

Remembering the Sit-Ins: Performing Public Memory at Greensboro's International Civil Rights Center and Museum

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A museum is not just a thing that is built for an opening; it is a living, breathing thing. People will course through its veins and provide the life and energy that sustain it.

– Eisterhold Associates Inc.

To save the Woolworth complex site is to preserve sacred ground.

– Representative Earl Jones and Melvin “Skip” Alston, ICRCM co-founders

The Civil Rights Movement has achieved legitimacy, even sacred status, in American public memory: the birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr. is a federal holiday; Rosa Parks' casket laid in honor in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda upon her death in 2005; and a number of figures across the political spectrum have claimed the legacy of the Civil Rights Movement in attempts to ennoble their own causes.¹ The past two decades have also seen a surge in the creation of Civil Rights commemorative sites, including

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¹ Other movements in the 1960s and 70s grew out of the Civil Rights struggle, or were informed by its tactics, including student, anti-war, women's liberation, gay liberation, and freedom movements by other peoples of color—Asian Americans, Native Americans, and Latinos. In the 1990s, conservative evangelical Christians framed themselves as an oppressed minority, analogous to blacks in the 50s and 60s (see Marley). More recently, conservative Fox News personality Glenn Beck hosted a massive “Restoring Honor” rally at the Lincoln Memorial, on August 28, 2010, the 47th anniversary of King's “I Have a Dream” speech. Beck's keynote address at the event referenced King's Dream and the March on Washington. Beck said of the rally, “This is a moment, quite honestly, that I think we reclaim the civil rights movement” (qtd. in Blow).

museums, memorials, and parks throughout the South, and the renaming of schools and streets in hundreds of cities across the nation. On the Washington Mall, America's symbolic center stage, a national memorial to Martin Luther King, Jr. is currently under construction, nestled between memorials to Presidents Lincoln, Jefferson, and Roosevelt at the northeast corner of the Tidal Basin.²

This remaking of the physical landscape at numerous sites across the country is also renovating the symbolic terrain of US national memory. The built forms of monuments, museums, and memorials are powerful rhetorical texts that constitute part of our "infrastructure of memory"³; they sanctify certain spaces and concretize historical events, rendering them worthy of remembering. Furthermore, such places enable the collective, embodied performance of public memory as visitors physically journey to sites where they interact with material artifacts, spaces, and each other.⁴ Monuments and museums also represent a significant investment of resources: they are typically permanent fixtures, expensive to build, and their designs are often fraught with controversy.

Taken as a whole, Civil Rights commemorative sites contest a long-dominant historical narrative articulated in public space that has celebrated white men and, in Southern states, the Confederacy. As geographers Owen Dwyer and Derek Alderman note, the struggle over commemorating the Civil Rights movement can "be thought of as yet another campaign to achieve racial equity" (6). This campaign seeks to make African-American experiences more visible,⁵ and to thwart collective forgetting, not only by celebrating the shining moments and victories won, but also through drawing attention to the atrocities of segregation, white supremacy, and violent resistance against the Movement.

Such memory work is especially consequential in a contemporary political climate where the election of Barack Obama in 2008 sparked commentary that America had entered a "post-racial" era.⁶ When conservative pundit Glenn Beck dons the mantle of King's Dream at his 2010 "Restoring Honor" rally—after having called President Obama a racist and accusing him of harboring a "deep-seated hatred for white people"—it behooves us to pay close and careful attention to the politics of

² See <http://www.mlkmemorial.org/>.

³ I borrow this term from Dwyer and Alderman (6). Carole Blair and others have made a convincing case that monuments and museums perform rhetorical work.

⁴ Americans claim to trust history museums and historic sites more than any other source (including books, television, and even history classes) for engaging with the past. Historians Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen found in their extensive survey that museums "gave visitors a sense of immediacy—of personal participation—that respondents associated with eyewitnesses; they evoked the intimacy of family gatherings; and they encouraged an interaction with primary sources that reminded respondents of independent research" (105).

⁵ See Dwyer and Alderman, Chapter One.

⁶ See for instance Shorr, Crowley. See also Joan Faber McAlister's compelling analysis of "post-racial" attacks on Michelle Obama.

commemorating the Civil Rights Movement.⁷ For if collective memory of the Movement gets distilled down to a few iconic moments, patriotic platitudes, and the sweeping refrains of King's "I Have a Dream" speech, then the radical edges of the long grassroots struggle for social, political, and economic equality—and the ongoing need for that struggle to continue—dissolve away into forgetting. Such a limited narrative of the Movement's history offers scant resources for citizens today.⁸ How citizens perform memories of the past, then, has important ramifications for the present and future. As historians Leigh Raiford and Renee Romano assert, "memories have power, not only to educate people about the past but also to dissuade or propel action. How we remember the movement, in other words, can discourage us from or encourage us toward future activism" (xix).

This essay explores how a recently opened commemorative site, the International Civil Rights Center and Museum (ICRCM) in Greensboro, North Carolina, sets a compelling stage for the performance of public memory. Housed in the original F.W. Woolworth's dime store where four college freshmen sat down at a whites-only lunch counter on February 1, 1960, the ICRCM blends historical artifacts with interactive high-tech media to offer visitors an engaging encounter with the sit-ins, segregation, and the broader Freedom Movement.⁹ My analysis of the ICRCM and its promotional materials seeks to answer several questions: How does the ICRCM perform public memory of the Movement, and of the sit-ins in particular? How are people moved through and by the museum's narrative and physical spaces? Does the ICRCM contribute to, or revise, the dominant consensus memory of the Civil Rights Movement? And finally, does this museum invite visitors to engage with the past in a way that can inspire activism in the present?

⁷ Beck uttered these remarks about Obama in July of 2009 as a guest on "Fox & Friends" (CBS News). After the 2010 rally, Beck did express regret for his July 2009 remarks, saying "I have a big fat mouth"; however, he stopped short of retracting the statement (Fox News, "Beck Amends"). Beck claimed that it was a coincidence that his rally fell on the anniversary of the March on Washington, but nonetheless invoked King's "Dream" in his speech and in post-rally commentary, where he explicitly rejected racial politics and the struggle for economic justice that were central to the Civil Rights Movement, and focused instead on King's "content of our character" line oft cited by conservatives (Fox News, "Glenn Beck").

⁸ T.V. Reed argues that in recent years, "the movement has borne the burden of mainstream acceptance, becoming hallowed as an American success story by the very forces of complacency that stood in the 1960s and stand now in the way of further progress toward racial justice. The movement has become a museum piece, its radical power stuck in amber, its meanings reduced to Martin Luther King Day platitudes" (38).

