poignantly reflected in a quote from an 1867 letter from Gibbons that ends the timeline:

*Can we forget the crack of the whip, the cowhide, whipping-post, the auction-block, the spaniels, the iron collar, the negro-trader tearing the young child from its mother’s breast as a whelp from the lioness? Have we forgotten that by those horrible cruelties, hundreds of our race have been killed? No, we have not, nor ever will.*

Gibbons’s commitment to remembering was not widely held among the white leadership of the university. Not long after the Confederate surrender, white elites began the work of constructing a history that ameliorated Southern pride at the expense of both historical accuracy and Black dignity. As articulated by historian Liz Varon, this mythology of the Lost Cause argued “slavery was a benign institution; secession was a constitutional defense of state sovereignty; the wartime emancipation of the slaves was a travesty; the Yankee victory in the war was a triumph of might over right; and the postwar experiment in Black citizenship was a failure.” This



Photograph of Isabella Gibbons, date unknown. Photograph courtesy of Boston Public Library.

political initiative was first articulated by Southern whites but quickly affirmed by their Northern brethren as both sides reimagined the war fought to end slavery as a dispute between honorable brothers, entirely erasing Black Americans from the narrative.

This work of mythmaking slowly reshaped the local landscape. In the opening decades of the twentieth century, white Charlottesvilleians erected four monuments: two to Confederate generals with no connection whatsoever to Charlottesville; and two to the

Clark brothers of Albemarle County – one who trekked with Meriwether Lewis, Sacagawea, and their party across North America and the other who became famous as the “Conqueror of the Northwest.” In their subject matter, scale, and location, all four monuments worked to reinforce a culture of racism.

The invention of the Lost Cause ideology and the racism it condoned served to reinforce the policies that reshaped the University of Virginia as well. The clearest expression was probably the remaking of the pavilion and hotel gardens in the middle decades of the twentieth century. Bounded originally by eight-foot curvilinear walls (the height echoed in the wall of the memorial), the gardens behind the pavilions were once work yards filled with summer kitchens, smokehouses, woodpiles, laundry fires, chicken coops, and other necessities of food production and elite household maintenance in antebellum Virginia. But the rise of refrigeration and grocery stores in the early decades of the twentieth century rendered obsolete these nineteenth-century necessities. So in the 1940s the ladies of the Garden Club of Virginia took it upon themselves to “restore” the early gardens of the Academical Village. While lovely – and now historic in their own right – these gardens filled with azaleas and tulips bear little resemblance to the work spaces of enslavement that preceded them. Another act of erasure and rewriting completed.

In stark contrast to this approach to difficult historical truths, the aforementioned timeline would be difficult to erase, inscribed as it is in granite. Additionally, it is cut into the floor of a trough designed to carry a constant flow of water. Associated with libation and baptism, water plays a critical role in African American faith traditions: again and again, the design team was told that, in addition to teaching a hard history, the memorial needed to be a place of renewal. As viewers slowly move along the timeline, encountering these highly legible, very personal, and deeply hurtful histories, they are reading through a stream of water that promises healing.

While the official opening of the site in April of 2020 was postponed because of COVID, the university promised that the water feature will not run until the descendant community has dedicated it. The keeping of this promise is an important start to a long conversation now possible, one that is about telling an accurate history and undertaking the work of repairing harm. President James E. Ryan's commitment to fostering university-community partnerships by establishing the Equity Center and the Board of Visitors' approval of a slate of important racial-equity resolutions at its September 2020 meeting are important steps toward that goal. But equity cannot be declared into existence; it must be daily practiced and fought for by individuals and institutions committed to its realization.

The fact that the memorial will play a role in that struggle first became evident on June 5, 2020. After more than a week of growing frustration in the wake of the killing of George Floyd, a group of African American medical students called for a silent but very public White Coats for Black Lives protest: nine minutes on one knee in and around the newly revealed Memorial to Enslaved Laborers. At midday hundreds of health care professionals in their white coats gathered and knelt in silence, protesting the persistence of trauma borne by the Black community. But in the silence the land itself seemed to cry out. Thousands of Black Virginians had navigated their way through the violence of slavery in this very place; now, 155 years later, members of the same community had come together to acknowledge that institutional violence against Black Americans is ongoing. For a brief and sacred moment, the pain of the past and the pain of the present were both in view. – Louis P. Nelson

### In Plain Site: The City as Monument

*I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids – and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me.*

– Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*

**S**et in the midst of the Black Belt – a region named for its large, politically unenfranchised Black population as well as for its rich alluvial soils – Selma tells the story of American cities in the South that are divided by race. Like other towns in the region and throughout the South, its urban grid, streets, public buildings, and network of formal and informal civic gathering places speak eloquently to the complex histories and separate lives and cultures of its Black and white residents. Selma's antebellum homes, landscapes commemorating the Confederacy, and formerly segregated civic spaces serve as monuments to the racial inequities that shaped the city and fueled its growth. At the same time, they remind its Black inhabitants daily of the racial, economic, and political barriers – at once brutal and intricate – designed to render them invisible. And yet these are not the landscapes for which this small municipality is known across America. Instead, Selma's legacy and public image rests on its role in the struggle for civil rights in 1965.

Although I have seen Selma depicted in magazines, newspapers, and books – and eventually went there myself – it is the images broadcast on Sunday, March 7, 1965, that framed my sense of the town. Like many others in households across the nation, my family and I watched as the regular programming that evening was interrupted by images of a long line of Black women and men, led by John Lewis, Hosea Williams, Albert Turner, and Amelia Boynton, marching across the Edmund Pettus Bridge. This would be the first of three attempts to march from Selma to Montgomery, fifty-four miles away, to bring their demand for the right to vote to Governor George Wallace.

The impetus for the long march was the murder of Jimmie Lee Jackson, an unarmed, local civil-rights activist who had been shot to death by police during a voting-rights protest a few weeks earlier in Marion, Alabama. Leaders of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) – including John Lewis, who was already working to register voters in the region – persuaded the leaders of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference that what was happening in Selma

exemplified the political and social forces undermining the 1964 Civil Rights Act and, more broadly, preventing Black women and men from becoming fully enfranchised citizens. For that reason, it was an ideal place to launch a demonstration to build support for voting rights. On March 7 Lewis and others led approximately six hundred marchers from Sylvan Street in the heart of Selma's Black community to the Edmund Pettus Bridge.

That same evening, millions of Americans witnessed the confrontation that Alabama state troopers and their deputized posse had instigated only hours before. Armed with riot batons and tear gas, they confronted the peaceful marchers at the foot of the bridge, transforming an otherwise unremarkable landscape of fast-food restaurants and auto repair shops into a battlefield. Blocking the way forward on Highway 80, the troopers and posse then advanced on the marchers with batons swinging, forcing them to retreat back across the bridge into town. Seventeen marchers, including Lewis and Boynton, were hospitalized, and dozens of others were injured.

The events of what came to be known as Bloody Sunday are vividly recalled today because they were captured on film by national news networks and broadcast across the nation, thrusting Selma into the national consciousness. Still, no one would have imagined that this town and its bridge would become one of the nation's iconic cultural landscapes. Now, more than fifty years later, it is important to recall the complex social structure of the city itself to understand the significance of these events and how best they might be commemorated.

In her study of social and political theory *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt defined “the space of public appearance” as that which comes into existence when people are speaking and acting with one another on equal terms: “Where I appear to others as others appear to me.” Arendt goes on to clarify that this “space of public appearance” doesn’t exist for everyone at all times and that for some individuals – even though they may be “capable of word and deed” – it may never exist. To be deprived of this space “means to be deprived of reality, which, humanly and politically speaking, is the same as appearance.”

When considering the erasure of Black citizens in white spaces, this idea is particularly useful. In Arendt’s view, to be visible in this space of public appearance one must be able to “appear through speech and action” in the civic realm.

Black citizens waiting to register to vote outside the Dallas County Courthouse, 1963. Photograph by Elizabeth Boone Aiken, *Birmingham News*. All images provided by Alabama Department of Archives and History. Donated by Alabama Media Group.

And yet the duality of American cities and towns, particularly in the South, meant that “public” spaces and “white” spaces were often synonymous. This made visibility for Black citizens within the larger culture virtually impossible, because of course there was no public space in which they were allowed to speak and act with whites on equal terms.

As the late legal scholar and former chief judge of the US Court of Appeals in Philadelphia A. Leon Higginbotham Jr. described in his book *In the Matter of Color: Race and the Legal Process*, an exhaustive array of laws and municipal Jim Crow statutes were introduced throughout the South to control the speech and action of Black men and women in the public realm, with the express intention of “restricting any activities or aspirations of Blacks that might threaten” those in power. Denying Black people the right to vote lay at the heart of that effort. Perhaps the most important legacy of the civil rights movement was that it starkly exposed these mechanisms of control while simultaneously empowering Black citizens to enter the space of public appearance and together declare, through word and deed, their presence.

Selma is a city of memory and monuments. More than half a century after Bloody Sunday, its memorial landscape reflects a tension between the dual narratives that attempt to explicate its local history. One narrative foregrounds the Lost Cause and its heroes, romanticizing the city’s antebellum past. The nineteenth-century mansions, statues to Confederate generals, and even recent reenactments of the Battle of Selma tell a simplistic story about the history of the region; one that largely suppresses the presence and contributions of its Black community.

Into the 1990s it was possible to visit Selma and have little sense of what had occurred there during the voting-rights movement – even though, if the city exists in the nation’s



memory for anything, it is for the battle for civil rights rather than for the Battle of Selma. In the last two decades, however, a series of new monuments and spaces have been constructed. The city is the starting point of the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail, and its memorial landscape includes the Selma Interpretive Center, the National Voting Rights Museum & Institute, the Civil Rights Memorial Park, and a number of commemorative plaques and historical markers. I would suggest, however, that the three sites in the city that perhaps most eloquently convey the challenges that Selma’s Black citizens encountered and endured were not built for this purpose. Instead they are part of the fabric of the city itself: a government building, a stretch of street, and a bridge.

Incorporated in 1820, Selma sits strategically on a bluff above the Alabama River. Its riverfront location – and, later, the railway linking it to the ports of Mobile and New Orleans – established it as an important transfer point for goods and materials. From its inception the town was surrounded by plantations, and cotton was its chief export. Located upriver from Old Cahaba – which served as the original state capital and the seat of Dallas County – and down-river from Montgomery, where the capital was relocated in 1846, Selma gained political and financial prominence when it replaced Old Cahaba as the Dallas County seat in 1866. The original platting of the city resulted in a regular grid of streets forming a near square north of the river, with Broad Street running north-south at its center. The major streets – Selma, Dallas, Alabama, and Water Avenues – run nominally east-west, parallel with the river, providing long views and easy access to Broad Street.

As the town grew, two distinct landscapes emerged on either side of Broad Street. West Selma was conceived as a cultural landscape of power and authority for Selma’s white population. The platting linked the primary residential, cultural, and political spaces of the white community, including the cemetery and the courthouse. The “separate but equal” doctrine codified by *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896 and the proliferation of Jim Crow statutes that followed further buttressed this urbanism of duality. Even today, virtually none of the

spaces associated with Black social, political, or cultural life are found on the west side of town.

Old Live Oak Cemetery is situated at the western end of Selma Avenue, close to the banks of the Alabama River. Initially Old Live Oak was not strictly segregated by race. Enslaved men and women are interred in the cemetery proximate to the families who held them in bondage; their headstones are small and carry only the first names of the deceased. Benjamin Sterling Turner – a Selma merchant and the state’s first Black congressman, elected during Reconstruction – is also buried there. In the twentieth century, however, Old Live Oak came to be associated almost exclusively with the power and privilege of the city’s white residents. Also interred here are the Confederate generals and United States Senators John Morgan and Edmund Pettus. Other important landmarks of West Selma include antebellum mansions on the National Register of Historic Places, such as Sturdivant Hall on Mabry Street; the First Baptist Church of Selma, on the corner of Dallas Avenue and Lauderdale Street; and the Vaughan-Smitherman Museum, which has, among other things, an extensive collection of Civil War memorabilia.

