Creating an Interpretative, Educational, and Commemorative Site on the Heritage of Cotton Pickers in the Mississippi Delta

Dissertation Proposal

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Abstract

Interpreting the cultural and economic impact of the cotton pickin’ experiences since Reconstruction in the American South few scholars attempt without trepidation. At too many historic sites and museums the interpretation of cotton pickers is still inadequately presented within the larger discourse surrounding race, racism, and national identity. Furthermore, most narratives collected in works of scholarship have been examined, but not to the extent that this document presents in terms of the historical belief systems that enabled forgetfulness and neglect. Why are the lives of the tenant farmers, day laborers and sharecroppers so poorly represented, thus disregarded at historical sites, monuments and museums? And, what were the ramifications of such few representations? Only by examining more voices—both elite and non-elite—within the context of new and existing scholarship on the Mississippi Delta, cotton, and African American life can the whole story of cotton pickers in the Delta be understood, and interpreted for the purpose of education, and commemorated in certain forms as expressions of cultural tourism. This dissertation addresses in particular how one African American community in the Delta—Mound Bayou, Mississippi--approached this chasm through its history, their cotton legacy and cultural heritage preservationist efforts as instruments for education,
empowerment, and economic development. Thereby, giving credence to the need to create the Cotton Pickers of America National Memorial in Mound Bayou and to offer new forms of historical evidence, methodologies, and analyses.

Central Theme and Purpose

For many years historical sites and monuments have been criticized for biased and exclusionary practices that marginalize or silence the historical presence of its cotton-picking laborers, particularly the African Americans (e.g., Nives, and Alexander, 2008; Eichstedt and Small, 2002; McPherson, 2003; Shackel, 2003; Leon and Piatt, 1989; Gable, Handler, and Lawson 1992; Rahier and Hawkins, 1999). The question remains, why are the lives of the tenant farmers, day laborers and sharecroppers so poorly represented, and or marginalized at historical sites, monuments and museums? This is a curriculum question that demands further investigation into the considerations for interpreting public memory and history in the Mississippi Delta.

For more than 100 years, tall white classical columns topped with stalwart Confederate soldiers have been the history monuments of choice in the American South. As David Goldfield reminds us in *Still Fighting the Civil War* (2002), these monuments are everywhere, from battlefields to museums to public squares. The myth of the Old South has dominated public memory in the South for so long, it seems near impossible to imagine any other sort of monument, or even a counter-narrative that might start the public dialogue of what the South was, is, and could be.

No place is this more true than Mississippi Delta, the region that historian James Cobb memorably called “The Most Southern Place on Earth” in a book with those words
as the title. There is more than historical narrative to define this most southern place. The Mississippi Delta’s image is reflected literally, figuratively, spiritually, and musically in the material culture and the rich lives and diverse expressions of its past and current residents.1 “You can tell a great deal about a country or a people by what they deem important enough to remember, what they build monuments to celebrate, and what graces the walls of their museums,” as one historian put it, “Yet I would argue that we learn even more about a country by what it chooses to forget,”2 such as the forgotten or marginalized role of cotton pickers in the region’s history.3

New political realities and more inclusive understanding of Southern history have combined in the last decade to create a public-driven process in the Mississippi Delta that challenges the prevailing narratives symbolized by those tall classical monuments. The process is about establishing a monument in concrete, stone, and steel about cotton pickers—enslaved Africans and later African American and white sharecroppers who carried out the back-breaking work of building the Cotton South from the nineteenth century to the last decades of the twentieth century.

As early as 1840, the United States was producing over 60 percent of the world's cotton. The economic boom in the cotton South attracted migrants, built up wealth among the free inhabitants, encouraged capitalization of investments like railroads, international shipping, and facilitated territorial expansion, with the Delta being one of the last regions

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joining this process of regional change. Cotton also built up domestic capital, attracted foreign investment, and contributed to the industrial growth of the North, particularly New York. Cotton in a very real sense was the fabric of America.