⁹ The Greensboro sit-ins were not the first in the nation or in North Carolina, but they are commonly remembered as such because they touched off a quick succession of similar demonstrations in more than seventy cities across the South in the spring and early summer of 1960.



figure 1: The International Civil Rights Center & Museum. (photo courtesy of the ICRCM)

The ICRCM commemorates a key rhetorical performance of the Civil Rights Movement by preserving its very stage as hallowed public space; in so doing, the museum also celebrates the activist potential of the ordinary citizen. Bodies are central here: back in 1960, the students who engaged in sit-ins in Greensboro and across the South made a compelling argument with their bodily rhetoric by calmly, steadfastly asserting their right to be served in the stores they patronized.¹⁰ The students met resistance and suffered verbal and physical attacks, but the power of their nonviolent direct action ultimately prevailed. Indeed, these courageous yet mundane acts made history: the lunch counter sit-ins are among America’s most significant historical moments, exemplifying the force of bodies acting in concert to effect social change.¹¹

The story of the sit-ins, and of the broader Movement, is a story of both trauma and triumph. I will argue that the ICRCM negotiates the traumatic in a predominantly

¹⁰ Two dancer-scholars—Rebekah J. Kowal and Susan Leigh Foster—offer compelling reads (in their respective essays) of the Greensboro sit-ins as a carefully choreographed form of embodied protest. Kowal comments on the force of bodily presence: “While boycotters or strikers made their point through concerted absences, sit-inners exerted pressure by insistent presence, occupying spaces from which they were usually prohibited. Sit-inners put themselves center stage instead of removing themselves from the scene” (136).

¹¹ A section of the original Greensboro Woolworth’s lunch counter is on permanent display as one of a few “Landmark Objects” at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History.

archival mode, displaying artifacts from the Jim Crow era as well as graphic images of racial violence and its aftermath, thus effectively containing the trauma in the past. At the same time, the museum also invokes the embodied, performative repertoire.¹² ICRCM tour guides give animated, extemporaneous narratives that spark participation and interaction, and visitors are actively interpellated into the story, as we re-enact the walk to Woolworth's made by the Greensboro Four, see our own faces reflected in screens above the lunch counter, and are invited to identify with the student activists. Museums may seem to be fixed archives, but only if we read them as static visual texts and ignore the bodily experiences of visitors coursing through their veins. I suggest that bringing performance to bear on critiques of museums and memorial sites enriches our understanding of how public memory is constructed and embodied.

To make this case, I first map some defining features of public memory studies and submit that memory work is often accomplished through various forms of performance. Next I provide a description of the museum tour experience, followed by my critical analysis of how the ICRCM moves memories. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of the museum's strengths and shortcomings, and consider how the ICRCM's performance of public memory contributes to the complicated, pressing task of commemorating the Civil Rights Movement.

The Movement, Public Memory and Performance

The virtual entry to the ICRCM website (sitinmovement.org) momentarily transports viewers back in time and introduces, in a simple and highly condensed form, what Tamar Katriel calls the "memory-history dialectic" (2).¹³ The museum's website opens with a splash page featuring two worn wooden doors, side by side: one reads "White Entrance," the other "Colored Entrance." Then the words "SOME THINGS SHOULD BE LEFT TO HISTORY" appear in large font across the screen. As this statement fades, the two doors slide toward the center, merge, and transform into a single contemporary glass door marked with the ICRCM name and logo. A few seconds later, the words "BUT NEVER FORGOTTEN" appear superimposed over the glass door. That image then dissolves, and viewers are routed to the museum's home page. This short flash animation performs memory and history as both distinct and interrelated. History, materialized in the segregated doors, appears as an artifact

¹² I draw the archive/repertoire distinction from Diana Taylor; I explain these concepts in more detail later in the essay. See also Joshua Gunn's analysis of the archive and repertoire, mourning and melancholy, visual spectacle and haunting voices in public discourse after 9/11.

¹³ Katriel writes that museums and other memory sites "speak to an ... encompassing dialectical tension that is basic to modern life, the tension between the isolating, intellectual stance of critical reflection, which [Pierre] Nora would assign to the realm of 'history', and the all-consuming moment of ritual, communal bonding, which he would assign to the realm of memory" (16).

from the past, something distant and removed from the present day. Memory, by contrast, lives in the now and is animated by a moral imperative: we must never forget (and never repeat) this particular history. Time and space are also imbricated here—the ICRCM glass door signifies the entrance to a space that will aid memory of a receding past. The museum positions itself as a repository for the safe-keeping of a history that should be left behind in a literal sense, but taken along with us in the form of public memory, and never forgotten.

Scholarly work on public memory has burgeoned in recent years across multiple disciplines, including history, sociology, rhetoric, art history, and performance studies. Critics have taken up the concept of public memory in analyses of visual texts (photographs, films), public spaces (memorials, museums), ritualized performances (strikes, lynching), written texts and public address. It is not my aim here to survey the breadth of this work, as this has been done expertly elsewhere¹⁴; rather, I will articulate a few key defining themes of public memory studies to use as a point of departure in my analysis of the ICRCM.

First, public memory, like performance, is shifting, malleable, and open to contestation (Zelizer 218). Because it is a collective process, rather than a static thing, public memory evolves over time, is made and remade, and is challenged and revised out in the open. Greensboro’s ICRCM, together with the spate of other Civil Rights memorial sites built in the past quarter century, offer a significant revision to the story of America’s past. As Dwyer argues, this profusion of new commemorative sites is remarkable in that they turn away from a version of history that underwrote white supremacy to one that celebrates its downfall. “Unlike the majority of representations of American history in public space,” Dwyer notes, “civil rights memorials present an explicitly antiracist rendering of the past. . . . In this sense, civil rights memorials offer a stunning rebuke to centuries of American public history” (6). That said, memorials of any kind are complicated and unfinished texts, and Civil Rights memorials taken together do not tell a unified story. Meaning making at any particular site, furthermore, is influenced by a number of contingencies, including the various interpretive frames brought to the site by different visitors.¹⁵

Second, public memory is partial and partisan (Blair, Dickinson, and Ott 9). Like individual memory, public memory is selective and incomplete. I noted at the outset that the Civil Rights Movement has been celebrated and legitimated in American public culture, but the mainstream, popular version of the story represents only a narrow slice of an enormous and complex movement. The dominant narrative, or “consensus memory”¹⁶ of the Movement typically spans the period from 1954, with the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, to Martin Luther King’s assassination in 1968.

¹⁴ See Zelizer; Blair, Dickinson, and Ott.

¹⁵ See Miller.

¹⁶ I borrow this term from Raiford and Romano (xiv).