Of course, many Black men and women worked in West Selma, and therefore regularly moved through the residential and commercial spaces of the white community, but negotiating these spaces was a complex and sometimes dangerous affair. Black residents might traverse these “spaces of appearance,” but they were not seen as civic actors within them. Their collective inability to access the political process rendered them effectively invisible. In 1965 the public building in which the power and control of the white community was concentrated most heavily was the Dallas County Courthouse.

Built in 1902, the Dallas County Courthouse faces the federal courthouse across the street. Although Selma does not have a traditional courthouse square, this corner of the city is charged by the presence of these two buildings and understood to be one of its significant civic spaces. Renovated in the early 1960s, the county courthouse is a large white building with little ornament or detail; the addition of vertical strip windows adds to its opacity and ungainly proportions. One is not so much welcomed into this building as admitted into it.

For Selma’s Black citizens, its public functions were intentionally limited. Although the building was ostensibly the seat of justice, Black men and women in Selma could not count on receiving a fair trial there, nor could those who were detained depend upon the court to ensure their safety. Joe Spinner Johnson was a labor leader attempting to organize local sharecroppers. In 1935 he was picked up by a mob,

severely beaten, and taken to the jail in Selma where he was murdered. His body was found in a field near Greensboro a few days later.

The Dallas County Courthouse was also a symbol of the powers arrayed against enfranchising the town's Black citizens. In 1965 Selma had a population of twenty-eight thousand residents, approximately 80 percent of whom were Black. And yet fewer than three hundred of Selma's Black citizens were registered voters. That was because the registrar, whose offices were in the courthouse, controlled access to the voter rolls. Through the use of poll and property taxes, literacy tests, and other strategies purposely adopted to suppress enfranchisement, the registrar repeatedly prevented Black citizens from exercising their right to vote and gaining political visibility.

These coordinated efforts to deny Black citizens entry into "the space of public appearance" were so successful that the Dallas County Voters League, formed by local civil-rights activists, and leaders of the SNCC persuaded Martin Luther King Jr. and other members of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to focus their organizing efforts on Selma. For seven weeks early in 1965, Blacks lined up outside the courthouse to register, often waiting for many hours before being turned away. Hundreds of them were arrested on flimsy pretexts; some were even assaulted by the sheriff – who was known for wearing a helmet and carrying a cattle prod as well as a gun and stick – for attempting to enter the building. For those who know its history, the Dallas County Courthouse still radiates the sinister power it embodied for decades. Even more than fifty years later, it symbolizes Selma's longstanding betrayal of the vast majority of the citizens that it was nominally pledged to serve.

East Selma lies beyond Broad Street, east of the original twelve-block core, and it differs in many significant ways from its western counterpart. Alabama and Selma Avenues cross Broad Street, but the major streets of East Selma – Washington, Lawrence, Green, Franklin, and Sylvan (now Martin Luther King) – run north-south, connecting the river and Water Avenue (a commercial thoroughfare edging the river), with industrial and rural zones to the north. A mixed-use area since the nineteenth century, East Selma contained not only residential neighborhoods but also a shipyard, foundry, ironworks, and other heavy industries. The presence of these industrial and commercial facilities undermined the quality and value of the adjacent residential areas, making them less desirable to whites and therefore available for occupation by the city's Black population.



Aerial view of Sylvan Street, Carver Homes, First Baptist Church, and Brown Chapel, 1965. Photograph by Haywood Paravicini, *Birmingham News*.

If West Selma may be defined by the presence of significant cultural markers of the white community, then East Selma may be defined by the presence of similar markers of the Black community. At the same time, the concept of "separate but equal" identities reinforced the racial hierarchy that elevated the spaces of white Selma while relegating the spaces controlled or conditioned by Selma's marginalized Black community to a subordinate status.

The city's George Washington Carver homes in East Selma are a good case in point. In 1957, the city used federal funds to build this series of low-rise, barracks-style, modern houses in a three-block area bounded by Lawrence Street and St. Ann Street. Although the Carver homes were in one sense a sign of progress – an acknowledgment that the city needed to provide better housing for its Black residents – they were also an implicit justification of segregation. And while the buildings themselves were new, even after their construction Sylvan Street itself – the north-south thoroughfare that bisected the development – remained unpaved.

Less ambiguous landmarks in this part of East Selma are First Baptist Church and Brown Chapel A.M.E., two of the

city's most powerful Black churches, which stand in stark contrast to the visual anonymity of the housing project that was later sited between them. First Baptist, a brick church with white trim, was built in 1894 in the Gothic Revival style by a local Black architect, Dave Benjamin West, and is considered one of the most architecturally significant late-19th-century Black churches in the state. Brown Chapel, built ten years later by a Black builder named A. J. Farley, is a more impos-

ing structure, with Romanesque Revival detailing and twin towers framing its arched entryway.

Founded after Reconstruction, when the Black population was once again politically disenfranchised, these churches fulfilled a dual role, providing not only places of spiritual sanctuary but also important civic arenas in which Black citizens could congregate, speak, and interact with one another. Black churches did not set the laws in Selma; nevertheless, they became symbolic if not literal spaces of public appearance.

In the months leading up to Bloody Sunday, both churches began to expand their civic roles. First Baptist was acting as the headquarters for SNCC's voting-rights activities and Brown Chapel was hosting leaders of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. In addition, many of the visiting organizers were offered room and board by local Black activists living in the Carver Homes. As the campaign for voter registration got underway and Selma's Black residents were repeatedly denied access to the Dallas County Courthouse, the community created its own civic landscape on this stretch of Sylvan Street. Just as the courthouses in West Selma animated the space between them, so too did these churches, transforming a visually unremarkable stretch of road into East Selma's primary civic space.

In 1976 Sylvan Street was renamed after Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and its red clay surface has long been paved. And yet it does not read as a space of public appearance because – unlike Live Oak Cemetery or the Dallas County Courthouse – it was never intended to function as one. Nonetheless, First Baptist Church, Brown Chapel, and the Carver Homes still stand, and this street is now a destination on civil-rights tours of the city: an evocative link to the events of 1965. As a memorial landscape, MLK Street speaks powerfully to the importance of challenging one's invisibility through the collective strength of the community. It was here that demonstrators from Selma and neighboring cities and towns gathered as they prepared to march through town and across the Pettus Bridge to Montgomery.

Because traditional monuments and memorials constructed within the public realm are instruments of both governmental and private patronage, like the bust of Nathan Bedford Forrest recently reinstalled at Live Oak Cemetery, these cultural landscapes tend to either neglect or actively suppress the presence and contributions of marginalized cultural communities. To recognize the people, places, and events significant to Black history in Selma, one must be cognizant of the vernacular landscape, which is defined less by patronage than by cultural practice. This brings us to the most powerful and poignant of all of Selma's monuments: the Edmund Pettus Bridge.

If you drive to Selma from Montgomery, you approach the city on Highway 80. Now widened to four lanes, Highway 80 still runs through Lowndes County, a rural agricultural landscape where cattle graze on grassland and softwood trees are a cash crop cultivated for the local paper mill. Although the highway has been designated the National Historic Trail, there's little indication of the events that took place along the route: only a roadside memorial to Viola Liuzzo, a white mother of five who was shot to death in Lowndes County after the third march to Montgomery for having a Black man – Leroy Moton, a fellow organizer – in her car.

The section of Highway 80 leading to the bridge is notably underwhelming, lined by a series of dilapidated buildings, empty tractor trailers, and automotive and tire-repair shops. There are fewer businesses and more empty shops and vacant lots than there were in 1965, and this stretch of the road clearly signals Selma's declining economic fortunes. The

National Voting Rights Museum & Institute, which once sat across the river, is now located in a former industrial building that overlooks the Bloody Sunday site.

Tucked alongside the city's Welcome to Selma sign is Civil Rights Memorial Park. It's a small open space with a roadside plaque and four tablets portraying the images of local leaders of the civil rights movement. Curiously, the plaque noting the bridge's status as a national historical landmark sits on the other side of the river, far from the site for which the bridge gained its notoriety. Taken together, the park, the plaques, and even the museum are modest bright spots in a landscape generally in disrepair, one that seems to work not to evoke or commemorate the past but rather to forget it. But then one arrives at the bridge itself.

Named for a man who was not only a Confederate general but also a Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan, the Edmund Pettus Bridge seems an unlikely monument to the Voting Rights Movement. Built in 1940, it is an inelegant structure that consists of a concrete roadway set on a series of masonry abutments and framed by a steel arch; before 1965, it was simply a piece of infrastructure carrying both Black and white traffic in and out of the city. But what it lacked in grace was more than compensated for by its metaphorical power as a bridge between the "unseen" part of Selma, where hundreds of Blacks had congregated on March 7, and the space of public appearance. Even though the participants in that first march made it no further than to the other side of the river,

their clash with state troopers at once laid bare the state's machinery of control and made them undeniably visible, both in Selma and to the nation. The necessity of repeating the march onto the bridge twice more in the same month became another parable: the struggle for equal rights is never over, and therefore it must be re-enacted again and again.

Over the past fifty-six years the symbolic power of the Pettus Bridge has only increased. This is because the bridge both serves as a witness to the sacrifices of the past while also offering a powerful ritual through which visitors can honor the victories that followed. As the official beginning of the Selma to Montgomery Historic Trail, the Pettus Bridge now draws pilgrims from across the nation and around the world to retrace that journey. Thousands of others gather annually in early March for the Bridge Crossing Jubilee to walk from Selma to the site of the Bloody Sunday attack. Both President Clinton and President Obama have walked across the bridge; Viola Liuzzo's daughter has taken part in the Jubilee celebrations; and John Lewis's coffin was carried over the bridge in a horse-drawn carriage before his burial, as Alabama state troopers stood at attention. These annual crossings enable visitors to at once reimagine, reanimate, and celebrate the events of 1965.

And so the Edmund Pettus Bridge still sits in plain sight, having entirely subverted the racism of its namesake. Instead, it has become the most tangible monument to the Voting Rights Movement, marking one time when the "invisible"

narratives of Black history embedded in the Selma cityscape were suddenly exposed to the world. Its story is all the more urgent this year, when the demands of Black men and women for equal justice under the law are being met with increased violence, and new barriers to voting and equity are being erected across the United States. For it is in this place that Selma's Black citizens risked their lives to claim political visibility and, in so doing, crossed over into history.

– Craig Barton



Civil rights marchers at the foot of the Edmund Pettus Bridge on Bloody Sunday. Photograph by Spider Martin, *Birmingham News*.

## Frozen in Time: Virginia Highway 64

I've always seen the section of Interstate 64 that runs from the end of the Virginia Peninsula to the Blue Ridge Mountains as a timeline. I think of the green-and-white exit signs as time machines, portals to past decades and past centuries. The vista at exit 123 at the eastern edge of Charlottesville, reached after an hour's gradual climb from Richmond, tempers the traveler's velocity. Spectacular views of the Blue Ridge Mountains open before you, and Thomas Jefferson's plantation, Monticello, appears on the left as the road crosses over the Rivanna River. It's here that you begin to understand this end of the Piedmont: it is the entrance to the blue-black purple slopes of the Blue Ridge. Time slows down as you catch yourself in awe of their beauty. As I look west, I find myself thinking of the human settlement of this area over the eons; of everyone catching their breath, pausing in that same westward stare.

Heading eastward on 64's timeline, signs of the past recede as the speed limit rises. The road traverses the Piedmont, crossing the fall line – where the uplands meet the coastal plain – as well as the Upper James River. At length it arrives in the state capital, Richmond, once the capital of the Confederacy. However, a reference to the earlier history of the region emerges as you pass the capital and enter the Atlantic coastal plain. Road signs for exit 247 announce the Virginia Company of England's settlement at Jamestown, established 414 years ago. Then history recedes again until the end of the Virginia Peninsula, where exit 286 takes us back 402 years to Old Point Comfort, the place where Virginia's first enslaved people arrived on the White Lion. A historical plaque marks where the 160-ton English privateer landed with twenty captives seized from the Kingdom of Ndongo in Angola: the first enslaved Africans to arrive in the English colonies.