Interpreting the cultural and economic impact of the “cotton pickin’” culture in the Mississippi Delta presents a challenge few scholars take on without trepidation. Yet, scholars from historian Nan Woodruff to geographer Charles Aiken have explored the post-bellum South, analyzing the planter society and even noting the sharecroppers’ significant presence and contributions to the region’s economy and culture. But the many books, articles, and dissertations have done little to dent the public memory of the 19th and early 20th century South—that one depicted in so many novels, movies, and historic sites of the gracious white families and their docile and ignorant “servants.”

Public memory is defined as “a body of beliefs and ideas about the past that help a public or society understand both its past and its present, and, by implication, its future.”

No true scholar of southern culture, agriculture, or economy would doubt that cotton was King in the South, especially in the fertile Mississippi Delta. Nor would they question the pivotal role played by African American, Mexican, and white sharecroppers in the post-Civil War years of making that crop profitable and successful. But, in the Mississippi Delta until fairly recent times, that “public or society” represented by the majority African American population had little influence in the depiction and land-

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marking of public memory.⁶

This dissertation addresses in particular how one African American community in the Delta—Mound Bayou, Mississippi--has addressed this gap as an issue of history, of empowerment, and of economic development. The drive and determination centered in this community to host a national memorial to cotton pickers speaks to the material power of monuments, as addressed by an array of scholars from Ed Dwight to Dolores Hayden to Thomas J. Schlereth to James Horton. It also speaks to the recognition of heritage tourism as economic development for the rural south as long as the storylines ring “authentic,” to both resident and visitor alike. It also speaks to the need for an expanded public memory that can be gained from oral histories from Delta residents because only through expanded dialogue can one achieve the local social and cultural investment necessary for a sustainable project. Finally, since the region is already home to a federally-designated National Heritage Area, multiple National Register districts and properties, and numerous state and local heritage parks and sites, it powerfully speaks to the navigation between government agencies and interest groups that public historians and communities must achieve together for the project to meet its potential.

Why Mound Bayou as the focus of the study? The town of Mound Bayou, Mississippi has been an oasis of African American identity and empowerment since its creation, July 12, 1887. It is one of the Nation’s first all African American township to form post-Reconstruction; and the second to be incorporated in America, on February 23, 1898. (Some argue the third after Brooklyn, IL the oldest town incorporated by African

Americans in the United States, whose motto is "Founded in 1829, by Chance, Sustained until July 8, 1873, when it became incorporated by the Courage of their convictions"; and Eatonville, FL, Incorporated on August 15, 1887). It was in “Pursuit of a Dream” as history professor Janet Sharp Hermann discusses in her book of the same name. Hermann’s narrative is the story of a near utopian community that stemmed from the Davis Bend plantation owned by Joseph and Jefferson Davis the President of the Confederacy. As Hermann reveals the Davis Bend plantation was managed by two enslaved Africans Benjamin Montgomery and his son Isaiah Montgomery. The land and the stories have inspired University of Illinois Professor Matthew Holden and other trailblazers and writers for generations. Professors, musicians, visual artists, entrepreneurs, migrant workers, and politicians recognized Mound Bayou as the Jewel of the Delta. Like the down home blues of Robert Johnson, Howlin’ Wolf, Elmore James and Sun Thomas, the Mound Bayou’s landscape retained its raw, soulful, sensory, and isolated-earthly ethos.

Then there is the remarkable story of the cotton industry in Mound Bayou. Cotton was, above all, a crucial factor in its economic development. But cotton cultivation was also a source of conflict (racial, sectional, and between social classes) before the Civil War. After the war, the Montgomerys purchased Davis Bend and continued to raise

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cotton and become very prosperous, only to lose the land back to Jefferson Davis, who after being accused of treason was not tried and returned to the plantation after two years. After years of unsuccessful legal battles with the Davis family, Isaiah Montgomery, Benjamin Greene (cousin), and twelve pioneers from Davis Bend, negotiated a land deal to acquire the swampland we now call Mound Bayou. In spring of 1887 the land purchase was made from Louisville, New Orleans, and Texas Railroad (L, NO & T), a new rail line between Memphis and Vicksburg, in the Yazoo Delta Northwest Mississippi.

