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The Crossroads of Commemoration: Lynching Landscapes in America

Diversity Graduate Student Research Grant

- Description of research and grant spending

The University of Delaware Diversity Research Grant of \$1,452 has supported a key component of my dissertation research. As I was unable to travel in summer 2013 due to moving out of state, I delayed my research trip to the South for the following year. Although this was a long wait, doing so enabled me to reduce costs by including my attendance to the annual lynching reenactment that happens in Moore's Ford, Georgia in July with visits to other area sites. So in the summer of 2014 I applied the bulk of the grant to my research trip to South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama. I will apply the remaining funds of \$350 to an upcoming trip to Washington, DC in early November 2015.

Last year after completing a spring teaching position at UD, I headed south to rekindle my dissertation research. While in Greenville, South Carolina I studied the memorials to the 1947 lynching of Willie Earle. At this time I realized how I could incorporate a phenomenological approach in my dissertation. That was a break-through moment. Additionally, my trip to the town's historical center Upcountry History Museum of Furman University provided important cultural context.

After a few days in South Carolina, I traveled to the small town of Moore's Ford, Georgia to attend the lynching reenactment. This experience was rich and illuminating as it dispelled my earlier assumptions about this practice. Even though the reenactment did contain violent representations, the event's political, therapeutic and community-building aspects impressed me greatly. During my time in the area I networked with several local civil rights activists.

Then I journeyed to Atlanta where I spent time viewing historical collections at the National Center for Civil and Human Rights and the Martin Luther King Jr., National Historic Site. These rewarding visits provided strong contextual information. Just before concluding my research at the King site, I ran into two of the civil rights activists that I had met at the lynching reenactment. Chatting with them led me to attending a state political organizing meeting. At this event I met many residents and government officials.

From Atlanta I went to Birmingham, Alabama via a Greyhound bus. It was unsettling and at the same time good to experience a smooth, uneventful trip through Anniston, 1 Alabama, the former site of savage violence against the Freedom Riders of 1961 who strived to desegregate U.S. transportation systems. During my brief stay in Birmingham,

I visited the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute and Kelly Ingram Park. Although the park was calm that day, reminders of the cruelty against civil rights demonstrators in 1963 generated an uneasy feeling in me.

- Plans

I intend to apply the remaining \$350 to an upcoming trip to Washington, DC in early November 2015 to support my research of the downtown sculptural memorial program Points of Light.

Presently I am incorporating my research of the lynching reenactment in my dissertation chapter titled "A Brutal Embrace: Domesticating Lynching in American Visual Culture." Last week I presented a portion of this chapter at the American Studies Association Conference in Toronto. Later I will write the case study centered on the Willie Earle memorial of South Carolina and the DC Points of Light relief sculptures and pathway.

In addition to the dissertation writing, I am preparing lesson plans on memorial culture for secondary teachers. After I complete my research in DC, I plan to collaborate with local area teachers on this project. Also with the assistance of schoolteachers and arts agencies, I intend to present a portion of my research to New Haven, CT high school students.

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