One of the classes I have taught at the University of Virginia is a seminar that included a project examining Richmond's Monument Avenue through the lenses of race, culture, and architecture. The avenue, which runs north-south, was a 5.4-mile, tree-lined civic effort designed to drive up real estate values while intimidating and excluding the city's Black residents. The effort began with the installation

of the Robert E. Lee statue in 1890 and was followed by the addition of Confederate statues of J. E. B. Stuart, Jefferson Davis, Thomas Jonathan "Stonewall" Jackson, and Matthew Fontaine Maury. In the fall of 2019 my students and I went on a field trip to Richmond and walked some of the avenue together; its scale was overwhelming.

Afterwards, I shared with them a photo taken just before the scaffolding had been removed from the statue of Lee in 1890. The photo shows his massive head above several rows of white men (one with a baby on his lap) and a handful of Black men along the bottom. I also shared with them the words of John Mitchell, a Black Richmond council member during Reconstruction and the editor of the *Richmond Planet*. Mitchell observed, "He the African American put up the Lee Monument, and should the time come, will be there to take it down."

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2

I think about maps and monuments a great deal: what is accentuated, what is erased. Alongside my teaching, I run a design practice, developing empathy-driven responses to the landscape. In 2019 I was asked by the Albemarle County Office of Equity and Diversity and invested community stakeholders to site a memorial for John Henry James that was to be given to the community by Montgomery's National Memorial for Peace and Justice and the Equal Justice Initiative.

In July 1898 a white woman named Julia Hotopp accused an African American ice cream salesman named John Henry James of assault. James was first held in the Charlottesville's jail at Court Square, but then removed to Staunton to protect him from local residents and UVA students determined to lynch him. The following day the police chief and county



Overlay of Highway 64 on John Smith's 1624 map of Virginia.  
Courtesy of Library of Congress and Asyanti Karma.

sheriff accompanied James on the train back to Charlottesville, where he was to stand trial. About four miles west of town at Farmington Plantation, a white man dressed as a woman stood on the train tracks at Wood's Crossing. The man was part of a mob of 150 white men, unmasked and armed with pistols. They stopped the train and stormed aboard, seizing James. There was a tense standoff with a group of Black men who had rushed to the site, but they were overpowered. Unmoved by James's declarations of innocence, the mob hanged him from a honey locust tree and shot him seventy-five times; pieces of his clothing and body were taken as souvenirs. I can find no record of what happened to his corpse.

The James Memorial will sit in Court Square, Charlottesville's center of white power and authority. I was asked to provide designs for siting two elements: a historical marker detailing James's lynching and a six-foot Cor-Ten body-sized column – both supplied by the National Memorial for Peace and Justice. After walking the square many times, I decided to place both elements at its southeast edge, because, when I stood there in my Black body, several elements of Charlottesville's past reverberated in me with unusual intensity. These feelings shaped my guidelines for the site. The six-foot body column will stand upright, so that the visitor will be confronted with a coffin-like form. The axis runs from the visitor through the center of the column toward Monticello in the distance, with the Number Nothing Building (once a mercantile store) in the foreground. Outside of this building enslaved people and goods were regularly auctioned before 1865.

The body column will be placed between two large pin oak trees already growing in the square, with an informational panel on James just to the left; refrains of Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit" waft through the air. If you had turned around in this spot when I chose it, you would have found yourself in the crosshairs of a Confederate soldier (the At Ready statue) and the Stonewall Jackson statue in the distance, all while standing before the steps of the Court House. I wanted all who visited to question the forces surrounding this murdered man – as well as themselves, one another, and the design of this public space and its natural relationships. The arrangement is meant to tap into your emotional core.

Projects like Court Square are what I live for. Designing with empathy – what I call \_mpathic design (the blank

space suggests the removal of one's ego) – is at the heart of my design practice. It recognizes that people are seen and acknowledged – or not – in particular spaces, through layers of identity, culture, history, and memory. It affirms that our layered emotional responses to places are both valid and complex, and that in the built environment form, symbol, material, and scale all play a role – ideally, one that culminates in deeper relationships with nature and the landscape. \_mpathic design says, We are here, and equally, We see you.

### 3

Spring in 2020 coincides with the onset of the pandemic; the impossibility for so many to "shelter in place" lays bare the system's inequities. Everyone around me feels unease, confusion, and fear – about both the present and the future. As the *New York Times* culture writer Jenna Wortham notes, I now have white friends voicing the emotions I experience daily. Texts and calls keep coming in. Is this a new opportunity to practice empathy, in the quiet and increasingly isolated interiors of our homes, rooms, and minds? We turn on our digital windows to escape; it's worked in the past. It doesn't now. We find that we can't run away from reality: its injustices are too exposed, too raw. When I attempt to do so, I am confronted by my own Black reflection in the black mirror of the screen staring back at me, so uncomfortable with my relative comfort.

A student designing her thesis on the plantation landscape of Charlottesville shows me a map she's made that overlays the familiar street grid with the boundaries of the local plantations that predated it. I ask for a copy and note that the date on the original map is the same year that the Robert E. Lee statue was installed on Richmond's Monument Avenue. I decide to explore this landscape, starting with my own neighborhood, which is known as The Farm. It feels like the most beautiful spring I've ever seen, even though it is difficult to enjoy it. Perhaps because this year we are paying full attention to the emerging shades of green, the warming breezes, and the cherry trees flowering against the blue-black purple of the Blue Ridge.

### 4

Then on May 25, 2020, time stops – for eight minutes and forty-six seconds. I feel paralyzed, frozen in place. I watch images of protesters gathering at Lee Circle in Richmond, beneath the equestrian statue of Robert E. Lee. I remember Mitchell's words and wonder: has the time finally come?

### 5

In the days after the murder of George Floyd, I am lost. I decide to find places to explore, to reconnect to the earth, to this place, in order to understand this time. Many of my colleagues head off to the Blue Ridge to hike quiet trails, an experience I've never felt fully comfortable enjoying solo in my Black male body. I want to find spaces here in town, close, where I will feel relatively "safe" – whatever that means. When I pull out my student's map, my eyes are drawn to Monticello in its lower right corner. In Charlottesville, Monticello dominates the landscape; we still move about under Jefferson's panoptical eye. Should I begin my explorations there?

I first visited Monticello in 1990 while a student at UVA's School of Architecture. After the guide made reference to the household's "servant" life, I barraged her with questions about the living conditions for the enslaved until she turned a shade of red that matched the house's brick. Now I am back in Charlottesville, teaching at the same school that I attended over thirty years ago, and I still cannot pass Jefferson's estate without wondering what it was like for the Blacks who lived there. Perhaps this is not the day to visit, I think to myself.

A few days later I pull up the map again, tracing the course of the Rivanna, remembering Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*, in which he described his excavation of a Native burial mound; today, however, the site is unknown. I am reminded again of what is honored, what is disrupted, and what is lost. My attention is caught by the great swath of Pen Park, the largest park in Charlottesville, and off I go.

After arriving at Pen Park and parking between tennis courts, next to the golf course, I walk toward a flat plateau, a familiar feature in this region of former plantations. I am reminded of Black hands flattening the land at Jefferson's Academical Village and, earlier, at Monticello. I've come to realize that wherever land is flattened around here, it was likely flattened by Black hands. The plateau, now occupied by the golf course's clubhouse, aligns perfectly behind the two old stone pillars that are original to the former plantation. Just behind the clubhouse is a spectacular view of Thomas Jefferson's inherited acres. To the right I can see Montalto, the mountain Jefferson purchased in 1777 from Edward Carter, which Carter had been given by King George II. I notice that a ha-ha, presumably made centuries ago, now protects the

golf course: cows can't get up here. The traffic on Interstate 64 rumbles in the distance. Is this the back end of the Locust Grove plantation? I try to remember the map. Turning right, I gaze toward the city and pause, as always, at the familiar sight of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

For weeks I explore the COVID-19-closed golf course, imagining it as open land and agricultural fields. Now it has become a nature preserve, its deer joyful in our absence as they graze among the sand traps. One day I ask a colleague and friend, an architectural historian, to walk along with me; she explains that this was once the Gilmer Plantation. The name of Dr. George Gilmer, Thomas Jefferson's friend and physician, is known by many here, and the Gilmers lived at Pen Park from 1782 to 1812. Later I learn that their holdings stretched across four thousand acres, including land worked by the enslaved. After another walk, I discover that this land was occupied by the Craven family from 1819 until the mid-nineteenth century and then by the Hotopp family from 1866 until the early years of the twentieth century.

There is a cemetery to the west of the house, in the middle of the golf course. I've found on similar plantations that there is often a stone-walled cemetery – constructed, of course, by the enslaved – where the original white owners and their descendants are buried. And I've learned to look for the unmarked graves of their enslaved workers and servants just outside the boundaries, where square and rectangular depressions are often all that remain to suggest their presence. This is the case here; I later confirm that the depressions are unmarked graves of the enslaved, with a view of Monticello in the distance.

But it is the sight of the name Hotopp on a large obelisk that stops me in my tracks. The year before, I had spent many hours thinking about John Henry James's life and death, but here, walking the Gilmer plantation, I have stumbled upon the missing piece of the story: the spot where, 121 years ago, the alleged assault "happened."

Walking back past the golf house, I think of other Black men moving through their lives and days and surroundings who found themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time. Jogging or walking through their neighborhood; heading back from the store. Aubrey, Floyd, Rice. As I pass the pro

shop, I catch my six-foot, Black reflection in the glass window against the display of striped golfing shirts, the blue-black purples of the Piedmont behind me. Exploring these landscapes in my Black male body, dressed in all black from head to toe, is a tool. Each step is part of my method to discover the layers of our past, where they remain frozen in time.

## 6

It's June when it suddenly happens – a Confederate statue glorifying the Lost Cause along Monument Avenue is pulled down. The news is huge, but I have a hard time absorbing it as I continue my walks through Pen Park. Weeks pass, more statues fall. Why am I not going to see for myself? Do I doubt the images in the digital windows; the dreams coming true after all this time? Am I afraid of those who are dreaming differently?

Perhaps it is because white protesters displayed Confederate flags at the dedication of the avenue's Arthur Ashe statue on July 10, 1996, on what would have been Ashe's fifty-third birthday. The statue, which is cast in bronze, shows Ashe, a native son of Richmond, holding a book in one hand and a tennis racket in the other, surrounded by children. The hostility toward this seemingly benign representation is ongoing. In the course I taught, my students and I discovered that a Ku Klux Klan group based in northwest Virginia had left leaflets filled with racial epithets at houses near the statue several months after its unveiling. We also learned that former Klan leader David Duke had staged a press conference at the statue. "We have to put up with Arthur Ashe, a sports star, on an avenue of heroes of the Confederacy," he said. "But they can't put up with a mural of Robert E. Lee. I can't understand that."

Of course, my own town is hardly exempt from the hatred monuments can stir up. When Charlottesville decided to remove its statue of Robert E. Lee in 2017, racists and neo-Nazis converged from all over the country to protest the disrespect being shown to this symbol of white supremacy. Whenever I walk by my former apartment, I remember what that week in town felt like. Coming home from the gym that Thursday, I passed four men wearing the new Nazi fashion style; the threat was palpable. Spooked, I crossed the street. Later that weekend, half a block from where I'd seen the Nazis, James Fields Jr. drove into a group of nonviolent protesters, killing Heather Heyer and injuring more than

thirty others. A block north, DeAndre Harris was viciously beaten by white supremacists, yards from where I used to park my car.

Enough, I tell myself. I'm going to Richmond.

## 7

On the day of my departure, I realize that I have been preparing for this trip without admitting it to myself, servicing the car and replacing two tires in order to ensure that I arrive safely. It's Monday, July 6. I stop for gas on the familiar climb from town on Richmond Road, which runs parallel to Interstate 64. Both roads at times align and overlap with Three Notch'd Road, a Native route leading from Richmond. Its name comes from a symbol – three notches cut into trees – used at intervals to mark the trail. I pull into a gas station on this trail, now called U. S. Route 250. Heading east, I recall that John Henry James was lynched on 250, on the other side of town – about the same distance from the city as I am now. Today the site lies just outside the Farmington Country Club.