Mound Bayou established itself as the section of the Mississippi Delta with the “premium cotton.” For many years all planters in the surrounding areas would ship their cotton from Mound Bayou station, because it yielded higher prices on the market. It became a land of promise for African Americans. Encapsulated in this “promise” were self-help, race pride, economic opportunity, and social justice, in a self-segregated community designed for blacks to have minimum contact with whites until integration was a viable option to African American freedom. Mound Bayou grew to have a U.S. Post Office, six churches, two banks, several stores, a hospital and a medical clinic, several public and private schools, public swimming pool and a zoo. Its economy depended primarily on the production of cotton, but also timber, corn, and being a prominent agent for the L, NO & T Railroad.10

Sourcing the Narrative: Scholars and the Secondary Literature on the Delta

To many twentieth century scholars the words Delta, cotton, and Blacks were

almost inseparable. In 1935, David Cohn, a Delta native and a firm believer in white supremacy wrote, “Cotton is more than a crop in the Delta, it is a form of mysticism. It is a religion and a way of life…all dependent upon Black labor.”\textsuperscript{11} Indeed, even today cotton is commercialized as “the fabric of our lives.” Hortense Powdermaker’s study “After Freedom” offers a stark depiction of the Mississippi Delta town of Indianola (approximately 40 miles from Mound Bayou). In her groundbreaking portrayal, Powdermaker describes a world structured around cotton production. “The system itself was profoundly corrupt, a form of life Blacks repeatedly said was only marginally better than slavery.”\textsuperscript{12} Then came Wilbur Joseph Cash, who after writing \textit{The Mind of the South}, in 1941, felt he had to leave the South in fear of retribution and subsequently committed suicide only months after the book’s release. The assessment of Cash and other early historians of the Delta were defensive because of the North’s offensive and moral superiority about slavery and civil rights.

Cash and the others opened the door to serious study of the region, resulting today in an extensive literature on the Cotton South, from a range of historians who would rank among the finest of their particular generation. Valuable secondary accounts for this dissertation include W.E.B. DuBois’, \textit{Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept} (1940) that offers insight into DuBois’ attitudes and writings, which trace the historical development and concern with the problem of race; William Percy, in the \textit{Lanterns on the Levee} (1941) who was raised in Greenville, Mississippi, within the shelter of old traditions, and southern aristocracy. Percy in the best sense bridges the interval between the semi-feudal South of the 1800s and the