There is a strong tendency in this consensus memory to celebrate prominent leaders (the “great man” approach), to highlight the “first” or most spectacular of events, and to focus on the national stage, rather than local scenes. Furthermore, the Movement is most commonly framed as a “Won Cause,”¹⁷ as a broad and sustained effort that accomplished its goals—the dismantling of Jim Crow and passage of important national legislation—and is now over and done. While plenty of scholarship challenges and complicates this consensus memory, Dwyer and others argue that the “great man approach” still dominates public commemorative spaces: the most obvious example being the overwhelming emphasis on Martin Luther King in a number of museums, memorials, and other commemorative activities ... particularly in contrast to the near invisibility someone like Ella Baker or Fannie Lou Hamer.¹⁸

Third, public memory is fundamentally performative in that it helps constitute the public as such. As Edward Casey puts it, public memory is both ground and horizon; it anchors our understandings of who we are now, where we have been, and where we are going. Casey asserts that “[w]e like to think that public memory is always there to reassure us as to our national or regional identity, and as an external horizon it does in fact play just this role. It is there to be *invoked*” (29). Public memory provides important performative resources for the present, defining the contours of our collective commitments.¹⁹ Referring to the Greensboro sit-ins, Smithsonian Networks Vice-President David Royle stakes a national claim to the memory of this story, which he says “was crying out to be told” (qtd. in Rowe).²⁰ Royle states, “people tend to forget their history awful quickly and this one shouldn’t be confined to the dust can of history. It needs to be passed on for generations so we can draw strength from it in the future. It’s truly an American story” (qtd. in Rowe). In Royle’s estimation, then, public memory of the sit-ins helps define what it means to be American.

Fourth, scholars widely agree that public memory is material, embodied, and attached to sites. Barbie Zelizer asserts that public memory “exists in the world rather than in a person’s head, and so is embodied in different cultural forms” (232), including artifacts, photographs, video footage, and bodily practices. The materiality of public memory is especially apparent in commemorative sites and spaces, where audiences encounter physical artifacts and move through “experiential landscapes [that] hail bodies, interpellating them as concrete subjects” (Dickinson, Ott and Aoki, 30). Memory places like museums and memorials are also rhetorically significant because they offer opportunities for audiences to engage with other members of the

¹⁷ Dwyer and Alderman, drawing on work by historian Glenn Eskew, describe the “Won Cause” perspective as “as story of sweeping cultural and political triumph” (28).

¹⁸ On Baker, see DeLaure; on Hamer, see Brooks and Houck.

¹⁹ As Blair, Dickinson, and Ott put it, “Public memories ‘matter’ and are authorized to ‘speak for’ a public that invests in them” (17).

²⁰ The Smithsonian Network produced a documentary, “Seizing Justice: The Greensboro 4,” that premiered on the Smithsonian Channel on July 25, 2010, the 50th anniversary of Woolworth’s decision to desegregate all of its lunch counters.

public. As Blair, Dickinson, and Ott explain, “[m]emory places are virtually unique among all memory apparatuses in offering their symbolic contents to groups of individuals who negotiate not just the place, but stranger relations as well” (27). Some sites commemorating relatively recent events also function as living memorials, where visitors may encounter veterans who actually lived the history being depicted.²¹ This is still the case for the ICRCM, as members of the museum staff, and in some cases fellow visitors, include Civil Rights veterans.²²

Building upon these definitional cornerstones, I explore with this study how public memory manifests through performance. Particularly at commemorative sites, public memory is constituted in a shared, interactive, embodied fashion as visitors reflect and enact in the presence of others. Some memory places feature explicitly staged performances—such as battle reenactments, or demonstrations of craft at living history farms—while others, including the ICRCM, involve performances of docents who guide visitors on tours of the site.²³ Still other sites, which may at first glance seem less overtly performative, can be read as performing memory work. Blair and Michel, for example, argue that the water and stone structures of Maya Lin’s Civil Rights Memorial in Montgomery mirror the Movement’s “tactical performances of protest and resistance” (47). Museums and memorials may also become spaces that compel a kind of performance by their visitors. In this vein, Tracy Davis examines the spatial logic of museums that engage visitors as actors, including the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis and the U.S. Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC; she concludes that such museums “promote self-reflection *and a conscious performance by the visitor of the meaning of the place*” (16, emphasis in original).

In one respect, then, memorials and museums are themselves performative, as they put artifacts on display, animate stories, and materialize events. As Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett puts it, “[e]xhibitions are fundamentally theatrical, for they are how museums perform the knowledge that they create” (3). In another sense, memory places function as stages upon which visitors perform with and for one another. In both cases, conceptualizing public memory as performance emphasizes enactment, embodiment, and the shared construction of meaning.²⁴ As I suggested

²¹ This has been the case for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, where one typically can see not only the names of the dead, but also living veterans visiting the site, as well as artifacts left by loved ones (Haines; Carlson and Hocking). See also Balthrop, Blair, and Michel’s analysis of the World War II Memorial.

²² The three surviving members of the Greensboro Four were present at the ICRCM grand opening in February 2010, and on the day I toured the museum, I happened to meet Ann Dearsley-Vernon in the lobby, who introduced herself as “one of the three white girls” who joined the Greensboro sit-ins on the third day.

²³ See Bowman, Katriel.

²⁴ As Della Pollock explains, “performance is primarily something *done* rather than something *seen*. ... It is less the product of theatrical invention or the object of spectatorship than the process by which meanings, selves, and other effects are produced. ... It is the embodied process of making meaning” (20, emphasis in original).

earlier, the ICRCM shuttles back and forth between the two modes of memory work described by Diana Taylor: the archive and the repertoire. The Greensboro museum collects material artifacts and displays apparently fixed, static texts—Taylor’s “*archive* of supposedly enduring materials” (19). But the ICRCM also engages “the so-called ephemeral *repertoire* of embodied practice/knowledge,” through the improvised performances of docents and visitors, through inviting reflection and enactment, through positioning museum-goers as participants in, rather than mere observers of, history.

Touring the ICRCM

The F.W. Woolworth’s building was erected in 1929 on South Elm Street, in the heart of downtown Greensboro. Due to declining sales, the store closed in 1994 and was slated for demolition to make space for the expansion of a neighboring parking lot. In November of 1993, State Representative Earl Jones and Guilford County Commissioner Melvin “Skip” Alston founded a non-profit organization, Sit-In Movement, Inc., with the goal to salvage the Woolworth’s building and transform it into a museum. Sit-In Movement, Inc. raised \$23 million in grants and donations to complete the project.²⁵ The museum’s exhibits were designed by Kansas City firm Eisterhold Associates Inc., which also created the Civil Rights Memorial Center and the Rosa Parks Museum, both in Montgomery, Alabama, and the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis. To develop exhibits for the ICRCM, Eisterhold researchers studied news articles and videos, interviewed the three surviving members of the Greensboro Four, plumbed oral history archives, issued open calls in the city for artifacts, and interviewed a variety of people who were in Greensboro during the time of the sit-ins (McLaughlin 42).