After catching myself staring toward the blue-black mountains while my tank fills, I notice that I am being stared at by a frowning woman at another pump. It is an intense, laser-focused stare. I decide to refrain from glancing at her bumper sticker. As I put the pump back in place, I hear "The Talk" run through my mind – the set of life-saving social rules taught by Black parents to their children to help them navigate the landscapes of America. No eye contact, no hurrying, no sudden movements. With careful control, I slide back in the car, placing my wallet in the dashboard bucket. The bucket is what sold me on the model; I don't have to reach for my wallet and registration if I get stopped by the police while shifting through time on 64. As I pull slowly out of the station, a truck barrels in; as it passes, I notice its bumper sticker: Stand for the Flag, Kneel for the Cross.

I get back on 64 just before the Shadwell plantation, where Thomas Jefferson was born. Accelerating up the ramp, I think back to John Smith's 1612 map of Virginia, which was used not only by the Virginia Company but also by the colonists themselves for more than a century. I can still visualize the drawing of a longhouse in its upper left corner and the name Monasukapanough nearby as my car glides between

the letters A and C in the region of the map Smith labelled MONACANS. But as 64 straightens, there is no hint of Mafs-macack or Mowhemcho, two of the almost 230 indigenous towns he carefully charted among these hills. Ten miles outside of Charlottesville, I prepare myself for another familiar ordeal: somewhere near the curled flourish of Smith's pen, a massive Confederate flag welcomes me to Louisa County. The red reflects through the windshield onto my wallet and registration.

Pines, maples, oak, and tulip trees hug 64's timeline. Halfway to my destination, as I maneuver around fellow time travelers (enclosed in slow-moving trucks and in cars with stickers proclaiming support for guns and presidential candidates), the texture of the map starts to fade away. Instead, pictures of Richmond begin to reappear in my mind's eye: the bronze Stonewall Jackson being lifted from its base; the toppled Jefferson Davis. My anticipation is building for this walk. But as 64 begins to merge with Interstate 95, different images haunt me: pictures of Marcus David Peters, a Black high-school biology teacher who crashed his car in the midst of a psychotic episode and ran out onto the highway. Peters was tased multiple times and then fatally shot by the police, despite being naked and unarmed. I-95, the great Eastern Seaboard connector, has always made me think of the Great Migration, the movement of African Americans from the South to the North. Now it makes me think of Marcus David Peters as well.

At exit 73 the sign appears for Arthur Ashe Boulevard – renamed last year to bolster the lone Black statue on Monument Avenue, which stands at the intersection of Monument and Roseneath Road. I exit the highway and start heading south, the view of the city becoming more expansive on the left. At Broad Street I reach an expected stoplight where Andrew Jackson used to be. As I drive closer, I see it's true: it's gone. I pass the spot, make a U-turn, and find a parking space. It's super quiet, this sixth day of July, 2020, and time to walk.



## 8

I begin on the southeast corner of the intersection of Ashe and Monument Avenue, where I take a picture of the empty base. As I lower my phone, a white man in a car stops at the light and gives me a thumbs-up sign. Then I walk east, down the tree-lined avenue, and the layers start compressing inside me: the Three Notch'd Road, the John Smith map, the interstate exits, the pandemic walks in Charlottesville – all meld

**Jefferson Davis Monument (with Jefferson Davis removed), summer 2020, photograph by Elgin Cleckley.**

together. Between neoclassical columns, Black Lives Matter signs stand out in the windows of homes.

A white couple passes me as I get closer to the Jefferson Davis statue, intentionally making eye contact and saying hi. I remember this happening consistently in Charlottesville after the events of 2017, this effort on the part of some white people to reinhabit, coinhabit, the same spaces differently; to acknowledge the shared and scarred landscape. Just as I cross, a car honks and a Black man waves – as such men have done in Virginia throughout my lifetime.

The day's heat is building. I immediately notice that Vindicatrix, the symbol of white Southern womanhood, still stands atop her pillar and that the base of the pillar is still flanked by the curved exedra; its thirteen columns represent the eleven states of the Confederacy and the two additional states, Kentucky and Missouri, that sent delegates to the Confederate Congress. But the statue of Davis himself, president of the Confederate states from 1861 to 1865, is gone. And here is where it starts, the rainbow of color and words of racial reckoning – evidence of the social-justice movement that is defining our time.

When Edward Valentine's statue of Jefferson Davis was unveiled in 1907, forty-two years after the Civil War had ended, the mythology of the Lost Cause was so potent that two hundred thousand people attended the ceremony. As I read Davis's words, incised across the top of the exedra – "The high and solemn motive of defending and protecting the rights we inherited" – I think again of the African Americans who were forced to help erect these statues. In this instance, John Mitchell's prophecy has finally been fulfilled over a century after he made it: the time came, and the African American – along with those of other races – was there to take it down.

Anticipation builds as I turn back toward downtown. Then the Lee statue appears, still there, but utterly transfigured by a tide of color. Words and images applied in paint, chalk, and markers cover every inch of its base. As I wait for the traffic light to change, it feels as if all my walking, the uncovering of layers at these two points in the Piedmont, Charlottesville and Richmond, has built up to this moment. Reaction, reflection, revolution – all the layers have dissolved into this space in front of me. Both on and behind the vibrantly painted concrete barriers that edge Lee Circle, the names of Black lives reverberate to the hum of passing cars. As I wait to

cross, a white man waves at me, and now, no longer hesitant, I wave back.

At the entrance to Lee Circle there is a new sign, with flowers planted around it. The script used for its message, Welcome to Beautiful, reminds me of the John Smith map. Below the greeting, Marcus David Peters Circle is written in all capital letters, and to the left of the welcome message is an image of the base of the Lee statue with a Black fist where Lee's name was once visible. Lee Circle has been "liberated by the people": this is what it says on the sign. Time has unfrozen.

Beyond the sign, vibrantly colored calls for justice layer the statue's base, which is now ringed with laminated cards and flowers telling the stories of Black lives lost in interactions with police. Centered on an axis that runs parallel to Three Notch'd Road, Interstate 64, and Richmond Road, there are larger panels and photographs detailing the murder of Marcus David Peters, the park's namesake. And outside the circle? People of all colors are having picnics, playing basketball, and gathering for a barbecue at the east end. People have died for these vanquished monuments, but now different stories are being told, and I am excited to see what this reclaimed space will become. From an \_mpathic design perspective, the elements that will be integral to that future space are all already here, created by the community. I walk the circle, reflecting, envisioning, recalibrating.

When I leave Marcus David Peters Circle, I cross the intersection, but instead of taking the sidewalk, I head directly down the avenue's green median. I walk between the trees, right on the axis that points back to Charlottesville. Gratitude and joy are propelling me forward, directing me west – back to the Piedmont. I am reanimated, open to the energy that has been here in this land and has been recalibrated in Marcus David Peters Circle. While walking amid the hum of passing cars and stridulation of locusts, I realize that this new place, this new circle of love and \_mpathic design, will provide the fuel that I need as we move forward – reevaluating our monuments, erecting new ones, and redefining our places among them. I hardly remember the drive back. Floating through layers, I head west once more, charged to do the work, to continue the walks, to look for answers in the blue-black purples.

– Elgin Cleckley

### Riverton: "An Oasis in Harlem"

In 1960, the 35-year-old writer James Baldwin returned to Harlem to discover that a housing project had replaced his childhood home. The grocery store that once gave his family credit was still there, but Fifth Avenue seemed "filthy, hostile." In Baldwin's homecoming, which he recounted in "Fifth Avenue, Uptown," an essay published in *Esquire*, much was worthy of censure: the young men who watched television instead of working; the older men who did work, struggling to maintain a sense of dignity in the "white man's world." To Baldwin, the neighborhood's housing projects were the most blatant offense of all, revealing, in their bleak monstrosity, the continued oppression of Black people by the white ruling elite.

For Baldwin, there was one housing development in particular that best represented the subjugation of Black Harlemites: Riverton. Located on a plot of land from 135th to 138th Streets, bounded by Fifth Avenue and the Harlem River, Riverton was built by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company and opened in 1947. Riverton was created, Baldwin wrote, "because at that time Negroes were not allowed to live in Stuyvesant Town," Metropolitan Life's massive housing development on 14th Street, which was restricted to white tenants. According to Baldwin, Harlem hated Riverton "with the most violent bitterness . . . They began hating it at about the time people began moving out of their condemned houses to make room for this additional proof of how thoroughly the white world despised them. And they had scarcely moved in, naturally, before they began smashing windows, defacing walls, urinating in the elevators, and fornicating in the playgrounds."

In his essay, Baldwin denounced police brutality, the indifference of white northerners to racial discrimination, and Harlem's slum conditions. But it was his direct attack on Riverton that hurled him into a firestorm of controversy. Letters defending Riverton flooded *Esquire*'s offices. Riverton was "a showplace of cleanliness and decent middle-class living," Richard B. Cardwell, a Riverton resident, shot back in one such letter. "No one has defaced the walls, smashed any windows, or urinated in our elevators. The playground is supervised during the day and locked at night." In a letter to the Harlem newspaper *New York Amsterdam News*, Richard P. Jones, the chairman of the Riverton Tenants Association, took "sharp umbrage" at Baldwin's "grossly inaccurate and horrendous report of life in Harlem." Riverton residents, he wrote, were "orderly, decent, articulate and wholesome individuals." The *Amsterdam News*, which condemned Baldwin's essay, even took issue with the accompanying photographs – sin-

ister shots of storefronts and sad-eyed children – apparently intended to highlight "the most weird side of Harlem which Mr. Baldwin's photographer was able to find." Many of the readers felt that Baldwin had used Riverton as an ideological prop in an essay crafted for a white audience. Clifford Alexander Sr., the complex's resident manager, was particularly offended that Baldwin, a Black writer born in the neighborhood, had revealed himself to be just another one of the "self-styled experts [who] pose as authorities on Harlem and then exhibit their ignorance."

To Eugene Callender, an assistant minister and Riverton resident, Baldwin's essay was the "deeply moving expression of a bitter, angry man." Yet, Callender argued, Baldwin had fundamentally misunderstood that the neighborhood was changing for the better. "It is the white segregation policy which is responsible for the horrible housing conditions that exist in many parts of our community," he wrote. "But I want to live here." Harlem residents were committed to their block associations, churches, schools, and homes. And Riverton, Callender asserted, was one of the best-maintained pieces of real estate in Manhattan. What's more, both Riverton and Stuyvesant Town were now legally integrated: the City Council's Brown-Isaacs legislation, passed in 1951, had barred discrimination in all publicly assisted private housing. "We want to be free to choose to live or not to live in Harlem, but more important we want our [Caucasian] brothers and sisters to come live with us," Callender wrote. "That's why we are proud of the Riverton and other excellent middle-class housing now on Upper Fifth Avenue."

Baldwin and Callender painted two vastly different portraits of the same few blocks. In one, residents lived in chaotic squalor; in the other, hard-working people did all they could to enhance their homes and neighborhood. Baldwin saw Riverton's origins as defining and damning; the result was a symbol of white supremacy, albeit one concealed behind a façade of corporate benevolence. For Callender, however, Riverton's contested beginnings did not determine its identity. From Riverton's scarred past, residents had built an impressive, close-knit community, operated by and for Black people.

### Riverton's Origins

In the historiography of postwar New York City, Riverton exists as a footnote to its downtown counterpart. For many of the city's historians, Stuyvesant Town stands as a critical case study for understanding the complex intersection of race

and housing in the mid-twentieth century. The project was unprecedented in its scope – eighteen blocks of “slums” in the Gas House District on the East Side of Manhattan were to be demolished – and the design plan was considered visionary in its reimaging of the urban landscape. Influenced by Le Corbusier’s “towers in the park” paradigm, the developers would replace tenements, factories, stores, and small businesses with playgrounds, lawns, and 8,755 modern apartments housing twenty-four thousand people. During a period of acute housing scarcity, Stuyvesant Town promised a secure middle-class lifestyle to returning veterans – but only to those who were white. On May 20, 1943, just before the Board of Estimate voted to approve the project, Metropolitan Life’s chairman of the board, Frederick Ecker, told a reporter, “Negroes and whites don’t mix. Perhaps they will in a hundred years, but they don’t now.”