anxious South of the early 1940s. It is the Percy family who’s given credit for forming the first sharecropping arrangement in the Mississippi Delta; C. Vann Woodward’s *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (1955) is according to Martin Luther King, Jr "the historical Bible of the civil rights movement." It does indeed offer a clear and illuminating analysis of the history of Jim Crow laws, by presenting evidence that segregation in the South dated only to the 1890s. *The Burden of Southern History* (1960), which is another of Woodward’s classic books addresses the interrelated themes of southern identity, southern distinctiveness, and the strains of irony that characterize much of the South's historical experience; Amira Baraka (LeRoi Jones), offers a brilliantly creative counter narrative in *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (1963); James W. Silver, *Mississippi: The Closed Society* (1963) is a book about an insurrection in modern America, more particularly, about the social and historical background of that insurrection on the Ole Miss campus; Gilbert Fite, *Cotton Fields No More: Southern Agriculture 1865-1980* (1984) offers a general history of southern farming since the end of slavery; Neil R. McMillen’s, *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow* (1990) is the story of white supremacy in Mississippi in the late 19th and early 20th centuries that allows us to look at the real effects of a Jim Crow South; Clifton L. Taulbert’s, *Once Upon a Time When We Were Colored* (1989) is truly as authentic a tale as they come. It is a personal narrative that balances much of the secondary research and historiography on southern history; James C. Cobb’s, *The Most Southern Place on Earth: the Mississippi Delta and the Roots of Regional Identity* (1994) is one of the corner stones of this study. Cobb is able to outline in very clear terms the cotton obsessed, Negro obsessed, Mississippi Delta, where antebellum conditions and traditions are still
preserved and readily available to observe and study; Charles Payne in *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (1995) traces the relationships and linkages between different generations of heroes (AKA troublemakers) in Mississippi; and thereby shows us that the story of freedom and equality begins with, and is carried by, people who tried to change their communities, not their nation; Maghan Keita in *Race and the Writing of History: Riddling the Sphinx* (2000) examines the controversial legacy of writing history in America and offers a new perspective on the challenge of building new historiographies and epistemologies. This book offers new thought on how ideas about race and racism have shaped the stories we tell about ourselves to others; Nan Woodruff’s, *American Congo: The African American Freedom Struggle in the Delta* (2003) shows how the freedom fighters of the 1960s would draw on this half-century tradition of protest, by sharecroppers in the Mississippi Delta and Arkansas, thus expanding our standard notions of the civil rights movement and illuminating a neglected but significant slice of the American black experience; James C. Giesen’s, *Boll Weevil Blues: Cotton, Myth, and Power in the American South* (2011) brings together cultural, environmental, and agricultural narratives in a novel and allows us to reconsider how important cotton production was in the making of the modern American South; and, in Jeannie Whayne’s, *Delta Empire: Lee Wilson and the Transformation of Agriculture in the New South* (2011), I am able to trace the transition from the labor-intensive sharecropping and tenancy system to the capital-intensive plantations of the post-World War II era.

The body of literature on public memory is more recent but also extensive. Valuable contextual studies for this dissertation include: David Glassberg, *Sense of*
History: The Place of the Past in American Life (2001); Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity (1994), edited by John R. Gillis; and Memory and American History (1990), edited by David Thelen. Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History (1995) remains a key work in the study of the “unheard” voices in history. The link between public memory and public history is defined in Diane F. Britton’s article, “Public History and Public Memory” The Public Historian 19 (1997). The history of history writing plays a vital role in the consideration of how historical societies perpetuated the past. Several works by Michael Kammen, most notably Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture (1991) and In the Past Lane: Historical Perspectives on the American Culture (1997), provide a fine insight into how social memory can be distorted to “justify” present circumstances. Along the same lines is Roy Rosenzweig’s The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life (1998).

Another body of scholarship that informs the research and analysis of this dissertation comes from studies linked to the public history field. These studies include: Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory (2006), edited by Francis X. Blouin, Jr. and William G. Rosenberg; Richard J. Cox’s compilation entitled Lester J. Cappon and the Relationship of History, Archives, and Scholarship (2004); and John Lewis Gaddis, The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past. In addition, histories written about historical sites and public art installations, particularly those of monument developer Ed Dwight must be consulted for comparative purposes.

Sourcing the Narrative: Primary Sources and Voices Not Heard
Indeed, historical plantation sites and museums have been criticized for biased and exclusionary interpretive practices that marginalize or silence the presence of African Americans. However, cotton pickers did leave accounts of their lives: those by Nate Shaw and Hosea Hudson, while problematic, are the most famous. Numerous other sources of cotton-picking experiences exist in photography. Therefore, I will consider Walker Evans’ surviving historical landscapes, the oral histories of current residents, even poetic narratives, or theatrical structures, as with many of August Wilson’s plays and Zora Neal Hurston’s revolutionary work that documented the everyday lives of many farm workers throughout the south. As for sources of how the dominant white class controlled the narrative of cotton, African American life, and the Delta, one needs to go no farther than the popular novels and movies of the mid-twentieth century [*Gone with the Wind* (1936 for the novel, 1939 for the movie). The twenty-first century brings and Oscar Award-winning film *Twelve Years a Slave*, and book of the same name by Solomon Northrup to consider new interpretive images and narratives. Images of primitive, uninformed, dependant souls generally in need of supervision and guidance are commonplace in the popular literature. Indeed, so powerful is this false image of the Delta, cotton, and African Americans, few think otherwise, and do not lift the veil to see the reality under the numbing stereotypes, as ably discussed by Tara McPherson in her *Reconstructing Dixie: Race, Gender, and Nostalgia in the Imagined South* (2003).