The ICRCM opened on February 1, 2010, fifty years to the day after the first Greensboro sit-in. Due to the constraint imposed by this anniversary date, the museum exhibits were not entirely finished upon opening, and visitors have only been allowed into the museum by joining a guided, hour-long tour.²⁶ I visited the ICRCM on April 15, 2010, and toured with a group of mostly retired African American men and women from Durham, NC. Experiencing the museum together with them, as narrated by our docent, Nita Johnson—a charismatic Greensboro resident and self-proclaimed proud graduate of North Carolina A&T, “Go Aggies!”—made the history come alive. While the tour was rushed at times, and I regretted being unable to linger at certain exhibits, the passionate performance by our guide and the comments made

²⁵ See Rothstein.

²⁶ As of this writing, there are still no self-guided tours available. Museum officials are still in the process of deciding whether or not to continue the guided tours-only policy.

throughout by my fellow visitors, many of whom had lived through Jim Crow, made for a collective and moving experience of the museum space that would have been quite different had I been meandering through the ICRCM on my own.

The tour begins with a descent via escalator to the basement level, where the first exhibit treats America's founding, putting in stark contrast the lofty sentiments of the Declaration of Independence with the institution of slavery. Visitors then turn to view a short video, projected across three large screens, dramatizing the history of slavery in colonial America, Lincoln's famous "house divided" speech and the Civil War, the Reconstruction struggles to integrate freed Negro families, and the rise of the Ku Klux Klan. Our group then passes by a tall glass case housing a KKK robe and hood, standing as a ghostly sentry at the entrance to the "Hall of Shame."



figure 2: The Hall of Shame. (photo © Jeremy M. Lange. Used with permission)

The "Hall of Shame" is a dark and narrow hallway, perhaps forty feet in length. Along both walls hang images of brutality and bodily suffering, documenting the violent backlash against the 20th century freedom struggle. Black and white photographs printed on plexiglas are lit dramatically from behind, each image broken into several jagged pieces. The images are not labeled, but many are familiar, even iconic, and Nita tells their stories: a lynching victim hanging from a tree, a Freedom Ride bus ablaze, a snarling police dog lunging at protestors, Mamie Till Bradley distraught beside the open casket of her grotesquely disfigured son, Emmett.²⁷ With a

²⁷ Former ICRCM Executive Director Amelia Parker explains that there is an alternate passageway to allow younger children to bypass the gruesome images in the "Hall of Shame" and pass directly into the next exhibit space, the "A&T Room" (Parker interview).

sense of relief, we move next into the “A&T Room,” where we take seats and watch a video reenactment of the late-night dorm room meeting where the four college freshmen hatched their plan. The young actors resemble the Greensboro Four and are dressed in period clothing, but the color film has a contemporary aesthetic: there’s no mistaking this for archival footage. Next, we file down a long corridor with walls painted to evoke the storefronts of Greensboro. Giant portraits of historical figures also line the hallway: Sojourner Truth, W.E.B. DuBois, Frederick Douglass, Rosa Parks, Mahatma Gandhi.

A second escalator transports our group up into the cavernous, brightly-lit room housing the museum’s centerpiece exhibit: the lunch counter. The enormous L-shaped counter is cordoned off, keeping viewers at a solemn distance. Fifty-three chairs stretch the length of the counter, with chrome backs and seat bottoms upholstered in alternating aqua and salmon vinyl.

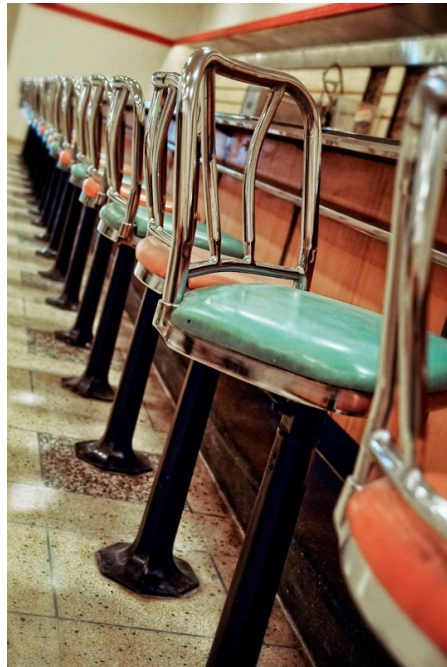


figure 3: The Woolworth lunch counter seats. (photo courtesy of the ICRCM)

On the stainless counter at regular intervals are stations with napkins, condiments, and order pads; along the back service counter stand a bank of coffee makers, commercial mixers, and other industrial-sized appliances. Five large black video screens span the wall before us; above these are signs advertising menu items at 1960 prices—“Turkey Dinner, 65 cents; Apple Pie, 15 cents.” A few moments later, a video reenactment of the sit-ins plays on the screens: the same four young actors we’d just

seen in the A&T Room approach and appear to sit down at the counter, facing us. We see other patrons, Woolworth's staff, and police; other students then join the initial four, and some are taunted and aggressed by ruffians. The video ends, the screens go black, and Nita directs our attention to an interactive map projected onto a circular table, illustrating how the sit-ins "spread like wildfire" across the South.

Next we pass under a replica archway of the Greensboro railway station, with the words "Colored Entrance" chiseled in stone. The "Access Denied" exhibit contains a collection of images and artifacts that give material form to segregation in the Jim Crow south. A restroom door labeled "Colored Women," donated by Kress's department store just down the street, stands opposite a circa 1931 water fountain and a two-sided Coca-Cola machine.



figure 4: two-sided soda machine. (photo © Jeremy M. Lange. Used with permission)

There is a wall-sized photograph of the interior of a bus, and single movie theater seat on display with a black-face mask, playbills, and a sign stating "Colored must sit in balcony." We pass by a glass case holding a Tuskegee Airman's uniform and into a room devoted to the central role churches played in African-American culture and community organizing. On display here are a pulpit, preacher's robe, historic Bible, and fragments of a stained glass window from the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham.

The next exhibit addresses education, illustrating how separate schools were grossly unequal, and depicting the struggles across the south to integrate public schools in the wake of *Brown v. Board of Education*. Visitors then move into "Politics and the Voting Booth," an exhibit that includes displays of poll tax receipts, two curtained voting booths, and a pen used by President Johnson to sign the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Next comes "Jail, No Bail," an expansive wall of nearly a

thousand mug shots of citizens from Greensboro and elsewhere who were arrested for their activism. The following room traces a timeline of the key direct action campaigns of the Movement, with short video loops for each event: the Montgomery Bus Boycotts, the Freedom Rides, Project C in Birmingham, the 1963 March on Washington, Freedom Summer 1964. Opposite the timeline is a wall highlighting quotations by community organizers Fannie Lou Hamer, Ella Baker, John Lewis, and Diane Nash. At the far end of the room is a panel celebrating the contributions of several African-American women, including Coretta Scott King, Mahalia Jackson, Maya Angelou and Madame C.J. Walker, who pioneered hair care products for black women—"Hallelujah!" Nita exclaims. From here, visitors enter another darkened hallway to contemplate solemnly the "Wall of Remembrance" which features the names of fifty people, some famous and others not, who lost their lives in the struggle. Their names and circumstances of death are etched on glass, and the entire space is illuminated by a rotating glass sculpture titled "Freedom," donated by Winston-Salem artist Jon Kuhn.