Metropolitan Life sorely underestimated the intensity of the backlash that would arise in response to its decision to bar Black tenants. Two million of Metropolitan Life’s policy-holders were Black, and many Black veterans had fought for the cause of democracy abroad, only to find themselves barred from the rewards of that service at home. To make matters worse, the City of New York had implicitly sanctioned the practice by having made the land available to Metropolitan Life in the first place. Planning Commissioner Robert Moses, in order to attract private funding in his ongoing campaign of “slum removal,” had even persuaded the city to grant Metropolitan Life large tax exemptions for the project.

“Those of us who have been proud of our City as being in the vanguard in the struggle for the protection and extension of the rights of the minorities . . . are meeting with dismay the likelihood of the erection of Stuyvesant Town as a ‘closed’ city,” Clara L. Hay of Brooklyn wrote to Mayor Fiorello La Guardia. “To fight for democratic rights all over the world and to plan for [their] curtailment in a post-war world seems incongruous.” Multiple lawsuits challenged Stuyvesant Town’s whites-only policy, and an extensive grassroots integration campaign emerged. The following year, City Councilmen Benjamin Davis and Stanley Isaacs cosponsored a successful bill that barred discrimination in future public-private housing projects, but it could not be applied to Stuyvesant Town retroactively.

Now, as Metropolitan Life navigated legal and political pressures over Stuyvesant Town, Moses wrote to Ecker, floating the idea of building a Metropolitan Life development in Harlem. (Moses was significantly downplaying his interest in the potential project; two weeks earlier he had begun researching possible sites.) Ecker replied that he was wary

of in any way suggesting that “private capital” was required “to match each White project with a Colored project.” Moses persisted, however, arguing that it might quell the controversy surrounding Stuyvesant Town and adding, “This is not at all on the assumption that there must be matched white and colored projects but on the much sounder theory that the colored areas are entitled at least to an experiment in this direction.”

By the spring Mayor La Guardia had joined the campaign to persuade Ecker. In an April 5 letter, after commending the chairman for building Stuyvesant Town “in the face of considerable risk and some public misunderstanding,” he went on to underscore the importance of private revenue sources in attempts to rebuild the city’s slums: “We are particularly anxious to have a private project started under the Redevelopment Companies Law in West Harlem where housing conditions are particularly bad.” The targeted socioeconomic bracket, he wrote, would be people “just above” eligibility in public projects. “I cannot over-emphasize the importance of such a project and the great benefits which would accrue to the City of New York as well as to your Company,” he finished. By June Metropolitan Life had begun negotiations for a plot of land uptown.

In Harlem reactions to the Riverton plan were contentious. On the one hand the

neighborhood sorely needed housing. Overcrowding and excessively high rents were common, and substandard conditions prevailed: in the 1920s three-quarters of Harlem’s buildings had been built before 1900. According to a 1942 report issued by the City-Wide Citizens’ Committee on Harlem (CWCCCH), “There is one single block in Harlem in which 3,871 people live” – a density comparable to the nation’s entire population contained within an area half the size of New York City. On the other hand, Metropolitan Life’s discriminatory practices at Stuyvesant Town made Riverton seem morally dubious. Many believed that the second project should be opposed until the first was desegregated.

In the autumn of 1944 Harlem politicians, clergymen, and leaders of city organizations gathered at the Ethical Culture Society on the Upper West Side to discuss Riverton. The chief point of contention at the meeting was whether Riverton should be protested on principle or championed for bringing high-quality housing to the area. Would accepting Metropolitan Life’s project for Harlem mean settling for housing that further entrenched segregation?

“The people in Harlem need housing,” a representative of the United Tenants League of Greater New York told the group. Under the Davis-Isaacs law, the city’s new antidiscrimination measure, Riverton would be legally integrated, which might help spur integration at Stuyvesant Town. Another speaker warned that if Harlem turned down this opportunity it would lose public sympathy. But the

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) took a much harder stance: “As long as the Metropolitan maintains a closed-door policy to Negroes in its proposed Stuyvesant Town . . . , the Riverton project becomes a segregated, Jim-Crow housing project and establishes a precedent that will not only keep the Negro walled in but will delay his fight to live in the community of his choice as a citizen.”

City Councilman Benjamin Davis, who represented Harlem, contended that one



or two developments would not decide the issue of housing discrimination in New York City. He maintained that the very fact that Riverton would be built under the new antidiscrimination law was itself a victory. Attempting to balance housing needs and principles of racial equality, many at the meeting argued that the greatest priority was to ensure that Riverton became integrated. If Riverton was multiracial, it would set a significant precedent for the rest of the city.

Despite the controversy, the deal moved forward rapidly, and on November 18, 1944, Metropolitan Life and the City of New York signed a \$6 million contract. Scheduled to open after the war, Riverton would be a "great contribution to modern housing development," La Guardia announced at the signing. "Other insurance companies please take note."

### Breaking New Ground

The original Riverton site was filled with auto repair shops and tenements built mostly before 1900; it was also home to more than 130 families, who were rehoused when the site was cleared. In place of the current businesses and tenements would stand twelve 13-story buildings containing 1,232 apartments ready to accommodate three thousand five hundred people. In the main part of the development between Fifth and Madison Avenues, which would come to be known by residents as "Big Riverton," nine buildings would surround an interior playground. "Little Riverton," which consisted of the remaining three buildings, would sit across Madison Avenue, on a triangle of land bounded on the east by the Harlem River.

The development's basic structure was an extruded tower in the shape of a cross with a central stair-and-elevator core. Ten of the buildings were arranged in pairs that abutted one another to form a double tower. The apartments were uniform: a compact kitchen to the side of the front door, a square living room with a big window, a narrow corridor with one or two bedrooms, and a bathroom. Three-bedroom apartments, which were double the size of a standard apartment, were rare and would be highly coveted.

On July 28, 1947, Emmett O. Smith, a Black veteran and mailing clerk at *The New Republic*, crossed the threshold of 2225 Fifth Avenue, Riverton's first completed building. He had watched the towers rise over the past six months and submitted an application for an apartment along with twenty thousand other prospective tenants. He and his wife were now the first people to move in. According to the *New York Herald Tribune*, as Smith inspected "the immaculate parquet floors, tile bathroom, and the two bedrooms, he and his wife agreed . . . that the place was 'a dream.'"

Like Stuyvesant Town, Riverton was designed to create a "suburban atmosphere." The apartment buildings took up a quarter of the land; the rest contained lawns, playgrounds, and walking paths. "Congenial conditions in respect to sunlight and air such as exist now in outer sections of the greater city and other suburban neighborhoods have been provided in the new community," Metropolitan Life declared. Riverton was a block away from the subway and Harlem Hospital and close to schools, churches, grocery stores, and a public library.

Many of Riverton's first residents were Black veterans who had been granted preference by Metropolitan Life. Captain Matthew Faulkner, an Army chaplain who had served in North Africa and Germany during the Second World War, moved in on Riverton's first day along with his wife and their two children. Like Stuyvesant Town, Riverton had been given a twenty-five-year tax exemption by the city; unlike Stuyvesant Town, Riverton was subject to the 1944 Davis-Iсаacs law, which prohibited racial discrimination in the selection of tenants. However, as the *Times* reported, "The project is in the heart of Harlem and the vast majority of the 20,000 applicants were Negroes." Riverton was also not the only new development in the area. The Housing Authority's Abraham Lincoln Houses on the southern side of 135th Street were scheduled to open soon; together, the Abraham Lincoln Houses and Riverton would add eight thousand five hundred residents to the neighborhood.

The Wrights also moved into Riverton on its first day of occupancy. Bruce Wright had served in the 26th Infantry division and received two

Bronze Stars; now he was a law clerk studying at Fordham University Law School. The Wrights were married during the Second World War and Constance Wright had begun looking for a home while her husband was fighting abroad. Their son Keith later recalled, "First place she went to was Stuyvesant Town. And they said, 'No Blacks allowed.'" Interviewed by the *New York Herald Tribune* after moving into Riverton, Constance

Riverton design plan, undated.  
Photograph courtesy of Riverton  
Houses Collection.

Wright told the reporter that she and her husband had never had a real home of their own. The newspaper photograph accompanying the story captures her excitement. Standing in her new kitchen, next to a bright white oven, Constance Wright is wearing a plaid dress and a shy smile, tilting a metal pot toward the cameraman.

By September, Riverton's first completed building was fully occupied. The final building was finished the following March, and by April leases had been signed for all of Riverton's apartments. A promotional brochure published by Metropolitan Life boasted of the transformation of this little corner of Harlem, describing how, in the following weeks, "lawns, never seen before, became brightly green and hundreds of trees and shrubs, newly planted, burst into bloom. . . . Among the trees were Norway Maples, Maidenhair Trees, Sweet Gums, Oriental Planes, Pin Oaks and Hawthorns. Shrubs included Azaleas, Flowering Quince, Rose-mallow, Honeysuckle, Rhododendrons and Snowballs. Vines such as Climbing Hydrangeas and Wisteria were growing vigorously." Riverton's first spring had arrived.

### Cultivating Riverton

In the early 1950s, David N. Dinkins was an insurance salesman and recent graduate of Howard University from Trenton, New Jersey, living in Harlem with his wife, Joyce. The Dinkinses were thrilled when they secured a Riverton apartment. It became the home in which they raised their two children and lived for many years before moving to River

Terrace and then to Gracie Mansion when Dinkins became the first Black mayor of New York City. To Dinkins Riverton was "Stuyvesant Town North," since Stuyvesant Town was "one of those places where you didn't try because you couldn't get in." Yet he loved Riverton and praised it for being so expertly maintained while he lived there. "If two snowflakes hit the ground," he liked to say, "There were three people with shovels out."

The man responsible for the development's high standards was Clifford L. Alexander Sr. Born in Jamaica, Alexander immigrated to New York in 1918 and studied business administration at New York University. In 1928 he married Edith MacAlister and five years later, they had a son, Clifford Alexander Jr. The Alexanders were prominent figures in 1940s Harlem. He served as the business manager of the Harlem YMCA



for a decade; they both worked for the New York Urban League; and she eventually became executive director of the Mayor's Committee on Unity, the precursor to the city's Human Rights Commission. Both of them had spoken in favor of the development at that fraught community meeting in the autumn of 1944. Two years later, Clifford Alexander Sr. became Riverton's first resident manager.

In this capacity he selected the lucky few who were offered Riverton apartments and thus was the person most responsible for curating Riverton's community. An August 1947 *New York Amsterdam News* article, published soon after the first residents moved in, noted that many working-class people found it challenging to secure Riverton apartments: "Known numbers bankers and underworld characters are definitely out, and the only overall-clad workers around will be the maintenance employees working at Riverton." Some locals "seemed bitter" that the neighborhood had "suddenly gone 'high class.'"

In an interview he gave to the *New York Times* many years later, Alexander maintained that Riverton residents represented a range of socioeconomic backgrounds: "Some people we took in could barely meet the rent," he recalled. "But they were responsible, intelligent people with potential." He added that no one had been evicted for nonpayment of rent while he was in charge.

As well as selecting potential tenants, Alexander was responsible for overseeing the day-to-day operations of the development, managing a staff of roughly seventy-five employees. With extensive rules for tenants and a team of gardeners, maintenance men, and security guards, Riverton functioned like a district of its own. Alexander regularly reminded residents that it was crucial to maintain Riverton's "enviable position of 'second to none.'"

Within a few years of its opening, Riverton had established itself among Black New Yorkers as a vibrant and desirable enclave in a city with highly segregated and often substandard housing stock. The Wrights exemplified the upwardly mobile trajectory of many of its families. Bruce Wright, who arrived at Riverton in 1947 as a student at Fordham University Law School, became a New York State Supreme Court Justice; his wife Constance Wright became a public-school administrator. Another tenant, Edward Dudley Sr., was appointed ambassador to Liberia by President Harry S. Truman in 1949,

Clifford L. Alexander (front, right) and his staff in the center of Riverton, 1954. Photograph courtesy of *Our World*, Riverton Houses Collection.



becoming the first Black person to serve as a United States ambassador. He would go on to become Manhattan borough president and a justice on the New York State Supreme Court.