Indeed, the research of Jennifer L. Eichstedt and Stephen Small finds that McPherson’s “Imagined South” still holds sway at historic sites that purport to interpret the experience and legacy of slavery. The interpretation at too many sites is still
inadequately presented within the larger discourse surrounding race, racism, and national identity. The vast majority of slavery historic sites construct narratives of history that valorize a white elite of the pre-emancipation South and trivialize the experience of slavery for both enslaved people and their enslavers.\(^{13}\)

Furthermore, most narratives collected in works of scholarship have been examined, but not to the extent that this document presents in terms of the historical and social-cultural belief systems that enabled forgetfulness and neglect. Who recollected what stories and from whom? And by what means were things gathered, verified and supplemented? But, my most pressing concern is as Eichstedt and Small indicates, what are the prohibitory reasons as to why the stories recalled were interpreted with no sensitivity, or regard to the experiences of others, particularly African Americans? **Essentially, why are the lives of the tenant farmers, day laborers and sharecroppers so poorly represented and disregarded at historical sites, monuments and museums?**

**And, what are the social ramifications of these limited interpretations?** Only by examining more voices—both elite and non-elite—within the context of new and existing scholarship on the Delta, cotton, and African American life can the whole story of cotton pickers in Mound Bayou and the surrounding Mississippi Delta communities be understood, interpreted, and commemorated at the proposed Cotton Pickers of America National Memorial.

More traditional sources are also available: newspapers, pamphlets, speeches, lectures, correspondence, diaries, legislative petitions, and public acts. The key source of information will be the Mississippi Archives and History files 1865-1965. The files in

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MAH include minutes of meetings not only from the Sovereignty Commission, but also of the White Citizens Council, the Delta Council and the Mississippi legislature. The meeting’s minutes provide a first-hand glimpse into the organizational structure of deliberate political and social exclusion and include other documents pertinent to this issue and the white supremacy movement. Because most of the MAH files pertain to twentieth-century matters, there will be, however, enough material for me to flesh out a good idea of how planters and the social elite surrounding Mound Bayou operated during the 1900s. These essays shall record the “story” of the rise of the Cotton Kingdom and should be put within the context of other research pertinent to the cotton industry.

Then there is the material culture still evident in Mound Bayou, from landscapes, to buildings, to sites, to traditions, to artifacts, to crafts, to stories, and to songs. As recently argued in the volume of essays, “We Shall Independent Be: African American Place Making and the Struggle to Claim Space in the United States (2008), “everyday, but less visible, spaces such as cemeteries, courtrooms, dance halls, and public transport provide valid sources for socio-historical research” (p. 2) for the African American experience.

**How does this dissertation engage with current scholarship?**

As the above listing of major secondary sources indicates, the Mississippi Delta has received scholarship attention from the mid-twentieth century to today. This study relies on that scholarship to consider in particular how Mound Bayou is taking steps to address the gap between history, landmarks, and public memory that has given us a
landscape full of Confederate memorials but nary a place that encompasses the cotton picker experience in the Delta. Why has the community chosen a monument to address this chasm? What do they hope to achieve by monument building—both as a source of identity and history but also as a revenue source through cultural heritage tourism. In the path-breaking book, “We Shall Independent Be,” editor Angel David Nieves asserts: “past attempts to enslave and suppress African Americans have been met with collective resistance, spurring African Americans to offer up new strategies for redefining self-identity through their own histories and narratives.” (p. 2) Building the Cotton Pickers of America National Memorial in Mound Bayou is part of the process, as Nieves puts it, to use “physical, social, and intellectual spaces created by African Americans [to] offer us new forms of historical evidence, methodologies, and analyses.” (p. 2) This volume of essays serves as the foundational basis of this dissertation. Like those essayists in “We Shall Independent Be,” I wish to assess recent African American “institution-building efforts as the cultural markers of a new race history and the coded signifiers of resistance to oppression.” (p. 5)