The final ICRCM exhibit is titled "A Changed World." The left wall of the room is covered floor to ceiling by a collage of hundreds of small photographs of people, women and men, black and white, young and old, citizens of every stripe.²⁸ A larger-than-life image of President Obama's face emerges in highlight at the far end of the wall, constructed out of the mosaic of small faces. Adjacent to this image is a quotation from Obama's July 2008 speech in Berlin: "The walls between old allies on either side of the Atlantic cannot stand. The walls between the countries with the most and those with the least cannot stand. The walls between races and tribes; natives and immigrants; Christians and Muslims and Jews cannot stand. These now are the walls we must tear down." Opposite the giant collage wall is a display about direct action campaigns around the world: South Africa, Kosovo, the Berlin Wall, Tiananmen Square. As the tour draws to a close, Nita encourages us to leave feedback in the suggestion box before we depart. Members of my group linger in the lobby, affirming the value of the museum and thanking Nita for her guidance. Some visitors wander into the gift shop, which sells books, the *February One* documentary, and a variety of items—t-shirts, mugs, paper-weights and the like—inscribed with the ICRCM logo.

Moving Memories

The ICRCM employs multiple strategies to impel visitors to perform public memory. Here, I examine four key recurring moves made throughout the ICRCM: foreground/background, authenticity/mediation, monumental/mundane, and reflection/enactment. Each conceptual pair evokes a creative tension that works to move museum visitors, bridge the archive and the repertoire, and articulate past and

²⁸ This collage includes a photograph of every single person who appears anywhere in the museum, according to former ICRCM Executive Director Amelia Parker.

present.

Foreground/ Background

The ICRCM deploys a foreground/background strategy at several junctures, pushing museum-goers to look below the surface of unifying symbols, to see material experiences that lie behind the sanitized façade of dominant historical narratives. In the opening exhibit, for example, visitors gather before a glass wall etched with the words “All men are created equal ...”. Behind the glass is the midsection of an American flag. Nita reads aloud the words from the Declaration of Independence, saying, “All men, AND WOMEN—I like to insert, ‘and women’—are created equal ...”; her improvised interjection exceeds the archival text, performing a feminist critique of America’s sacred foundational document. Then she pushes a button that brings up lighting behind the scrim of the American flag, revealing a number of items on display: a Confederate soldier’s cap, slave auction signs, a pair of manacles.



figure 5: American flag viewed through KKK apparition/reflection. (photo © Jeremy M. Lange. Used with permission)

Shortly thereafter, in the A&T room, visitors watch a reenactment of the students’ late night dorm bull session. As the video concludes, back lighting comes up to reveal this screen too, is a scrim: behind it stands a recreation of the Scott Hall dorm room, sparsely furnished with institutional appointments donated by A&T. We look through the screen upon which we viewed the film to see a three-dimensional, material space behind, a subtle reminder of the concrete, bodily actions that occurred decades ago. Later in the tour, there is a large, doubled image covering an entire wall that is a

powerful representation of “separate and unequal” schooling. Looking at the wall from one angle shows a Mayberry-esque 1950s classroom with a teacher and handful of smiling white children, well-fed and well-clothed, surrounded by an abundance of educational materials; looking at it from another angle reveals a run-down, dingy room crowded with young black students who have scarcely any books or equipment. In the final room, “A Changed World,” a larger-than-life image of President Obama’s face emerges in highlight out of the photomontage of hundreds of freedom activists. One of the artifacts that prompts the most intrigue among members of my tour group is a two-sided cherry red Coca-Cola machine. On one side, the price reads 5 cents; on the other, it was originally 6 cents, but a 10 cents sticker, now worn, had been placed over the top. Nita asks which side we think was for blacks and which for whites, remarking that the price differential was especially troubling, given the economic inequities between the races.

These repeated moves between foreground and background, surface and depth, trouble easy acceptance of patriotic platitudes, positioning museum-goers as skeptical critics. The vestiges of slavery appearing behind the U.S. flag render the phrase “all men created equal” suspect, even hypocritical, and prove the project of nation-building to be incomplete. The two-sided image of the grossly unequal 1950s schools may prompt viewers to reflect upon the wide disparity in funding and quality of education that still plagues public schools today. The “looking deeper” move in the A&T room invites us to consider the mundane material sites where important organizing happened, in Greensboro and across the South. And the final image of President Obama, emerging out of the collage of the hundreds of faces, visually performs the notion that behind and within any great leader, there are countless unsung heroes: organizers, supporters, forebears, demonstrators, martyrs for the cause of freedom. The public discourse around Obama’s election to the highest office in the land repeatedly acknowledged that his very candidacy was made possible in part by the many thousands of people who devoted themselves to the Movement. In several respects, Obama has become a powerful conduit for negotiating public memory: his candidacy and victory were framed as history-making, as evidence of American exceptionalism,²⁹ as living proof that the dream of the Movement had finally been achieved. During the 2008 campaign, Obama managed to give voice to both black and white anxieties, acknowledging the scars borne by older generations, while at the same time reaching toward the future and espousing a message of unity, not only across party and racial lines in the US, but internationally as well, which is captured by the passage of his Berlin speech displayed in the final exhibit of the ICRCM.

²⁹ As Obama presciently declared in his keynote address at the 2004 Democratic National Convention, “I stand here knowing that my story is part of the larger American story, that I owe a debt to all of those who came before me, and that, in no other country on earth, is my story even possible” (2).

Authenticity/Mediation

The ICRCM calls itself a “collecting museum,” and indeed it houses an impressive array of authentic historical artifacts.³⁰ Material fragments of history archived at the ICRCM—the slave auction signs, Pullman Porter uniform, poll tax receipts, shards of the 16th Street Baptist Church window, a piece of the Berlin Wall—seem to promise a direct, unmediated connection to the past. These items have survived, contain stories, and bear witness to the events now receding in time. In the “A&T Room,” the salvaged Scott Hall dorm bricks scarred by gunshot testify to the many student protests that continued on through the late 60s and early 70s, at A&T and on many other college campuses. The haunting KKK regalia gives material form to a chilling past, inviting speculation about its former owner. A worn black leather doctor’s bag and stethoscope in a plexiglass case provides a springboard for a story about its donor, Dr. George Evans, who successfully sued to integrate Greensboro’s Moses Cone Hospital, and who, according to Nita, “is still alive and well today at the ripe old age of 107!” Past is stitched to present, and made to be more *present* by these artifacts.