In 1954 *Our World*, a national illustrated magazine created for Black Americans, ran a six-page spread about Riverton, lauding it as "a Harlem showcase" and evidence of the emergence of a newly flourishing postwar Black middle class. In the summertime, *Our World* reported, adults and children square-danced; benches along the development's many paths were "favorite spots for 'visiting.'" The tenants included one of the city's six Black fire department lieutenants; the deputy police commissioner; and many lawyers, doctors, dentists, businessmen, and artists. Seventy-five percent of residents owned television sets and more than 60 percent owned cars. With a combined buying power of \$6 million to \$7 million a year, Riverton's residents boosted the local economy. If families left the complex, it was often because they had purchased homes of their own.

What would a model Black middle-class community look like? In a sense Riverton was an opportunity to answer that question, and Clifford Alexander took it seriously. In one mailer he admonished residents against littering, remarking, "It's rather amazing how a small imperfection can mar an otherwise perfect setting." His high standards extended to his staff as well: "According to Manager Alexander," *Our World* reported, "out-of-town visitors inspecting the Riverton's unique and intricate operations are impressed not only with its magnitude and how every small detail is covered, they are more amazed to learn that every key employee at the Riverton is a qualified Negro."

### Moving Up, Settling Down

"Success" was the mantra of Riverton. The renowned jazz pianist Billy Taylor lived at Riverton in the 1950s with his wife and children. "Our people believed that achievement was the most powerful form of resistance," he wrote in his memoir. Excellence could not "erase the color line" but it could "take you around the world and earn you the high regard of presidents, kings. . . . Excellence was the loophole, the enticing crack in an otherwise impenetrable racist wall." The philosophy that Taylor described – pursuit of excellence as a form of resistance to an oppressive system – was shared by many in the Riverton community.

Riverton was a wonderful place to raise a family. Keith Wright described his childhood as "absolutely idyllic," adding, "All

we had to do was be home before the streetlights came on." Mothers would sit in the center of the development with their baby carriages while kids played stickball in the streets: "First base was the tree, second base was the fire hydrant, third base was the Buick." He and the other children, Wright said, "just walked into each other's houses, and we really knew each other, loved each other."

Edward Dudley Jr., whose family lived in Riverton from the late 40s to the late 50s, agreed. "You went outside your house into one wonderful park, where the kids were friendly. It couldn't be a better place for kids – no drugs, crime, bullies." He remembers being allowed to run around in the interior playground without supervision. When it was time to come in, his grandmother, who lived with them, would lean out the window and call his name. "It was an oasis in Harlem," he recalled.

Dennis Neal, who also grew up in Riverton, told the *New York Times* in 1985 that there was "always someone looking out for you and giving you the five-cent lecture on success." Education was a top priority for many Riverton parents, and some of them managed to send their children to the city's elite private schools. Keith Wright's brother went on to become a judge like his father; Keith served as a member of the New York State Assembly for twenty-two years. Clifford Alexander Jr. was named chairman of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission by President Lyndon B. Johnson and then appointed Secretary of the Army by Jimmy Carter. He was the first Black American to hold this position. His daughter,

Elizabeth Alexander, became a prominent poet and academic, well known for the poem she delivered on the National Mall at President Barack Obama's 2009 inauguration.

Metropolitan Life had made an investment in Harlem that was a fraction of the cost of the project that they had developed for whites downtown. Ironically, however, the intimacy of Riverton was a factor in its success. "The numbers killed us," Stuyvesant Town's resident manager remarked in 1985, explaining that with thirty thousand residents, Stuyvesant Town could never create the kind of community that Riverton could with only three thousand five hundred residents. The development's small size contributed to its social cohesion and was one of the reasons that some residents who had grown up there later returned to Riverton to raise families of their own.

Even for adults, Riverton seemed to exist as a haven from the outside world, a refuge from the racially integrated professional environments in which many of them labored daily. James R. Foster, who lived at Riverton with his wife and two children in the late 1960s, was a thirty-one-year-old veteran who worked as a margin clerk for the investment broker Bear, Stearns & Co. "When you go out and work in a white world, you're put under a kind of pressure," Foster told the *New York Times* in 1968. "Consciously or unconsciously, you're reminded that you're a Negro. When I come home to Harlem, I know I can relax."

And yet Riverton, with its well-tended gardens, private security guards, and social cachet, was a refuge within a refuge: the utopian atmosphere that its residents enjoyed came at the expense of the exclusion of the rest of the neighborhood. Its grounds were off-limits to non-residents, and children from the Abraham Lincoln Houses across the street were not allowed in Riverton's playground.

William Leach and his wife, who moved into a two-bedroom Riverton apartment when the development opened, told the *Times* in 1968 that when they first arrived, there was friction between Riverton residents and poorer Harlemites, particularly in neighborhood stores. To Leach, a commercial artist, the tension reflected the contested politics of upward social mobility. "They did not know how hard we had to work," he said of his non-Riverton neighbors. "We had to fight like hell in order to learn – getting the kids through school, getting them the best education, and learning how to get the kids in college. We had to learn from scratch. Nobody helped us."

Even some of Riverton's residents found the middle-class mannerisms of the development's first generation off-putting

and ostracizing; the flexible eligibility requirements produced class tensions within the community as well as without. "When I first moved here, I found my neighbors to be very snooty, bougie," said Stephanie Tolbert, who arrived in Riverton in 1968 as a twenty-seven-year-old single mother. A clerical administrator at a nearby public library who sent her son to the local Catholic school, Tolbert recalled with disdain the chatter of parents around the playground about their beach homes and the private schools their children attended: "They were very Old Riverton. You didn't meet certain 'criteria.' Husbands went to work, housewives stayed home." Yet for her son, whose best friends lived in the same building, their housing arrangement was ideal; he "didn't grow up an only child." And Tolbert herself enjoyed living at Riverton enough that she stayed for more than half a century.

### The End of An Era

By the late 1960s Riverton's status as "the bastion of middle-class Harlem" was fully established. By then, Upper Fifth Avenue was scattered with middle-income developments similar to Riverton: Esplanade Gardens, Lenox Terrace, Riverbend, The Clayton, and others. "We began the metamorphosis of the area," Riverton's resident manager, Doris Haywood, told the *New York Times* in 1970. The neighborhood surrounding Riverton had many medical and dental offices. And although Harlem had the highest infant mortality rate in the city in 1969, no infants died in their first year in its "middle-income area."

But in 1972 Riverton's twenty-five-year tax abatement from the City of New York expired. The future of Harlem's most respectable development suddenly seemed uncertain. That year the Board of Estimate approved an agreement that would renew the abatement for another twenty-five years, but only if the property were converted to a tenant-owned cooperative. The proposal offered Riverton to its residents for \$15,345,000, or \$3,000 per room, with an average down payment of \$545 and the remainder mortgaged. If Riverton became tenant-owned, proponents of the conversion argued, it would represent "the largest single real estate conversion from rental to cooperative ever undertaken by Blacks in the country."

That summer, however, the proposal fell through. In the early 1970s, the crime rate was rising, municipal services were overwhelmed, and New York City was hurtling toward fiscal collapse. Rosa Guy, a Trinidadian writer who grew up in Harlem, wrote in 1972 that the neighborhood seemed "like a dying city": its buildings were crumbling, drug use proliferated, and residents who could were getting out. Only two hundred Riverton tenants (just over 16 percent) agreed to purchase their apartments, far below the 51 percent needed.

In rejecting the plan, Riverton lost its tax abatement and rents rose sharply. The *New York Amsterdam News* opined that Riverton residents had "lost a golden opportunity." Three years later Metropolitan Life sold Riverton to three real estate executives – Charles A. Vincent, a Black businessman, and two white partners – for more than \$10 million, and dreams of Black cooperative ownership evaporated.

The issue of cooperative ownership still divides Riverton tenants. Keith Wright, who was the chairman of the Riverton tenants' association for years, believes that walking away from homeownership was a mistake and wishes that he could have persuaded more of his neighbors to support it. For Stephanie Tolbert, the issue was simple: the plumbing wasn't good enough. "It's a lovely place, they keep it nice, but I'm not going to invest my money where the pipes are so bad," she said. Both Wright and Tolbert stayed on in their rent-stabilized apartments, however, and Clifford Alexander Sr. remained in his three-bedroom Riverton apartment at 2181 Madison Avenue until his death in 1989 at the age of ninety-one.

At the end of his denunciation of Riverton, Baldwin wrote, "A ghetto can be improved in one way only: out of existence." This fundamental conviction was at the crux of Riverton residents' disagreement with Baldwin. For them, choosing to live at Riverton was neither an endorsement of the Harlem "ghetto" nor a resigned acceptance of the city's pervasive racial discrimination. Instead, Riverton was part of the creation and negotiation of a personal – and in some cases, professional – politics of Black uplift and social mobility. Although many residents shared Baldwin's dream of a desegregated city, race was part of what bound Riverton's community together. Not only did its buildings provide high-quality housing within a racially restrictive market but also they facilitated a new era of Black middle-class political, economic, and social achievement. It was acknowledgment of this success that Baldwin had so harshly denied them. Although it emerged from patently racist origins, Riverton prevailed as a haven and endured as a home.

According to longtime residents, white tenants have only begun to arrive in significant numbers at Riverton over the past decade or so. Moreover, in Stephanie Tolbert's estimation, most Riverton residents are no longer young parents but single, childless, and working multiple jobs. "I had my first white next-door neighbors about three years ago," Tolbert recalled. "They were wonderful." But the "Old Riverton" of judges, doctors, and politicians no longer exists, she said: "We don't have that quality here anymore." – Eliza Fawcett

## Book Reviews

**Frederick Law Olmsted: Plans and Views of Communities and Private Estates, The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted, Supplemental Series, Volume 3**

Edited by Charles E. Beveridge, Lauren Meier, and Irene Mills

Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020

The publication of this final volume of *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted* completes a remarkable archival editing project that spanned five decades and produced ten volumes of documents and two oversize supplemental volumes of plans, drawings, and historical views. *Communities and Private Estates* is in itself a monumental achievement. The editors assembled unprecedented documentation and provided authoritative context for more than seventy design projects Olmsted and his collaborators undertook between the 1860s and 1890s, including planned communities, residences, campuses, and

institutional landscapes.

Together, the present volume and *Plans and Views of Public Parks* (the project's other oversize supplemental volume, published in 2015), constitute a comprehensive visual presentation of the work of one of the most prolific and significant artists of the nineteenth century. Taken as a whole, the twelve volumes of *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*

encompass the writing, ideas, and designs of our greatest landscape architect, who was also a major public intellectual engaged in the most

critical social and environmental issues of his day.

The Olmsted papers project should not draw to a close without an acknowledgement of how it began. Shortly after Olmsted's death in 1903, his son, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., began editing his father's descriptive, professional, and personal documents, which were kept at the family home and office that had been established in 1883 on

Warren Street in Brookline. A busy landscape architect like his father, in 1920 Olmsted Jr. wisely brought in a coeditor, Theodora Kimball, librarian of the Harvard School of Landscape Architecture and coauthor of *An Introduction to the Study of Landscape Design* (1917). Kimball was mainly responsible for bringing out the first volume of edited papers, covering Olmsted's life before 1857, in time for the centennial of his birth in 1922. The two editors continued to collaborate and in 1928 published *Forty Years of Landscape Architecture: Central Park*, the definitive history as related through Olmsted's documents and accounts. This first Olmsted papers project, however, ended there. Kimball died in 1935, and Olmsted's papers awaited a new generation of scholars.

Renewed attention came in the 1940s, when a biographer named Laura Wood Roper decided that Olmsted would be her next subject. After almost three decades of work, she published *FLO: A Biography of Frederick Law Olmsted* (1973), which remains the authoritative account of his life and achievements. Roper had complete access to the firm's archives, a portion of which she helped transfer to the Library of Congress

by 1950. Further transfers of textual records were made in the coming years. Most of the firm's plans and drawings were retained at the Brookline office, known as Fairsted (which became the Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site in 1980). Roper benefitted from the cooperation and friendship of Olmsted Jr. and other family members, all of whom shared their personal memories with her.