What will be the relationship of your dissertation to your professional residency and professional development as a public historian?

The body of work of monument developer and artist Ed Dwight includes over 118 monuments and public art installations dedicated to American history. The works include the beginning phases of the Martin Luther King Memorial on the Washington, DC Plaza, the Medgar Evers statue, Harriet Tubman monument, and the tribute to the Cotton
Pickers of America complex in the Mississippi Delta. The essential works of this renowned developer are the focus of *The Ed Dwight Method: A Handbook for Community-Based Historic Monuments*, a project whose publication is sponsored by the MTSU Center for Historic Preservation. Our intend is to offer a brief, but comprehensive, retrospective of Ed Dwight work as didactic tools for preservationist, interpreters, students and disseminators of historical narrative and culture, which includes folks who just want to build a monumental site in their community, but are afraid to ask “how do we do it?”

The projects of Ed Dwight are supplemented by materials that include a formulaic outline of best practices and offer guidance for developing public art projects that range in scale from a singular site, as that of the Medgar Evers’ statue on Alcorn University’s campus; to my project, *Cotton Pickers of America Monument Complex and Cotton Kingdom Historical site* that will be housed on a twenty-acre cotton field in Mound Bayou, Mississippi.

Many studies done on Delta’s rich alluvial soil and the viciously over worked labor of the millions of enslaved Africans, European, Mexican and Asian immigrants provide motivation for my research, on both the Handbook and the Monument. For nearly two centuries, Delta planters cleared the land to grow a crop that fueled the number one industry in America, for nearly two hundred years with plenty of help and financing, from the North, to fortify what is known as Wall Street. The risky endeavor, of cotton speculation paid off big time, for some, out performing all other industries combined from the late eighteenth century and well into the twentieth century. The story
about is magical product cotton that gave rise to today’s American Empire is fascinating:
on a multitude of levels.

When considering the economic, social and cultural implications of the cotton
industry my research will hopefully reveal remarkable characteristics that attributed to
America’s success. While many of the narratives exist in museums and archives around
the country, many more are seen in the faces of the people who reside in the Mississippi
Delta today. The cotton culture of Mississippi Delta and the untold public memories are
my charge for ongoing professional development.

I am also afforded the benefit of the National Park Service’s assessment that none
of the current research has interpreted the complex mosaic of America’s growth and
development from the perspective of the non-elite cotton pickers.14 This fact alone
makes the protracted focus of my research in the Mississippi Delta a uniquely rich
opportunity that will continue to ripen for many decades to follow.

The dissertation also will open discussion about the role of heritage tourism as a
source of economic development and cultural enrichment for Mound Bayou and the Delta
at large. I see that the field of heritage tourism is one where public historians need to
take leadership roles, without prejudice. The opportunity for financial and material
culture investments in the heritage assets of the Cotton Kingdom exists here, in the still
fertile alluvial soils of the Mississippi Delta. The potential for the great (financial,
spiritual and emotional) returns still exists in the unmet needs of the people, the “silent
voices,” as it were, who are literally stuck in the Mississippi mud, due to economic,