Authentic material artifacts—in contrast to photographs or reproductions of objects—exert a powerful draw for tourists seeking access to the past. According to Dwyer, tourist officials report a widespread “desire for authenticity [which] prompts visitors to look for sites with relics that promote a tangible, unmediated encounter with the past—however untenable such an experience may be” (15). Americans seem to trust the authenticity of museum artifacts more than other sources of information about the past. As historians Roy Rosensweig and David Thelen report, “Artifacts brought respondents closer to experiences from the past than even eyewitnesses could. Museum visitors could form their own questions by imagining that they were reexperiencing for themselves—without mediation—moments from the past” (106-07).³¹

Indeed, the perceived authenticity of ICRCM’s flagship exhibit, the lunch counter, is particularly important. Because four seats and a section of the Greensboro Woolworth’s lunch counter were removed some years ago and installed at the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, DC, there was some question about which museum had *the* four actual chairs where David Richmond, Franklin McCain, Ezell Blair, Jr. and Joseph McNeil sat down on February 1, 1960. Amelia Parker, speaking as Executive Director of the museum, took pains to reassure the public that “the

³⁰ The ICRCM is continuing to collect artifacts and is in the process of building an archive. As of this writing, the archive was still under construction, and thus was not yet open for public use.

³¹ Of course, this notion of engaging in a direct, unmediated experience with the past is untenable; memory and imagination are media in their own rights, and any museum’s archive of artifacts has been selected, organized, and put on display.

original portion of the lunch counter and stools where the four students sat has never been moved from its original footprint” (qtd. in McLaughlin, “Journey Through” 38). The centerpiece artifact is explicitly presented as authentic: it is not a fake or constructed space invented by museum designers, but the real thing, a site made significant by the students who sat there in 1960, and consecrated by the stewards of history who saved the building from demolition.

At the same time, however, the ICRCM’s archive of authentic artifacts appears in the context of a high-tech, multi-mediated environment. The opening exhibit animates antebellum artifacts with shifting spotlights behind an American flag scrim; museum goers then turn to watch a short Ken Burns-style film featuring sketches, early photographs, and documentary footage. In the Hall of Shame, the graphic images light up sequentially, triggered by weight sensors in the floor. In several exhibits, touch screens enable individual visitors to trigger short video clips about various episodes in the Movement. Most notably, the lunch counter itself provides a stage for the video reenactment of the sit-ins. Museum visitors inhabit the space of the authentic artifact, but are transported by modern technology.

All of these artifacts are in some respect mediated. Even those conventionally displayed in glass cases have been selected, contextualized, and presented as historically significant. Authenticity is not the absence of mediation, nor does it offer a direct line of access to the past—rather, the very notion of authenticity is something performatively achieved by the museum itself.³² Nita exclaimed during our tour, “Yes, we *do* have a lot of artifacts!” and she was sure to articulate the donor and history of each important item. As Blair, Dickinson and Ott note, “a sense of authenticity is a rhetorical effect, an impression lodged with visitors by the rhetorical work the place does” (27). Objects become “authentic” artifacts because they are performed as such.

The ICRCM’s many artifacts become meaningful through the performative repertoire, as they are given voice by the tour guide’s spoken narrative and through various interpretive acts by museum-goers. As my tour group wound through the ICRCM exhibits depicting segregation in the South, Nita periodically repeated the refrain, “Jim Crow, alive and well ... Jim Crow, alive and well.” The tour narrative animated the museum’s artifacts, treating the water fountain, two-sided Coca-Cola machine, and the poll-tax receipt books not as dusty relics of a distant past, but as material embodiments of a living, breathing, divisive and oppressive system. My fellow tour group members, most of whom were retired African-Americans, also participated in the performance, adding their stories to those told by our guide. Visitors offered confirmation—“Mmm-hmm, that’s right”—as Nita explained that the family Bible was historically used as a record of births, marriages, and deaths, since Negroes were not treated as full citizens and thus not accounted for in official

³² Diana Taylor debunks the myth that archival objects are somehow unmediated, explaining that “[w]hat makes an object archival is the process by which it is selected, classified, and presented for analysis” (19).

public records. At a small exhibit featuring a theater seat and black-face mask, Nita recounted that segregated theaters and movie houses forced blacks to sit in the balcony.



figure 6: balcony theater seat. (photo © Jeremy M. Lange. Used with permission)

One of the museum visitors interjected, “Yeah, but we had such fun up there!” The group laughed, and someone recalled throwing popcorn down onto the white moviegoers seated on the main floor. This interactive performance testified that, indeed, Jim Crow had been “alive and well” in the not-so-distant past; it also highlighted bodily tactics of resistance that were used to contest racial segregation.³³

Monumental/Mundane

The tension between the monumental and the mundane is also deployed at the ICRCM: the museum depicts social change as something both heroic and quotidian, something accomplished by the collective actions of ordinary people. The lunch counter has been crafted into a sacred monument, housed in an enormous, brightly-lit room—which is striking especially in contrast to rest of museum, with its dark, winding hallways, cramped spaces, and tight corners. A chain cordons off the counter, and visitors are not allowed to touch the seats or get too close: one is cowed by this place. And yet, the very nature of this space, and the acts that occurred there in 1960, also suggest mundane, ordinary activity. On the lunch counter, at regular intervals, sit

³³ This exchange is one example of how museum tours “may become occasions for shared reminiscing” (Katriel 4).

stations with napkin holders, salt and pepper shakers, and notepads for taking food orders. These items are familiar, unremarkable, quotidian.³⁴ So, too, are the spartan furnishings of the Scott Hall dorm room that appear behind the movie scrim, suggesting that bold, history-making ideas can be made in the most ordinary of places.



figure 7: The Greensboro Four leaving Woolworth's on February 1, 1960: David Richmond, Franklin McCain, Ezell Blair Jr. (now Jibreel Khazan) and Joseph McNeil. (Photo © Greensboro News & Record, taken by staff photographer Jack Moebes. Used with permission)

The ICRCM also invokes both the monumental and the mundane in its promotional materials. A series of five posters, available on the ICRCM website, advertise the new museum with a unified aesthetic: all feature a single black and white photograph, infused with sepia tones and darkened at the edges to give the effect of aging newsprint. One poster includes a photograph of the 15-foot sculpture of the Greensboro Four that stands on the A&T campus, shot from a low angle. The text reads: “Young men must have been really strong in 1960. We’ve been standing on their shoulders ever since.” Below, in smaller print, it says: “Dignity has a price. And what young men and women endured igniting America’s sit-in movement required courage, sacrifice and commitment. It is their strength we commemorate. It is our gratitude we express. And our vow to never forget.” This poster visually presents the

³⁴ As *New York Times* reviewer Edward Rothstein puts it, “The [lunch counter] site is an authentic, half-century-old relic, a remnant of the mundane, the insignificant, the quaint.”

bodies of the four young men in an imposing, monumental form, and frames the acts of all those who sat in as heroic and history-making.

Another poster from the series, however, highlights a simple, more quotidian angle of the sit-ins. It features the iconic photograph of the four Greensboro students, snapped outside of Woolworth's by *Greensboro News & Record* photographer Jack Moebes after they exited the store on the first day. The text accompanying this image reads, "Before the march on Washington, Montgomery and Birmingham, there was the walk to Woolworth's." This message celebrates the small steps of a few individuals, making a simple request—they are walking, not marching. The store is specified, but neither the city nor the four individuals are named; in a sense, then, these bodies could be read as any young demonstrators, in any number of American cities, all of whom took direct action. In this respect, the ICRCM honors what Dwyer calls an "antimonumental impulse," and helps tourists understand the "mundane, socially-embedded condition of social change" (15).

Reflection/Enactment

Finally, the ICRCM compels visitors to both reflect and enact. The introductory exhibits—the "All men are created equal" scrim, the quick video history of slavery in the U.S., followed by the Hall of Shame—prompt solemn reflection. We look at and through screens, take in shocking images, introspect. Then, with the introduction of the Greensboro Four, we are invited to experience vicariously their planning session and mile-long walk from campus to downtown. Our docent explicitly said, "Let's reenact our own walk" as she guided the group down a long corridor painted with pale outlines of Greensboro storefronts. As we walked, Nita explained that the four young men walking that day were standing on the shoulders of many people, referring us to the images of Douglass, Truth, DuBois, Parks, and Gandhi. In a similar vein, outside the museum visitors and passersby can walk in the bronze footprints of the Greensboro Four engraved in the city sidewalk. A class of second graders visiting the ICRCM took turns stepping their own small feet into the imprints (Rowe "Class Learns" A2).³⁵ Other exhibits invite various forms of enactment: touching maps to trigger video, or entering a voting booth to discover questions from a literacy test given to Negroes rather than a proper panel of candidates running for office.

The centerpiece lunch counter room is a kind of liminal zone where museum-goers occupy a doubled, shifting position that bridges reflection and enactment. We cannot actually approach and sit in the seats, but we stand in relation to the counter as though we, too, might sit down and ask to be served.

³⁵ Jonelle Davis reports that a group of high school students from Washington, DC, also took turns stepping into the bronze footprints, which were installed in 1991.



figure 8: the lunch counter exhibit. (photo © Jeremy M. Lange. Used with permission)

Behind the counter, on the back wall above the bank of coffee pots, there are five shiny black video screens in which we see our own faces clearly reflected. Then a film reenactment begins, spread across the five screens; store patrons, including the young Greensboro Four, face us as they sit down to request service. This video has a theatrical aesthetic: the camera is static, and the actors play against a fixed black backdrop, so throughout the film, we can still see our own faces clearly reflected, above the heads of the actors. As we watch the video, we are now seeing from a doubled perspective: we physically face the counter, as if we were potential customers, but via the video screens, we come face-to-face with young men performing the sit-in, putting us in the position of the Woolworth's staff.³⁶

There's something dynamic and engaging here: the video performance brings the sit-ins to life, more so than the static counter alone could have alone. The doubled perspective prompted me to wonder—how would I have acted then, in either position? Would I have had the courage to join the sit-ins? What if I had been a Woolworth's waitress or dishwasher—what would I have said or done? What can I, must I, say or do *now*? The striking reflection of our entire tour group in the black screens above the lunch counter helped articulate 1960 to the present moment. We

³⁶ Available on the Eisterhold Associates website is a detailed explanation and diagram of the complex process of producing this effect. The firm developed a synchronized, multiple-camera recording system for multi-screen delivery, requiring careful choreography, resulting in a “you-are-there panorama, fitted into the lunch counter” (Eisterhold Associates, “Integrating Media” section).

see ourselves and each other now, throughout the video reenactment, ghostly forms hovering above the heads of the actors in the film. As we watch them, we literally look into our present selves as well. Other scholars have noted the transporting power of reflective surfaces at Civil Rights memory sites. In her analysis of the Civil Rights Monument in Birmingham, Carole Blair reads the convex black stone wall coated in cascading water as a screen that “refers us to our own context, asking us to look at ourselves and at what is happening around us in the here and now” (7). Tracy Davis makes a similar claim about an exhibit at the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis: “The glass reflects the video footage as well as our own images, so that we are now intermediate in the riot and the historicization. In this museum, we not only read, hear, and see the civil rights movement of the 1950s-1960s in action, we are put in its midst and challenged to do something within the bounds of the historical narrative” (26). Likewise, the ICRCM lunch counter exhibit puts museum-goers into the scene of the sit-ins, prompting a performance of public memory that merges reflection and enactment.

Conclusions

In his *New York Times* museum review published upon the ICRCM’s opening, Edward Rothstein writes, “The point, of course, is not to show a collection but *to share an experience*. In this the museum is fully successful. The taste of justified bitterness runs through it.” Rothstein’s experience, like mine, and like those of other visitors reported in local news articles, all suggest that a central strength of the ICRCM is its experiential, visceral impact. The museum’s exhibits give material form to the trauma of segregation, offering some tangible sense of what motivated the students who sat down, as well as the risks they faced. Rothstein goes on, however, to render two judgments with which I disagree: first, he claims that the ICRCM sanctifies and exaggerates the stature of the Greensboro Four, and suggests that instead, the museum should “stick with the mundane tone of the luncheonette exhibit.” Second, he asserts that “the museum is less intent on the movement’s successes (which should be made more evident) than on the existence of continuing and unresolved problems.” My analysis here leads me to draw quite the contrary conclusions.

Pace Rothstein, I found that the ICRCM resists the “great man” approach to history, and also complicates the consensus memory of the Movement. While the museum does mention some of the spectacular, nationally-recognized events of the movement, it puts them in a context of community organizing and shows how they were made possible by an expansive network of African American institutions, like churches and colleges. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s role is downplayed, and the museum explicitly recognizes the contributions of women and a wide variety of citizens working at the local level. The most obvious heroes of this particular site are the Greensboro Four, but the ICRCM stops short of lionizing them. There are not extensive biographies of the four men or any statues of them on site. The way that the ICRCM performs the events of February 1—through video reenactments, the

simulated walk from campus to downtown, the interactive lunch counter exhibit—celebrates the *act* of the sit-ins more than the specific agents who performed it. The act of the four was powerful, and the place of the Greensboro lunch counter is significant, because others soon joined, and thousands more repeated the acts elsewhere—“spreading like wildfire.” In many respects, the ICRCM captures the spirit of a black student quoted in *Diary of a Sit-In*, who said: “I myself desegregated a lunch counter, not somebody else, not some big man, not some powerful man, but little me. I walked the picket line and I sat in and the walls of segregation toppled” (quoted in Proudfoot, xxiii).

Like several other Civil Rights memorial sites, the ICRCM presents the Movement as the story of a collective struggle ending in triumph. The museum honors the sacrifices by scores of citizens who were arrested and jailed, and commemorates those who died with its “Wall of Remembrance.” White supremacy and Jim Crow are embodied in historical artifacts, presented as “alive and well” back then, but effectively vanquished today. The museum’s closing exhibit is titled “A *Changed World*”—articulated in the past tense, suggesting that the black freedom struggle in America has ended, victorious, and that the 1960s non-violent struggle has inspired activists around the globe. There is little reference to present-day racism, socioeconomic disparity, and work left to be done in the United States. Rothstein, however, curiously suggests that the ICRCM focuses not enough on the Movement’s successes, and too much on “continuing and unresolved problems.”

I would critique the museum for the converse reason: that the final exhibit could more powerfully underscore the ongoing need for activism not by shifting to a global scene, but by highlighting instead, or in addition, the continuing and unresolved problems that exist in communities and institutions throughout the US. There was a lost opportunity to note that bigotry and racially motivated violence didn’t disappear overnight when the “Whites Only” signs came down, and that communities in Guilford County, throughout the South, and across the nation are still are grappling with various forms of discrimination and struggling to negotiate race relations.³⁷ The celebratory “Changed World” ending point of the ICRCM conforms to the tendency of Civil Rights memorial sites to celebrate the Movement’s victories in terms of a progress narrative, at the expense of addressing contemporary problems.³⁸ As Victoria

³⁷ In Greensboro, for instance, a band of Ku Klux Klan and neo-Nazis attacked a civil rights and labor organizing meeting in 1979, resulting in five deaths; none of the accused were convicted in criminal court. The site of this shooting remains unmarked, which reflects “the uneven treatment that the Movement receives on the cultural landscape when the local ‘present’ is too controversial for museums to handle” (Dwyer and Alderman, plate 64). See Jovanovic, Steger, Symonds and Nelson for an in-depth study of the Greensboro Truth and Community Reconciliation Project, a grassroots organization created to repair the fabric of community relations in the wake of the 1979 shootings.

³⁸ See Victoria Gallagher’s work on several Civil Rights memorial sites, as well as Bernard Armada’s two essays on the long-standing protest by Jacqueline Smith outside of the National Civil rights Museum in Memphis, TN.

Gallagher writes, “The impulse toward amnesia in the name of progress that characterizes discourses of memory suggests that black experiences and history are acceptable to the extent that they emphasize problems of the past in terms of progress rather than current failings” (“Memory and Reconciliation” 316). So, while the ICRCM’s archive of exhibits illustrates how nonviolent direct action spread to other movements around the world, it does not make clear explicit connections between the freedom struggle of the 1960s and contemporary injustices in America today.³⁹ That said, museumgoers interacting and performing memory (as the spoken, embodied repertoire) may indeed forge these connections for themselves.⁴⁰

How we remember the Civil Rights Movement remains critical, particularly given recent attempts to appropriate the Movement’s legacy that strip the struggle of its radical edge and divorce its symbols from their material context. The ICRCM does important work in ensuring this context is not forgotten. Operating in an archival mode, the museum preserves material artifacts from Jim Crow, displays haunting images in the “Hall of Shame,” and honors the many lives lost for the cause. A limitation of the archive, however, is that it too neatly contains trauma in the past, and fails to draw attention to problems that persist in the present. At the same time, the ICRCM tells the triumphant story of the sit-ins through spoken, embodied performances that belong to the repertoire. By inviting visitors to identify with the student protestors and to reenact their journey, the ICRCM celebrates grassroots organizing and the activist potential of the ordinary citizen. I have endeavored to show here that *both* the archive *and* the repertoire can productively work in concert, and that critics should attend to performance in their studies of public memory sites.⁴¹

Franklin McCain, one of surviving members of the Greensboro Four, remarked

³⁹ According to Gerard Eisterhold, the museum design initially included plans for an exhibit covering the post-1968 period in the US. However, spatial limitations and budget constraints ultimately led to this section being folded into the final “Changed World” exhibit.

⁴⁰ For instance, Ryan Price, a Drake University sophomore traveling with the 2011 Student Freedom Rides tour, narrates his experience in the ICRCM’s Hall of Shame in a PBS blog post. Price describes the gruesome images, and the tour guide’s explanations. As the group was about to move on, Price recounts, “the thick silence was interrupted as Rip Patton (original rider) cleared his throat, ‘Hey.’ The group paused and [the] guide said, ‘Yes?’ ‘Hey, wait,’ he said, clearly choking up. We all waited as the strongest, most respected man in the room gathered his ability to speak. Moments turned to seconds as the air thickened. ‘There was a lynching in December of 2010, December. That’s all.’”

⁴¹ Writing about 9/11, Joshua Gunn argues that proper mourning requires the archival mode, whereas “the repertoire represents the manifold ways in which the object of mourning cannot be grieved—melancholia” (100). This may be the case for some intensely traumatic events, but the Civil Rights Movement is another kind of story: while the nation needs to grieve the shameful past of Jim Crow, brutal violence, and lives lost, Americans seek to remember, celebrate, and emulate the actions of those who sat-in. The ICRCM presents the Movement not as something from which citizens should detach, but rather as something they must engage and embody, which is facilitated by the performative repertoire.

after touring the ICRCM: “This (museum) causes me to take an inventory of myself, and I’m forced to ask what have I done lately. I’m hoping this museum will issue this same challenge to others” (quoted in McLaughlin, “Five Decades” A1). In many respects, I think it does. By mobilizing both the archive and the repertoire, Greensboro’s ICRCM compels us to navigate tensions between foreground and background, authenticity and mediation, the monumental and the mundane, reflection and enactment; as we do so, we participate in a performance that positions us not only as spectators but also as actors on the public stage of national memory.

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Additional Resources and Acknowledgements

International Civil Rights Center & Museum:

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Museum Founders: Melvin "Skip" Alston & Earl F. Jones.
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New York Times slideshow, "Center of Change" (February 1, 2010):

http://www.nytimes.com/slideshow/2010/02/01/arts/design/20100201_MUSEUM_SLIDESHOW_index.html

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Website: news-record.com

Sit-in website: sitins.com



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