Roper was at the forefront of a generation of researchers who rekindled interest in Olmsted's life and work. In 1950 she met a young scholar named Charles C. McLaughlin and encouraged his interest in editing and publishing selections from the Olmsted papers. In 1956 McLaughlin began work on what would become *The Formative Years, 1822–1852* (1977), the first volume of *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*. In 1973, as the scope of what would clearly be a multivolume, extended documentation and editing project became clear, McLaughlin brought on an associate editor, Charles E. Beveridge, whose 1966 doctoral dissertation had been "Frederick Law Olm-

sted: The Formative Years, 1822–1865." Beveridge made substantial contributions to the first volume and then became the series editor, managing and coediting the remaining eleven volumes over the next forty-three years.

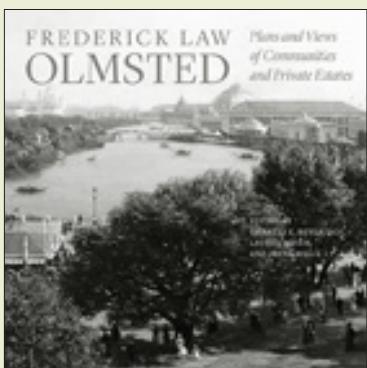
Beveridge was one of a generation of American historians who reclaimed Olmsted's legacy in the 1960s. Some, including Victoria Post Ranney, David Schuyler, Jane Turner Censer, and Carolyn F. Hoffman, would become associate editors for the Olmsted papers project. Other scholars produced their own single-volume selections of documents, notably Albert Fein in 1967 (*Landscape into Cityscape: Frederick Law Olmsted's Plans for a Greater New York City*) and S. B. Sutton in 1971 (*Civilizing American Cities: A Selection of Frederick Law Olmsted's Writings on City Landscape*).

The rediscovery of Olmsted's parks in particular generated research and publications that were intended to facilitate informed preservation efforts. A new awareness of the value of Olmsted's legacy was evident in 1966, when Mayor John V. Lindsay appointed Henry Hope Reed "curator" of Central Park. The next year, Reed and Sophia Duck-

worth published *Central Park: A History and a Guide*, enhancing a new appreciation of what many came to understand was the city's most significant work of art. In 1982 Cynthia Zaitzevsky published her comprehensive history of Olmsted's Boston park system, culminating ten years of intensive research that had begun in the archives at Fairsted.

Through the years the volumes of *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted* continued to appear. The selected documents – carefully transcribed, edited, and extensively annotated – provided solid documentary foundations for the many preservation efforts now under way in Olmsted landscapes. The second volume (1981) covered Olmsted's remarkable career as a journalist in the 1850s, traveling in the southern states and documenting and publishing on the abhorrent social and environmental conditions that he considered the direct results of slavery. The next volume, *Creating Central Park* (1983), was published just as the Central Park Conservancy was undertaking an unprecedented restoration of that landscape.

The conservancy had been founded in 1980 by



another Olmsted scholar, Elizabeth Barlow Rogers, who had published *Frederick Law Olmsted's New York* in 1972 and had been part of the growing public advocacy for the park. In 1979 Mayor Edward I. Koch appointed her administrator of Central Park, a new position that centralized the park's management. The following year, the Central Park Conservancy was formed as a nonprofit organization and began fundraising, organizing volunteers, and launching myriad restoration projects. Rogers recognized the need for a comprehensive plan and brought together a group of landscape architects and researchers to produce *Rebuilding Central Park: A Management and Restoration Plan* in 1985. Grounded in extensive scholarship – including that provided in the then-expanding library constituted by *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted* – the Conservancy's plan guided the park's rehabilitation project designs, renewed maintenance protocols, and agenda for fundraising, becoming a model for new public-private park groups seeking to replicate the Conservancy's success.

For those unfamiliar with the range of Olmsted's interests and activities, it comes as a surprise that only six of the ten textual volumes of his papers are directly concerned with

landscape architecture. Volumes 4 (1986) and 5 (1990) cover the years of the Civil War, when Olmsted served first as the executive director of the United States Sanitary Commission and then as the manager of the Mariposa mining estate in California. It was only in 1865 that he returned to New York and resumed his work with Calvert Vaux designing Prospect Park. The next five textual volumes of the Olmsted papers, published between 1992 and 2015, present documents relating to the hundreds of design projects, park reports, and publications that Olmsted was engaged with over the next thirty years until his withdrawal from active practice in 1895. These published papers have encouraged preservation programs by park advocates across the country and provided valuable research to guide them.

Few if any documentary editing projects have provided such directly useful information or been so widely used by the public. The twelve published volumes of Olmsted's papers are a major contribution to nineteenth-century American cultural and social history and a resource that historians and biographers have used extensively already. With the

appearance of the oversize supplemental volumes (numbered 2 and 3, because supplemental volume 1, published in 1997, is a collection of writings on parks), the Olmsted papers project is complete. Throughout the entire span of the series, Charles Beveridge has maintained the highest editorial standards for his own work as editor and for that of the changing cast of associate editors who have contributed their efforts to one or more volumes. For some of us, working with Beveridge was nothing short of a graduate education in documentary editing, in historical methodology, and, above all, in understanding the significance of not only Olmsted's landscapes but also his ideas, influence, and activism.

The published papers offer a means to access this intellectual legacy directly. Under Beveridge's leadership, thousands of documents, plans, and drawings have been made available in reliable form, with detailed annotations that provide the historical context necessary for a modern reader to understand references and allusions to contemporary people and projects, and so to appreciate more fully the meaning of what is written or drawn. But the sources are then left to speak for themselves: the papers reveal Olmsted's analyses, conclusions, and assertions,

not those of the editors. Similarly, many of the landscapes persist: these are the ultimate documents to be studied, interpreted, and restored. Anyone interested in Olmsted's life and work should begin by visiting the landscapes and reading the published papers.

None of this background should distract from the achievement of *Communities and Private Estates*. The range and number of projects in the book visually attest to the expansion and proliferation of Olmsted's practice of landscape architecture after 1865 and particularly in the 1880s after the move to Brookline. The division of work into categories illustrates both the breadth and the depth of the office's activity. Well-known examples of residential community design, such as Riverside and Druid Hills, are accompanied by over a dozen others in the same category, many of which will be far less familiar to most readers. While the documents that relate to the projects illustrated here were published in earlier (textual) volumes, the visual catalogue of each category of production proves invaluable for understanding and cross-referencing the entire body of work. The residential designs of Biltmore, Moraine Farm, and

Rough Point are relatively well-known also, but are accompanied by the plans of fifteen additional residences, creating entirely new opportunities for visual comparison and analysis.

In addition, many of the projects that have been the subjects of prior publications, such as the plans for New York's Twenty-Third and Twenty-Fourth Wards and the Capitol grounds in Washington, are more fully illustrated here than in any previous source. Complex projects that spanned many years, such as the campus of Stanford University, are demystified by a complete portfolio of the most relevant graphic documentation. When used in conjunction with the relevant textual volumes, *Communities and Private Estates* makes Olmsted's most significant town plans, residential and institutional grounds, arboreta, and other landscapes readily available to all with unprecedented completeness.

As with the previous supplemental volume of plans and views, the quality and format of the reproductions of plans, drawings, and photographs, drawn from dozens of repositories, are exceptional. Each project is presented with a short statement – essentially a long annotation – that provides concise, objective information for understanding the images, while subjective commentary is minimized.

The format and design of the folio assert the continued relevance and need for printed books. The Fairsteds' archives have made many of their plans and views available online in recent years, and the Library of Congress has done the same with its microfilmed collection of a large portion of the original manuscripts. These resources are welcome, but they do not attempt to replicate the years of contextual research, careful selection, documentation, and presentation evident in the final volumes of the Olmsted papers. *Communities and Private Estates* is a lavish illustration of what editorial care and practice can accomplish in making vast collections of archival material coherent and useful to historians, landscape architects, and the public generally.

Olmsted never wrote a single, comprehensive treatise on landscape architecture. His approach was always site-specific and contingent. He eschewed doctrine that would precede a thorough investigation and consultation of the site and preclude a design response rooted in the fabric and structure of a place. As Theodora Kimball wrote in 1922, his "habitual method" was "to envisage the peculiar facts of each situation"

and devise an equally individual response. "He looked on theories and 'principles' as valuable tools of service, [but] inevitably incomplete and defective" and in need of "reshaping, sharpening, and improvement" when applied to a specific design intervention.

The result, Kimball noted, was that Olmsted's published papers were necessarily a "somewhat disjointed compilation," with observations on his practice spread out among writings on hundreds of individual projects. She might have added "lengthy"; twelve volumes are quite a lot for most readers. Partly as a result, historians and landscape architects have constantly reinterpreted Olmsted's work, often with great insight, but sometimes with a less than thorough investigation of the texts that the designer himself, a compulsive correspondent and writer, left to explain his legacy. The volumes of his edited papers will allow for a new generation of scholarship grounded in his own opinions and theories as they related to his landscape-design projects. Beveridge's great legacy is to have assured that Olmsted's ideas, contextualized and annotated to allow today's reader to fully understand them, will persist – as do the landscapes themselves.

– Ethan Carr

**Traces of J. B. Jackson:  
The Man Who Taught Us to  
See Everyday America**  
**By Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz**  
Charlottesville, VA:  
University of Virginia Press,  
2020

Many *Site/Lines* readers owe an intellectual and personal debt to John Brinckerhoff Jackson – whether it was acquired by reading his superb essays, hearing his engaging lectures, sitting in on his classes, or becoming his friend. On my part, I had the pleasure of being a teaching assistant for Jackson's course on the American landscape at Harvard in the early 1970s. At the time it was one of the university's most popular classes. Following in Jackson's footsteps, I would go on to teach my own course on the contemporary American landscape, at the University of Oregon. But Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz's experiences with this great teacher were unique, and *Traces of J. B. Jackson: The Man Who Taught Us to See Everyday America* is the prod-

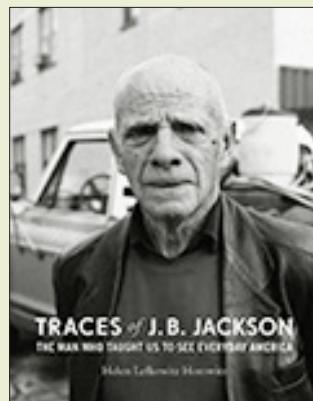
uct of their relationship.

Horowitz first met Jackson ("Brinck," as he preferred to be called) in 1973. She made multiple visits to his home in New Mexico, and the two developed a deep friendship. In 1997 she edited an anthology of his essays,

*Landscape in Sight: Looking at America* – an essential compilation of Jackson's original and often provocative insights. She became his literary execu-

tor, and – critical for this volume – before he died in 1996 he entrusted her with the journals he had kept between 1954 and 1960 that described his travels across the United States, Europe, and Mexico. This hitherto unpublished material is the most revealing aspect of Horowitz's fine book, in which she has struggled to understand not only the teacher and writer but also the man.

In what is simultaneously a biography of Jackson and a reflection upon the relationship between subject and author, Horowitz explores everything from his formative years to his lasting impact on the way we see, interrogate, and describe landscapes – especially those



of the American scene. She illuminates the genesis and development of his ideas by analyzing a half century of his landscape wisdom. (Some familiarity with Jackson's writings is a necessary prelude to *Traces*, which can be thought of as a companion volume to Horowitz's anthology.)

The outlines of his biography are well known: his patrician upbringing, partly in Europe; his Harvard education; his return to Europe, first to travel and write, and then to fight in the US Army during World War II. Subsequently he settled in the Southwest and began *Landscape*, the landmark journal that he conceived, funded, edited, and designed – and for which he wrote most of the copy.

Included in *Traces* is the story of that seminal publication's beginnings and development. The contributors to *Landscape* addressed a broad range of topics, from the minutia of plants and their place in the ecosystem to wilderness, cities, nascent suburbs, and the burgeoning environmental movement. They constituted a Who's Who of individuals in the early stages of what would become prominent careers as designers and scholars of landscape: Kevin Lynch, Grady Clay, Lawrence

Halprin, Paul Shepard, Edgar Anderson, May Theilgaard Watts, Edward Hall, and many more. In the sixties and seventies Jackson taught at Harvard and Berkeley, and when he retired from teaching he continued to lecture and write.

A central task in comprehending Jackson is to examine the experiences and places that directly impacted his thinking. Three stand out. First was his exposure to Europe during his upbringing, education, and travels; he continued to visit Europe throughout his life. He was fluent in French and German and became familiar with authors – especially French geographers – who greatly influenced him. He often made comparisons between the United States and Europe and drew distinctions between their histories and traditions. There is a certain clarity to the human imprints in this largely arid landscape; their long-lasting effects often stand in stark contrast to their settings.

Jackson's journal, *Landscape*, was originally subtitled *Human Geography of the Southwest*.

Large sections of *Traces* are excerpts from Jackson's letters and travel journals. They help us witness the development of his ideas – since the journals acted as field notes for concepts that would become more fully formed in his classic essays – and see the world through his keen eyes.

Immediacy and intimacy

spondent Ernie Pyle would write a column about Captain (later Major) Jackson in his book *Brave Men* (1944). Toward the war's end, Jackson began writing guides for soldiers, and there is a profound patriotism embedded in his essays.

The third significant influence on his philosophy was the region in which he chose to settle down after the war. The Southwest is not only a physical landscape but also home to descendants of the earliest European colonists and the nation's oldest indigenous communities. It is also a zone of cultural contrast among Anglo, Hispanic, and Native peoples and traditions. There is a certain clarity to the human imprints in this largely arid landscape; their long-lasting effects often stand in stark contrast to their settings.

Jackson's journal, *Landscape*, was originally subtitled *Human Geography of the Southwest*.

The second major influence on Jackson's thinking was his military experience. His first adult return to Europe was as a soldier. He became an intelligence officer and learned to interpret his surroundings from a soldier's point of view. In war, intimate knowledge of the landscape can mean the difference between life and death. The great war corre-

characterized Jackson's vision and the ways in which he recorded his observations. Horowitz's excerpts from these journals also provide insight into the formation and evolution of his values, convictions, and religious faith.

Unlike many sophisticated travelers, Jackson embraced the term "tourist," and thought deeply about the effect of tourism on society. He revisited places and was keenly aware of cultural changes in landscapes – especially between those of pre- and postwar Europe. In some sense he was an individual from the first half of the twentieth century looking at the second half with fresh eyes. At the same time, his European experience gave him the perspective of an outsider: he had the sensibility of one who could see the American landscape anew.

It is tempting to compare his journals and essays to those written by his American and European contemporaries. Certainly Henry Miller's *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*, which was based on a 1939 cross-country journey and written after the author had been living in Europe, came to very different conclusions about the United States. Especially interesting is the Swiss photographer Robert Frank's *The Americans* (1958),

for which Jack Kerouac, author of *On the Road* (1957), wrote the introduction. Like Jackson, Frank investigated the most ordinary and often neglected aspects of the country.

At the core of Jackson's method for interrogating and reading the landscape was an insatiable curiosity: he had the ability to talk to anyone and often asked surprising and revealing questions. He sought out the unique and, more importantly, the commonplace as he roamed on and off the beaten track. Recorded in his words and sketches are the minutiae of habits. While he privileges sight, he also notes smells and sounds, and he is keenly aware of dress, food, and activity.

He is equally attuned to recurring patterns, especially of domestic architecture, the layout of towns, the patterns of fields, and the lines of landscapes and roads. His "reading the landscape" was based on his observations in the field, but equally informed by extensive reading in diverse and eclectic sources. For example, he encouraged looking at popular as well as professional literature, even using the local phone book

as source material.

His journals reveal his experience of Santa Fe and, ultimately, of the local community of La Cienega where he built his home. The dichotomy between the two epitomized the distinction between the establishment and his lifetime quest to understand and define the vernacular landscape. His thinking was also intimately tied to the many ways in which he moved through his surroundings – on horseback in the Southwest and on a motorcycle traversing the continent, and, in his later years, in a pickup truck near his home in New Mexico. Jackson also loved to fly. Born only six years after the Wright Brothers' first flight, he matured in an era when air travel was still new and exciting, and he recognized the dramatic new perception it afforded of the land below.

Much as Jackson interrogates the landscape and asks himself questions for which he probes for answers, Horowitz in turn asks questions about the evolution of his thoughts and beliefs, delicately addressing what she refers to as "his long struggle to move beyond his origins." He came from a privileged, highly educated background, yet in his writings and speeches often adopted a populist and anti-elitist point of view. He was assumed by many to be a

homosexual, and yet he had a conservative sensibility coupled with complex political beliefs. In his journals there is the casual racism and anti-Semitism so common in his time and social class, and yet such remarks never appeared in his essays, and he would ultimately attend an African American church.

As *Traces* makes clear, intellectually as well as personally, Jackson's life was built on paradoxes and contradictions. He bore witness to the rise of fascism in Europe, which he addressed in essays and in his sole novel, *Saints in Summertime*, and yet retained a fondness for Germanic culture. He addresses the deep and even imagined history of places, yet equally inquired about, and was often enthused by, the prospect of the new. He spoke with great authority and cosmopolitan erudition and yet displayed a deep empathy for those who created and dwelled in the American landscape. He had a wary yet enduring relationship to academia, where he was lauded and essentially founded the discipline of landscape studies. A man of scholarly learning, he worked as a manual laborer in his final years. But what connected everything was

the profound humanism with which he viewed the meaning of landscape as inseparable from the people who are its creators and inhabitants.

Although you can find Jackson categorized as a human geographer and landscape architect, in recognition of his essential contributions to those disciplines, he was, as Horowitz notes, "first and foremost, a writer": the twentieth century's most astute observer of the American scene. His earliest essays are from seventy years ago, yet they still feel current and incisive and often have the immediacy of a blog post. One wonders what he would say about the recent controversies over Civil War memorials, a topic he wrote about with great insight. And what would he have to say about self-driving cars, dead malls, cell phone towers, or the spatial response to the current pandemic?

It is appropriate that this review appear in *Site/Lines*. Since 2007 the Foundation for Landscape Studies has awarded an annual J. B. Jackson Book Prize to outstanding works on the meaning of place. Readers of Horowitz's *Traces* will discover a person who was as complex and fascinating as the landscapes he wrote about. That was Brinck.  
– Kenneth Helphand

## Awards

### 2021 John Brinckerhoff Jackson Book Prize Winners

The Foundation for Landscape Studies is pleased to announce the awardees of the John Brinckerhoff Jackson Book Prize for a distinguished, recently published work on a subject related to the history of designed and vernacular landscapes.

Edited by Charles E. Beveridge, Lauren Meier, and Irene Mills

*Frederick Law Olmsted: Plans and Views of Communities and Private Estates*  
Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020

Joan Busquets, Dingliang Yang, Michael Keller  
*Urban Grids: Handbook on Regular City Design*  
ORO Editions, 2018

Joseph S. Cialdella  
*Motor City Green: A Century of Landscapes and Environmentalism in Detroit*  
University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020

Gabrielle Esperdy  
*American Utopia: An Intellectual History of the American Roadside at Midcentury*  
University of Virginia Press, 2019

## Contributors

Edited by Walter Hood and Grace Mitchell Tada  
*Black Landscapes Matter*  
University of Virginia Press, 2020

Helen L. Horowitz (Coffin Grant Recipient, 2019)  
*Traces of J. B. Jackson: The Man Who Taught Us to See Everyday America*  
University of Virginia Press, 2020

Martin V. Melosi  
*Fresh Kills: A History of Consuming and Discarding in New York City*  
Columbia University Press, 2020

Mariana Mogilevich (Coffin Grant Recipient, 2017)  
*The Invention of Public Space: Designing for Inclusion in Lindsay's New York*  
University of Minnesota Press, 2020

Reuben M. Rainey and JC Miller (Coffin Grant Recipient, 2018)  
*Robert Royston*  
University of Georgia Press, 2020

Tom Williamson  
*Humphry Repton: Landscape Design in an Age of Revolution*  
University of Chicago Press/Distributed for Reaktion Books Ltd., 2020

### 2021 David R. Coffin Publication Grant Winners

The Foundation for Landscape Studies is pleased to acknowledge the following 2021 awardees of the David R. Coffin Publication Grant to authors or publishers of forthcoming books that will advance scholarship in the field of garden history and landscape studies.

Rolf Diamant and Ethan Carr  
*Olmsted and Yosemite: Civil War, Abolition, and the National Park Idea*  
Library of American Landscape History

Catherine Seavitt Nordenson  
*The Miasmist: George E. Waring Jr. and the Sanitary Landscape*  
University of Texas Press

Jane Wolf  
*Bay Lexicon*  
McGill-Queen's University Press

Mantha Zarmakoupi  
*Roman Landscape: Eco-critical Approaches to Early Imperial History*  
J. Paul Getty Museum Publications

**Craig Barton** is the university architect and a professor of the practice of architecture at Brown University. He is the editor of the anthology *Sites of Memory: Perspectives on Architecture and Race* (2001) and has contributed to several other anthologies, including *Row: Trajectories Through the Shotgun House* (2004), *Writing Urbanism: A Design Reader* (2008), and *City of Memory: New Orleans Before and After Katrina* (2009). His work has been included in a wide range of exhibitions, including an installation at Project Rowhouse in Houston, Texas, and *The Dresser Trunk Project*. He is a trustee of the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts.

**Ethan Carr**, PhD, FASLA, is a professor of landscape architecture and the director of the Master's of Landscape Architecture program at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. He is a landscape historian and preservationist specializing in public landscapes and was the lead editor for *The Early Boston Years, 1882–1890*, the eighth volume of *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted* (2013). His latest book, *Olmsted and Yosemite: Civil War, Abolition, and the National Park Idea*, coauthored with Rolf Diamant, will be available later this year.

**Elgin Cleckley**, NOMA, is an architect and educator whose work focuses on intersections of identity, culture, memory, history, and place. He was the design coordinator for the Ontario Science Centre in Toronto from 2001 to 2016 and previously collaborated with Baird Sampson Neuert Architects. Since 2016, he has been an assistant professor of architecture and design thinking at the University of Virginia. He is also the principal of *\_mpathic design* – an initiative, pedagogy, and design practice operating in academic, community, and professional contexts. His work has recently won the ACSA Diversity Achievement Award and the US Department of Education Blue Ribbon Award. It will be fea-

tured in a forthcoming book from Island Press, *\_mpathic design* (2022).

**Eliza Fawcett** received her B.A. in history from Yale University, where she studied American urbanism and creative nonfiction. She is currently a journalist at the *Hartford Courant*, covering politics and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Connecticut. She has previously reported for the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*.

**Kenneth I. Helphand**, FASLA, is the Philip H. Knight Professor of Landscape Architecture Emeritus at the University of Oregon. He is the author of *Colorado: Visions of an American Landscape* (1991), *Yard Street Park: The Design of Suburban Open Space* (with Cynthia Girling; 1994), *Dreaming Gardens: Landscape Architecture & the Making of Modern Israel* (2002), *Defiant Gardens: Making Gardens in Wartime* (2006), *Lawrence Halprin* (2017), and *Hops: Historic Photographs of the Oregon Hopscape* (2020). He has served as the editor of *Landscape Journal* and the chair of the Senior Fellows

in Garden and Landscape Studies at Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, DC. He is a fellow of the American Society of Landscape Architects and an honorary member of the Israel Association of Landscape Architects.

**Louis P. Nelson**, PhD, is a professor of architectural history at the University of Virginia and the vice provost for academic outreach in the Office of the Provost. He is a specialist in the built environments of the early modern Atlantic world, with published work on the American South, Caribbean, and West Africa. His current research engages spaces of enslavement in West Africa and the Americas through documentation and interpretation of buildings and landscapes that shaped the transatlantic slave trade. The majority of his work focuses on the early American South, Greater Caribbean, and Atlantic rim and includes a locally based collaborative project to produce an understanding of the University of Virginia as a landscape of slavery.

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