14 National Park Services, “History and Culture of the Lower Mississippi Delta, 11/2013: Draft Heritage
Study and Environmental Assessment,” National Park Services,
social and political injustices, thereby rendered unable to move...anywhere. If one were to measure the economic contribution of the no-wage (slavery) and extremely low waged (sharecropper) labor, we would at that point realize an incalculable profit that mirrors a debt that could never be repaid. However. Dr Thomas Durant in his paper “The Relevance And Applicability of The Marxian Theory of Capitalism To American Plantation Slavery,” cites the American Farmer magazine’s estimation that a single slave could tend six acres of cotton and eight acres of corn. The prime cotton picker was a healthy 16 to 30 year old male, who could pick 500 or more pounds of cotton per day, which could generate $53,280 per year. A plantation with 50 prime slaves could generate a gross income of 2.7 million, a small fortune in the early 1800s."¹⁵ I owe my scholarship, my due diligence, and my integrity as a public historian, to the continuous work of preserving and protecting the legacy of those workers who made the Delta “King” and helped make the United States of America the economic super power it is today.

"Until historians adequately explore the...forces that operated on the...community there could be no truly adequate histories of the...life of the people within that community."

Neil R. McMillen

Creating A Historic Site For Southern Cotton Pickers: Heritage, Monuments, And Public Memory In The Mississippi Delta

Chapter Outline

Chapter 1: Heritage, Monuments, and Public Memory in the Mississippi Delta

This opening chapter will discuss the themes of how the current cultural landscape is defined by monuments that depict only a portion of the region’s history and that marginalizes or ignores totally the importance of cotton pickers to the region’s history and culture. It will explore the process of creating the dominant public memory in the region and end by introducing how African Americans created Mound Bayou as a historical and cultural oasis in the region, thus laying the foundation for developing a counter-narrative to “Gone with the Wind” images of the dominant culture.

Chapter 2: Mound Bayou as part of the Most Southern Place on Earth

This chapter will be the dissertation’s longest, and may need to be divided into two separate chronological chapters. The chapter will explore the creation of the cotton industry in Mound Bayou and the creation of the separate African American community of Mound Bayou, and what that separation meant in the Jim Crow South. It looks deeply in the process of harvesting the cotton crop, and how that changed with the introduction of mechanization in the twentieth century. It also will address the issue of sharecropper agency in the Cotton Kingdom, considering the question of labor, assessing a fair distribution of proceeds to sharecroppers and tenant farmers, and considering the issue of Sweat Equity Investment, and what that may mean to the public memory of the region.
Chapter 3: Mound Bayou: Missing Voices, Missing Places

Picking up on the theme of public memory, this chapter explores the various oral histories and other public programming projects of the author over the past five years and what these voices add to the narrative of the region’s history and culture. Hearing those authentic voices is central to the strategy of the Cotton Pickers of America National Memorial that it just not be a gleaming monument, but also a repository of what residents thought mattered to themselves, their families, and their communities. This chapter will be an important component to the dissertation’s overall argument as to the process of and value of African American agency and place making.

Chapter 4: The Pursuit of National Designation

The process of creating more inclusive narratives within the preserved landscape of the Mississippi Delta has been an interest of the National Park Service for over a generation. This chapter will review that federal process over the last twenty years, and discuss how the community push for the Cotton Pickers of America National Memorial evolved in conjunction with the discussion and debate over the scope and themes of the Mississippi Delta National Heritage Area, which was designated by President Barack Obama and urging of U.S. Congressman Bennie Thompson in 2009.

This chapter will also focus on the legislation that determines a National Park and gives credence to the significance of establishing a National Historic Park, in Mound Bayou dedicated to the Cotton Pickers of America and an interpretive history of the Cotton Kingdom. I will also discuss the key themes and content of that interpretive
history, while addressing stakeholders, communities, outreach as well as the process of securing land and funding from the National Park Service.

Chapter 5: Empowering Communities in the Delta and Beyond: A Monument Building Handbook

The final chapter will discuss the process and utility of The Ed Dwight Method a Handbook for Community-based Historic Monument/Memorial Projects and Public Art Installations developed during my PhD residency. And more specifically how communities can use the Handbook as their own tools of place making and as part of a more community-centered approach to defining agency and creating heritage assets for heritage tourism programs. This chapter folds the residency into the dissertation and by producing a product that addresses community needs and its agency it helps meet my expectations and goals as a public historian.

Conclusion

This final section will be a brief discussion on how this dissertation fits into the African American place making model of Nieves and Alexander, as well as its contribution to the public history tradition of merging scholarship, practice, and engagement.

Bibliography

A comprehensive list of primary and secondary sources used in the dissertation.

GOALS:

• To create a finished Handbook by June, 2014
• Prepare PhD Dissertation Proposal by March 2014
• Write Dissertation, Fall/Winter 2014
• Prepare for defense
• Graduate, May 2015

Phase I       Sept-Oct., 2013

• Planning and research -- weekly consultancy with Dr Stevenson—COMPLETED

• Assess primary research priorities and begin secondary reading list.
  COMPLETED

• Conduct research into Papers at Indianola/Greenville/Greenwood/Cleveland
  Public Libraries—PARTIALLY COMPLETED

Phase II       November 2013

• Field visits to Denver w/ Ed Dwight—biweekly with Dr Stevenson—
  COMPLETED

• Secondary source reading, Fall residency, continued. COMPLETE.

Phase III      December 2013- February 2014

• Assess Dwight Field visit--COMPLETED

• Draft booklet outline—COMPLETED

• Secondary source reading, Fall residency, continued. COMPLETE.
• Primary source investigation, Spring residency.

**Phase IV March-June 2014**

• Research at Mississippi Archives and History (March 2014)
• Primary source investigation, Spring residency, continued.
• Application for Provost’s Writing Fellowship (April 2014)--DENIED
• Ph.D. proposal defense and portfolio review.
• Finalize primary source research, visit Mississippi Civil Rights Museum and Cane River Creole National Historical Park, NPS, LA (April-May 2014)
• Draft individual chapter outlines. (June 2014)
• Submit booklet for Center for Historic Preservation Review and Approval before printing (PDF and visual file)--500 copies printed

**Phase IV August-December 2014**

• Distribution of Handbook
• Draft chapter 1 (August 2014)
• Draft chapters 2. (September 2014)
• Draft chapters 3-4. (November 2014)
• Draft chapters 5 and conclusion. (January 2015)

**Phase IV January - April 2015**

• Revisions and preparation for graduation
Working Bibliography


**Articles and Federal Documents:**


Other Secondary Material


**Identified Oral History Interviews:**

- Dr. Jerry Mc Mulligan, Book Festival Producer, Los Angeles, CA
- Mrs. Blandye D. Brooks, 101-year old retired school teacher, Greenville, MS
- Mr. James Polk, 102-year old former sharecropper, Indianola, MS
- Mr. Leon Slack, 102 year old former sharecropper, Greenville, MS
- Mrs. Robert Terrell, 86-year old former sharecropper, Hollandale, MS
- Mrs. Bonnie Turnipseed, 83-year old former cotton picker, Sacramento, CA
- Ms. Helen Lillian Jones, 77-year old former cotton picker, Bolivar County, MS
- Dr Eulah Peterson, landowner in Mound Bayou, MS
- Mr. Darryl Johnson, cotton gin owner and Mayor of Mound Bayou, MS
- Dr Elaine Baker, retired teacher, Mound Bayou, MS
- Mr. B.B. King, blues singer, Berclair, MS
- Women in Agriculture, Land owners, Mound Bayou, MS
- Mr. Robert Terrell, Former Water Boy, Indianola, MS

**OTHER RESOURCES:**

- Center for Popular Music (Dale Cockrell—reading list)
- Culter, E. B. (southern historian of the Dunning School)
- O'Donovan, Susan. Sharecropper Agency in the Delta: (Sweat Equity Investment)
- Mississippi Archives and History, Jackson, MS
- Indianola Public Library, Indianola, MS

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PRESENTED IN FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY DEGREE IN PUBLIC HISTORY FROM MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY