

# The American South: From Civil Rights Struggle to Civil Rights Tourism

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**In recent years the American South has become the platform for an authenticity seeking tourism industry. Former sites of civil rights action have been revived and transformed into tourist attractions. The following paper introduces the notion of so-called civil rights tourism and presents a critical analysis of current sites of civil rights commemoration throughout the American South.**

Sixty years ago a political and social movement reached its climax: The U.S. civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s against racial discrimination marks a crucial period in American history. Racial discrimination, segregation and violence against African Americans were part of daily-life especially in the Southern states (Boyer 840–44). The African American plight began as early as the seventeenth century in the form of institutionalized slavery and continued up the twentieth century when Jim Crow laws legally enforced racism (Boyer 68–72, 336; Davidson 431). Through intimidation and terror, such as lynchings and poll taxes, white supremacy in the South successfully deprived African Americans of their right to vote (Boyer 600–01).

In the 1950s and 1960s, a growing number of African Americans began resisting white supremacy. Rosa Parks initiated the beginning of a one-year-long bus boycott led by Martin Luther King, Jr., with about fifty thousand black participants in Montgomery, Alabama. The boycotts led to the Supreme Court decision that buses had to be desegregated (Boyer 834). This major civil rights battle brought forward one of the most effective strategies used in the fight against segregation: non-violence. Martin Luther King became the leader of the non-violent civil rights movement. Inspired by the bus boycott in Alabama, four young African Americans in Greensboro, North Carolina, sat down at a segregated lunch counter and ordered food in January 1960. Although they were not served, but instead humiliated and abused, they repeated these sit-ins on a daily basis and were joined by more than sixty other students. Within a year, over seventy thousand students had participated in sit-ins in coffee houses, libraries, hotels and parks (Boyer 841). The civil rights movement had reached a point at which individuals, white and black, all over the country joined the movement and fought for equal rights.

In 1961, the so-called Freedom Riders began traveling through the South to protest against segregation on interstate transportation. These civil rights activists were met with utmost brutality on their various stops throughout the South. However, the violence they had to endure caused President Kennedy to take action and end segregation on interstate transportation (Boyer 845). However, not all the battles brought about as positive results as the sit-ins and the bus-boycotts. In 1963, Martin Luther King organized non-violent sit-ins and protest marches in Birmingham, Alabama. These were brutally stopped by the local police commissioner through the usage of electric cattle prods, aggressive police dogs and high-pressure fire hoses. These events and President Kennedy's active support to pass a civil rights bill triggered a series of brutal killings. Medgar Evers, leader of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in Mississippi, was killed in 1963. Furthermore, four black girls were killed by a bomb, while attending Sunday School in Birmingham (Boyer 846). The list of African Americans tortured and killed in these times of hatred and brutality is endless. It is important to understand that the number of battlegrounds of the civil rights conflict is immense. The events listed so far only name a few of the most famous and commonly known key events. However, in the 1950s and 1960s, heroic stories of civil rights activists took place all over the South. It can be argued that the more blacks fought for civil rights, the more vicious was the opposition of the white supremacy they faced.

Today many of these former battlegrounds in the South have become tourist attractions financially supported by local, state and federal resources. The so-called civil rights tourism industry has made the civil rights movement an object of the Southern economy: "The civil rights industry . . . sells the bitter legacy of race hatred while celebrating the ostensible triumph of racial equality" (Eskew 175). It can be argued that this fairly new section of tourism is used to help former slave states make yet another profit of the African American plight. On the other

hand, tourism dollars are, of course, helping rebuild an entire economy for both Caucasian as well as African American Southerners. Furthermore, it can be claimed that civil rights tourism promotes tolerance via education and has a major ideological as well as political impact throughout the United States. for African Americans as well as Caucasians. The following article presents a brief insight into the critical exploration of the current trend of civil rights tourism in the Southern states of the U.S.

## Memory Studies—Conceptual Framework

The theoretical basis in comprehending the notion of civil rights tourism can certainly be traced to the study of memory. Founding father of this field of research is Maurice Halbwachs, a French sociologist, who coined the term *collective memory* in 1925, a term, or rather a concept, with a lasting impact on memory studies, as it is still discussed and revised until today (Erl 8). Before Halbwachs published his theory of collective memory, individual memory theories were still predominant. The statement “People have memories, peoples do not” conveys the general thought that memory is something private and individual (Friedman 135). For centuries, sociologists and psychologists had been studying memory related topics, and the idea that the contents of memory were biologically transmitted was common. When Halbwachs communicated his new memory theory, he set himself vastly apart from the general trend, as he opposed the idea of a hereditary memory (Echterhoff 7–8). According to Halbwachs, individual memory is a social construct; people apply social frames to locate their memories. He explains that one can only remember an event of the past by finding its specific location within the frame of the collective memory (Halbwachs 368). Overall, he added a social dimension to the topic of memory by showing that communication and social interaction form the basis of collective memory (Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume* 8).

The study of memory set off into a new direction with the publication of Pierre Nora’s work *Les lieux de mémoire* in the 1980s. According to Nora, French national memory was fading, and thus, he began to analyze and chronicle sites at which the national memory of France was deeply rooted (Den Boer 21). Such sites were, for example, war memorials in small villages, the statues found in Paris, emblems and symbols, mottos like *Liberté–Egalité–Fraternité*, commemoration festivities, rituals, museums, documents and dictionaries. For Nora, these sites were a rich kaleidoscope of objects that needed to be brought into order. Furthermore, he wanted to emphasize how powerful the symbolic effect of all of these instruments and institutions of memory was and how they effectively portrayed the political identity of France as a nation (Nora 2). According to Nora, memory is rooted on concrete objects and gestures. Memory grows through a collective and results in solidarity within this collective. It seeks a natural growth, and, as it is part of living groups of people, it is part of a constant development. Overall, Nora affirms that memory is life itself (Nora 12–13). Compared to Halbwachs, who considers memory to be maintained through the recollections of collective groups, Nora considers collective memory to be maintained in sites and practices. Both Halbwachs and Nora support the idea that memory helps create identities of individuals and groups. Individuals as well as groups rely on memory to comprehend the principles of the world and to find their place within a societal structure. Memory helps us “make sense of lived experience, stake political claims, and give shape and meaning to the present and future” (Grabbe 1–2). Hence, it can be argued that memory and the urge to remember is a trigger of civil rights tourism.

The important role of memory in today’s world is based on today’s memory crisis. In former times memory was transmitted orally but with the intensive and rapid progress of mass media, the storage capacity of memory today has no limits (Glassberg 63; Neal 198). Rapid changes in the social and political realm, the fading of cultural traditions and the loss of historical identities have created the urge to establish means of retrospection (Hebel ix). Various scholars explain that an entire construct of collective memory is about to experience a drastic change as soon as there will be no more witnesses of World War II and the Holocaust. As the generation of actual eyewitnesses and survivors is dying out, memory has to transform from a lived and communicated experience into a culturally internalized memory in order to preserve these narratives (Echterhoff 13). Hence, the experienced memory has to be transferred into cultural memory to ensure its existence for future generations. This is done by applying specific memory to material objects (Echterhoff 13–14; Hebel ix; Assmann, “Zum Geleit” 15). Eyewitnesses of the civil rights movement are fading as well and the need to preserve their memory thus increases.

As pointed out by Hebel, memory is now considered a collective element with regard to its social and political

impact. Its role as a determinant of identity is highlighted: “[M]emory is investigated as a productive influence in the formation, preservation, and problematization of group coherence” (Hebel x). Individual as well as collective identity is influenced by memory. Although Nora felt that memory was about to vanish, others argue that memory has never been as public and as essential as it is today. Based on the memory concepts presented so far, it can be concluded that sites of memory directly influence the sense of identity of the people whose past is represented at such sites, namely African Americans. The sites also influence and construct the identity of the South itself. Additionally, memory involves certain social responsibilities. It is, for instance, the task of memory “to make the past a *presence* in our moral and emotional life” (Poole 155). With respect to the important role of memory, it has to be kept in mind that memory politics are not only about remembering but also about the systematic forgetting as well as distorting of the past. The way the past is remembered can be influenced easily (Assmann, “Zum Geleit” 15). Accounts of the past should be met with skepticism, as “all versions of history, be they oral or written, individual or collective, textual or physical, do not grow organically from an eternal soil . . . but rather are created, designed and engineered with a purpose” (Friedman 136).

## Sites of Memory Today

As a reminder, sites of memory, according to Nora, are “celebrations, emblems, monuments, and commemorations, but also speeches, archives, dictionaries, and museums” (quoted in Den Boer 21). Accordingly, sites of memory are not necessarily physical places. However, my focus will be on physical sites of memory where “groups of people engage in public activity . . . [and] . . . where commemorative acts take place” (Winter 61). It is important to note that sites of memory do not necessarily have to be officially acknowledged as such. The moment people remember past events that occurred at a site, the site becomes a place of commemoration (Winter 65). Thus, no markers or official tours are needed to turn a location into a site of memory. Commemoration is an important element of sites of memory, as such sites convey the message that a specific moment has to be remembered due to its significance as well as moral impact for a community. As the generation of eyewitnesses is fading away, sites of memory today have to be able to convey their message to future generations. Hence, sites of memory have to function as “sites of second-order memory,” especially when a generation change is taking place (Winter 62). This leads to the argument that once the need of a group of people to remember and connect their present life to certain events in the past vanishes, the sites will also eventually disappear or rather fall apart (Winter 72–73). The financial aspect is another fundamental element of sites of memory. Their construction and preservation has to be funded (Winter 65). This alone can already be a major obstacle when it comes to the establishment of sites of memory. In the U.S., for example, private organizations are mostly responsible for the creation of sites of memory (Glassberg 77).

The commemoration of the civil rights movement plays an important role in today’s African American memory. The establishment of memorials throughout the South in recent years strengthens this argument. Research done on a private ‘civil rights tour’ has shown that since 1989 at least thirty sites, commemorating the civil rights movement, have been established or rather recognized and marked as such. Movies, documentaries, street names, museums, and community festivities are all elements of the civil rights commemoration found in the U.S. today. Historical memory is very important, as the actions of people today depend on what they know about the past. With regard to the civil rights movement, this means that contemporary politics concerning racial equality are influenced by the belief in the success or failure of the civil rights movement. Hence, “how people remember the movement can thus have great political, ethical, and cultural consequences” (Romano xvi). Especially when considering that actions are determined by what people consider to be true about the past. This is dangerous because such determination is not necessarily based on the actual truth. Thus, today’s representation of the past is crucial in determining how society deals with the present and the future. Civil rights commemoration is, for example, often employed as a political tool, given that memory can be shaped to meet political as well as ideological goals (Romano xvi). However, the way the civil rights movement is commemorated today through sites of memory, such as museums and memorials, is not appreciated by everyone. Critics argue that civil rights leaders, such as Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks, are glorified and efforts of other individuals and organizations remain neglected. Furthermore, they fear that the message conveyed gives people the impression that common people are not able to fight for a change without extraordinary leaders. “How we remember the movement . . . can discourage us from or encourage us toward future activism” (Romano xvi).

Many of the leaders and participants of the civil rights movement fear that the later generations (“Post-civil rights generations”) do not understand, or rather neglect, the immense effort and pain it took to get equal rights that are taken for granted today. Consequently, they support the creation of museums and memorials to guarantee that the people will not forget the struggle (Romano xviii). U.S. Congressman John Lewis summarizes the importance of remembering and knowing the past:

We must know our history as a nation and a people. We must study it and visit its birthplace—in essence we must live history in order to understand and appreciate it. For better or for worse, our past is what brought us here, and it will help lead us to where we need to go. Our forefathers and foremothers came to this land in different ships, but we are all in the same boat now. (Lewis ix)

## Civil Rights Tourism—A Definition

When analyzing tourism the way it is conducted today, an urge for genuineness can be sensed. Places which convey a sense of authenticity are being visited, as reality and every-day life seem increasingly inauthentic (Sturken 10). Adventure and heritage tourism are the result of this search for authenticity (Weeks 196). However, this argument can be considered controversial, since tourism itself is actually extremely inauthentic, as it is merely about experiencing the reenactment of the lives of others (Sturken 11). In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, technology is the key trigger of heritage tourism. By creating a virtual reality and a “sensory experience,” people can satisfy their need for authenticity (Weeks 203). A high degree of authenticity is supposed to be found at “site[s] of trauma,” as such sites enable the tourist to experience a bond with past events. The visit of such sites of trauma can be considered a form of pilgrimage, as people “pay tribute to the death” and express their sympathy (Sturken 11). Furthermore, “tourists of history,” who seek the experience of the past, are encouraged to do so by “consumerism, media images, souvenirs, . . . and museum and architectural reenactments” (Sturken 9).

A firm classification of cultural heritage tourism has been devised by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, a private, nonprofit membership organization committed to the preservation of historic sites and “revitalizing America’s communities”: “The National Trust defines cultural heritage tourism as traveling to experience the places, artifacts and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present. It includes cultural, historic and natural resources” (National Trust for Historic Preservation). The overall aim of cultural heritage tourism is the preservation of heritage and culture, its conveyance to visitors as an authentic experience and the benefit from its economic impact.

**TOURISM+ CULTURE + HERITAGE = SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIES.**

Fig. 1. Economic profit equation presented by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2008.

The equation presented in fig. 1 reveals the powerful financial combination of cultural heritage tourism, as it helps to reinforce the economy by creating jobs, establishing new businesses and strengthening already existing enterprises. Consequently, cultural heritage tourism is an overall favorable sector of tourism, as it preserves the past and promotes economic profit for the present and future. Today, cultural heritage tourism is considered “one of the fastest-growing sectors of tourism in the U.S.” encompassing “civil rights history, civil war history, music, landmarks, literary works and even agriculture” (Ingebretsen).

Civil rights tourism is, thus, identified as a branch of cultural heritage tourism. Its commemorative activities celebrate “the victories of another war—against white supremacy, Jim Crow and lynchings”—the other war being the Civil War (Dewan). Shaila Dewan, the author of a *New York Times* article published in 2004, points out that the commemoration of the civil rights movement is almost on an equal level to the “exhaustive celebration” of the Civil War in the South, hence, underlining the growing recognition of civil rights commemoration as a tourist attraction in the South. Furthermore, the article reveals clearly how civil rights tourism was only reluctantly

welcomed by local whites: “Yet resistance persists, particularly among whites who see no reason to dredge up the painful past or who fear that the motive is to assign blame” (Dewan). It can be claimed that civil rights tourism initially developed on its own, as people began to travel to the South looking for civil rights sites before they were being officially acknowledged and marked as such sites (Harcourt; Vestal). As tourists began searching for civil rights sites and African Americans were gaining political power, a growing number of sites of commemoration emerged in the South and tourism dollars began accumulating (Dewan). Hence, the combination of economic prospects and tourists seeking civil rights sites started today’s civil rights tourism industry in the South. A brief news digest in the magazine *Marketing News* published by the American Marketing Association in June 1998 defines the beginning of civil rights tourism to be around 1989 during an economic stagnation in tourism. Accordingly, the aim of civil rights tourism was to attract African American tourists to the South and to improve its tourism economy (“Black Tourism Power”). The city of Atlanta, Georgia, for example, “has generated millions of dollars from civil rights tourism capitalizing on its reputation as the birthplace of the movement” (“U.S. Civil Rights Movement Boosts Tourism”). Consequently, Atlanta serves as a role model of how a combination of well employed marketing strategies and the preservation of heritage results in a major economic gain. As stated in the 2004 *New York Times* article on civil rights tourism, many poor towns in the South employ their civil rights history solely to improve their economic standing (Dewan). While traveling through the South and following the traces of the civil rights movement, one very often reaches isolated communities which create the impression of having reached the middle of nowhere. Tourists can bring the economic revival so desperately sought by such communities.

In addition to the great economic impact of civil rights tourism, political as well as educational (ideological) goals also play an essential role. The former mayor of Atlanta is quoted in an article on *VoA News*, stating that the conveyance as well as perseverance of the civil rights past is vital to the comportment of today’s political decisions: “I think that the rest of the world can be changed without violence” (“U.S. Civil Rights Movement Boosts Tourism”). Thus, he argues that the preservation of the past enables future generations to learn from the experiences of their forefathers and prevent the repetition of their mistakes. Dena Chandler, a white woman from Georgia, is quoted in the *New York Times*, saying that “death shaped their world in ways that they don’t know and don’t understand unless they know about it” (quoted in Dewan). She refers to young white and black people who did not experience the pain, struggle and violence of the past. Just like Atlanta’s former mayor, she believes in the educational qualities of civil rights commemoration. Participating in the memory-industry of the civil rights movement has become a question of honor as well as economic profit. In Alabama, for example, communities explicitly want to be part of a civil rights trail, as they want to profit from the positive connotation of being a place where people stood up and fought against injustice. Undoubtedly, civil rights tourism helps the South to shake off its negative image, and, thus, is a means to achieve positive publicity. On the one hand, the term *profit* in this context refers to economic profit. On the other hand, it refers to benefiting from prestige and recognition in a local as well as global environment (Dewan).

Setting the ideological motives apart, the question remains whether ethical values are being neglected at the sight of economic profits. In the *New York Times* article mentioned above, African Americans are quoted who fear that the commemoration industry transmits a false image of race issues in the South. Although civil rights commemoration is a booming industry, the problems of racism have not been solved. In this context, Ownby explains that “surely the most intense, most troubling, most untrivializable, most uncertain topic for tourism is how to deal with the horrors of slavery, the consequences of the Civil War, the inequities of race relations, and the heroism of civil rights activists” (Ownby 244). According to this statement, tourism in the South deals with this problematic situation by concentrating its promotion efforts on the “non-controversial” elements of the civil rights movement, such as “historic firsts, notable individuals and their homes, churches, schools, colleges, and hospitals” (Ownby 244). However, the following analysis of civil rights sites will show that controversial events and sites are not always avoided.

## **Civil Rights Tourism in the American South**

The explanatory work presented so far provides the foundation for the civil rights tour through the South upon which the reader is about to embark. Sites in Tennessee, Mississippi, and Alabama will be presented and analyzed to create an understanding of today’s civil rights tourism phenomena as well as to reveal the diversity

of the current sites. The analysis will show how civil rights sites are made accessible for visitors and how they are presented to the visitor. The presentation of the following sites of memory is based on first-hand experience gathered on a civil rights tour through Tennessee, Mississippi, and Alabama in 2010.

### The Slave Haven Underground Railroad Museum

Although slavery does not fit into the time frame of the civil rights movement, it can be argued that resistance against the institution of slavery is an early form of resistance against white supremacy and a quest for human rights. Thus, the Slave Haven Underground Railroad Museum in Memphis, Tennessee, is worth a visit for tourists interested in early resistance movements. Finding it, or rather getting to know of its existence, proves to be a challenge, as it is not greatly advertised. Tennessee's tourist website lists the Museum within its African American heritage section, and it can also be found on the alphabetical list of sites in West Tennessee as listing no. 59. Thus, one either has to know about the Museum and search for it specifically or look at every single site listed within the heritage section and find the Museum by coincidence. On the whole, not much information is given about the Museum on the website. A brief paragraph explains that the estate was built in 1849 and that, according to rumors, runaway slaves found shelter there on their way to the North (Tennessee Department of Tourist Development). The choice of words of this concise description is thought-provoking, as, according to the tour guide at the Museum, the estate functioned for certain as a shelter for runaway slaves. One almost has the impression that the history of the site is either not officially accepted or simply not true. Furthermore, a flyer with information about the Museum is distributed at the Memphis Visitor Center only upon request. Hundreds of flyers promoting all sorts of activities and places are stacked on shelves but not a single flyer about the Slave Haven Underground Museum can be found. Thus, one wonders why this important site of African American history is not further promoted.

The flyer handed out at the visitor center seems to be homemade. Only some basic information is printed upon a colored sheet of paper and the sheet is even cut askew. Another indicator that this flyer is not professionally set up is the picture of the estate, which, due to the black and white print, is almost unrecognizable. The information presented on the flyer is the general information, such as the address, driving directions, admission fees, hours of operation and a website and e-mail address for further research. Otherwise, the Museum is only promoted by stating that at the Museum "the secrets of the Underground Railroad" will be revealed. No information about what the Underground Railroad is or about the exhibits within the Museum is given (cf. Slave Haven Underground Railroad Museum). The website mentioned on the flyer is not of much help either, as the site is currently under construction and e-mails remain unanswered (cf. Heritage Tours). Hence, the only means to gather information about the Museum is to visit it. The Museum seems to be located in one of the poorer residential areas of Memphis. The white wooden houses mostly look alike and are all fairly small. Many front yards are fenced with shaky looking netting wires. A sign erected in the front yard of the Museum already indicates that this visit will be an entirely different experience from the modern Museum found at other sites.



Fig. 2. The Slave Haven Underground Railroad Museum and the sign in the front yard of the Museum in Memphis, January 2010.

Also in the front yard, a marker is erected by the Tennessee Historical Commission commemorating the estate and indicating its past as a stockyard. Nonetheless, the marker also states that presumably the site used to be a

shelter for runaway slaves on the Underground Railroad. Similar to the information given on the website of the Tennessee Department of Tourism Development, the marker does not acknowledge that the estate functioned as a slave haven but rather states that this is a claim by folklore. In any case, visiting the Museum is an overall adventurous experience. First of all, a sign at the main entrance of the building indicates that one has to use the backyard to enter the Museum. In the backyard, old barns shelter historic farming tools which are not part of the Museum's exhibition and which seem to be just lying around to rot. The backdoor is a white wooden door with all sorts of printouts attached indicating the admission fee, prohibiting cameras and summoning the visitor to knock. Knocking on this wooden door while standing in the abandoned backyard creates the atmosphere of doing something secret and prohibited—one wonders whether this atmosphere is created purposely to give the visitor the feeling of being a runaway slave. This mood is further enhanced by the fact that the actual hours of operation seem to vary from the ones published on the flyer and on the website, as several attempts are needed to finally get access to the museum. The tour guide, in 2010, was an African American woman dressed in various layers of different colored clothes covered with a long black leather coat. Her appearance further enhanced the feeling of embarking on a secret adventure. The room one enters is very small and packed with all sorts of items, which are available for purchase. There are African masks decorating the walls. African puppets and quilts in various sizes and colors are also being sold. As can be seen in fig. 3, the room clearly functions as a gift shop selling mostly goods which promote the African roots of African Americans. In addition to these traditional African American goods, some general souvenirs, such as t-shirts and tote bags with the name of the Museum printed upon, are being sold.



Fig. 3. The Gift Shop at the Slave Haven Underground Railroad Museum in Memphis, January 2010.

After having paid an admission fee of \$6.00, the tour begins. Together with the African American woman, who

receives the visitor, one can climb into the cellar and look at the narrow bunks used by the runaway slaves to sleep in. The cellar itself is very small. The tour guide explains that at times twenty persons were hiding down there. A small hole in the wall leading into a muddy tunnel used to be the entrance to the cellar room for runaway slaves. The entrance of the tunnel is located on a former porch under a loose wooden panel which now forms part of the house. The cellar is dark with only a little air and, thus, the entire atmosphere is very uncomfortable. The other rooms in the house show exhibits of the time. The tour guide, for example, explains the pattern on various quilts which reveal a message to those able to read the pattern. She sings some of the songs which the slaves used to sing while working and explains the hidden messages within the lyrics. The entire experience at the Slave Haven Underground Railroad Museum is very authentic. Due to the intense emotions the tour guide conveys while explaining all the exhibits, the fears and horrors of slavery become real within this house. Overall, this Museum offers a unique and compelling experience through the combination of an inner authenticity which is further enhanced through the exhibits, the decoration and the tour guide's genuineness.

### Kelly Ingram Park

A very different kind of civil rights site is located opposite the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute in Alabama – the Kelly Ingram Park. Here, police officers attacked hundreds of protestors, mostly children, with fire hoses and dogs in 1963 (Blejwas; Cobb 258). Today, the Park is recommended as a civil rights site by travel guides and advertised by the state of Alabama on its website. Indeed, the information given on Alabama's website is quite extensive, as the history as well as today's function of the Park are thoroughly explained (Alabama Bureau of Tourism & Travel). A flyer about the Park, compiled in 2008, is available at visitor centers throughout Alabama. The flyer begins by giving a superficial historic overview about the Park. This overview includes information about the name of the Park which honors a Birmingham fireman who was killed in World War I. Furthermore, it received its subtitle *A Place of Revolution and Reconciliation* by Birmingham's former African American major Richard Arrington. The flyers' historic overview informs the reader that the civil rights conflicts which took place at the Park in the 1960s led to a change in legislature with regard to civil rights laws. Pictures of the statues on display in the Park, including the date they were set up, are presented on the second page of the flyer. The four monuments located at the main entrance of the Park are displayed and briefly explained. A small map on the backside shows where exactly the different statues and monuments are located within the Park. The establishment of the Park as a civil rights memorial with its statues and the so-called *Freedom Walk* is referred to as multi-million dollar project. Overall, the flyer portrays what a visitor can expect at the Park. The map is useful for orientation. A brief remark on the back of the flyer informs the visitor that an audio tour is available at the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute (cf. Urban Impact).

At the Kelly Ingram Park itself, one finds exactly what the flyer has announced. At the entrance, four pillar-shaped monuments honor four of Birmingham's heroes and heroines of the pre-civil rights movement era who are not commonly known.



Fig. 4. Entrance to the Kelly Ingram Park in Birmingham, January 2010.

The term *Freedom Walk* is chiseled into the four asphalted paths leading towards the center of the Park, one from each corner of the Park. The name refers to the symbolic meaning of the paths, as they lead through a park with a violent past which eventually resulted in freedom or, at least, desegregation. Altogether, six sculptures are



placed in the Park. Unfortunately, only two of them have a plaque or engraving informing the visitor about what exactly is being remembered here. The accounts given in the flyer are not detailed enough to help comprehend what happened at the Park. Hence, the statues are interesting to look at, but without a guidebook or any other source providing the necessary historical accounts, they are meaningless. Nonetheless, the information provided at the two marked statues helps to draw conclusions about the symbolism of the statues. In addition, plaques on the ground near the statues indicate that an audio tour is available. The names of the statues are also marked on these plaques. No indication is given as to where to get the necessary equipment for the audio tour. The flyer refers to the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute. There, however, no sign or any other indicator of the availability of an audio tour could be found. Thus, to fully comprehend the symbolism of the Kelly Ingram Park, a travel guide or a prior visit to the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, where the history of the Park is part of the exhibition, is strongly recommended. Apart from the lack of information at the Park, the statues are very well displayed. The sculpture commemorating the police dog attack, depicted in fig. 5, for example, is set up so that the visitor, walking on the *Freedom Walk*, passes in between the sculptures of snarling dogs which seem to be attacking from all directions. So when you turn your face in either direction while walking past the statues you look into the jaw of an attack dog. Thus, the way the statue is set up gives the visitor an idea of how the protesting children must have felt. One does not just walk through the Park and look at some sculptures but rather experiences some of the key elements that the protesting children had to face. Accordingly, the statues create a sense of authenticity.



Fig. 5. Sculpture of the police dog attack at Kelly Ingram Park in Birmingham, January 2010.

#### The Emmett Till Museum & The Grocery Store

In 1955, Emmett Till, a fourteen-year-old black boy from Chicago, spent his summer visiting his granduncle in Money, Mississippi. Dared by his friends, he walked into a grocery store and either said “something ‘fresh’ to the twenty-one-year-old white woman at the counter” or whistled at her (Carrier 279). The accounts of what exactly happened while he was in the grocery store vary slightly. All accounts agree, though, that he dared to address the white woman in a manner considered inappropriate for a black person in those times. Three days later, Emmett Till was kidnapped from his granduncle’s house by Roy Bryant, the woman’s husband, and by J. W. Milam. Another three days later, his body was found, badly beaten and shot into the head, in the Tallahatchie River. His murderers had tied him to a cotton gin fan to ensure that his body would be kept under water. His mother had the body returned to Chicago, where she displayed his badly mutilated face to the public (Carrier 279–80; Cobb 260). The author of a travel guide consulted remembers this tragedy story as follows: “His mother, Mamie, had insisted on an open-casket funeral, and the gruesome photograph of Till that appeared in *Jet* magazine confirmed to black America—especially my generation of then teenaged males—that no state was more dangerous to a black person than the state of Mississippi” (Carrier 279–81; Cobb 260–61). Based on the information given, it can certainly be claimed that Emmett Till is an important person in civil rights history, as

cases like his encouraged others to fight discrimination. The importance of this incident is underlined by the fact that several of the civil rights museums in the South give accounts of Emmett Till's story (e.g. the Civil Rights Institute in Memphis, the Civil Rights Institute in Montgomery, and the Interpretive Center between Selma and Montgomery on U.S. Interstate 80).

While heading South on U.S. Interstate 49 to search for the grocery store in Money, one suddenly passes a sign announcing the Emmett Till Museum. I-49 is a quite picturesque route through the Southern country. Once in a while, a house can be seen at the horizon, but otherwise there is only farmland all around. Hence, the out-of-nowhere-effect is enhanced, and, at first sight, one has already passed the one and only sign announcing the museum. A person unaware of Emmett Till's story would not make a connection to the civil rights movement, as the sign only indicates the boy's name. The Emmett Till Museum is located in Glendora by the Tallahatchie River, where Emmett Till's body was found. Glendora is a small, all African American town with about 285 inhabitants (Christian). Finding the Museum is not easy, as one does not expect unpaved and muddy roads to lead to a tourist attraction.



Fig. 6. Sign indicating the Emmett Till Museum and Welcome Sign of Glendora, Mississippi, January 2010.

The area, at first, seems somewhat intimidating, but the few people lingering in the streets prove to be very friendly and helpful. As one approaches the Museum, signs are brought up by the Glendora County to inform the visitor of the tragic past. In front of an empty piece of land, a marker informs the reader that (s)he is standing at the site where "a black reporter James Hicks, discovered information pertinent to the trial for the murder of 14-year old Emmett Till in 1955. . . . Hicks was the only reporter to go into the black community to research evidence in the Till case. Adjacent to this site was the store of J. W. Milam, one of Till's murderers." A second marker on an empty, unfenced piece of land gives more details about what exactly happened to Emmett the night he was kidnapped. The Museum, established in 2006, is called Emmett Till Historic Intrepid Center (ETHIC) and is located in the barn from which Emmett's murderers took the gin fan and attached his body to it with barbed wire. At first sight, as can be seen in fig. 7, the Museum looks like an old barn. Within the Museum, Emmett Till's story is visually displayed. Unfortunately, I can give no personal account of the inside of the ETHIC, as the Museum was closed in January 2010. What might be perceived as a result of malorganization on my part, turned out to have different reasons.



Fig. 7. Emmett Till Historic Intrepid Center and the entrance to the Center in Glendora, January 2010.

Information about the Emmett Till Museum can be found on Mississippi's official website. In fact, the synopsis presented there is very detailed explaining that the ETHIC is, on the one hand, a memorial museum and, on the other hand, a technology center. No satisfying explanation is given about the technology center other than that the ETHIC uses modern technology to display the Emmett Till story. Overall, the ETHIC and, consequently, the town of Glendora are highly praised for their efforts as a small rural town to embark on such a grand project of historical preservations and tourism promotion. Unfortunately, no hours of operation are given on the website, only the reference to a gift shop at the site. Enquiries about the hours of operation, the gift shop and the presentations within the Museum sent to the e-mail address provided on Mississippi's official website remained unanswered. The free admission to the ETHIC on the website turns into a \$7 fee on site in Glendora (see fig. 7). Apparently, the information on Mississippi's website needs updating (cf. Mississippi Division of Tourism).

Although Glendora is only a small community, a lot has been done to remember Emmett Till. On [www.glendorams.com](http://www.glendorams.com), the official community website, Glendora's goal to become a leading role model in the promotion of heritage tourism is explained. With the opening of the museum, the creation of an Emmett Till memorial day and the planning of an Emmett Till concert to raise funds, Glendora certainly fulfills its goal. The text published on the website explaining the purpose of the museum corresponds exactly to the text on Mississippi's official website. The final responsibility, then, for not providing the hours of operation lies with Glendora's information policy. Hence, the visitor has to take the risk that he might end up facing closed doors. For Glendora this means losing valuable tourism dollars, as each tourist is a potential customer at the Museum's gift shop and at other sites, such as restaurants, etc. (Village of Glendora Mississippi). Unfortunately, no attendance data could be retrieved about the ETHIC. As mentioned before, requests directed directly at the ETHIC remain unanswered, and Sarah McCullough from the Mississippi Development Authority Division in Mississippi explains that due to the fact that the Museum is fairly new, no data is available yet (McCullough).



Fig. 8. The grocery store in Money, January 2010.

A striking contrast to the sites in Glendora is the grocery store in Money (fig. 8). There is not a single sign explaining to the visitor what happened in this collapsing and run-down building over fifty years ago. The only way to recognize the store is by comparing the pictures presented in a travel guide with the buildings in a similarly bad condition. Eventually, one finds the skeleton of a building which used to be the grocery store. Here, Emmett Till's tragic story began, but nothing has been done to commemorate it. Facing this rotten building one wonders whether any other tourists apart from Jim Carrier, the author of the travel guide, and myself have actually ever come here. Money is a perfect example of a town neglecting its civil rights history for reasons which unfortunately remain unknown. At the Old Capitol Museum in Jackson, a reference to the grocery store in Money can be found on a panel listing the ten most endangered historic places in 2005. The information given here only

indicates that no progress has been made to preserve the site. Nevertheless, this panel shows that the lack of preservation of the site is being noticed.

Although Emmett Till's story is retold in several museums throughout the South, the store in Money is in a shocking condition. With regard to the achievements visible in Glendora, the building in Money has a great potential to become a tourist attraction. At this point, however, the collapsing building rather serves as an example of an unappreciated civil rights site. Maybe, if the efforts taken in Glendora were not so remarkable, the neglect of civil rights history in Money would not be noticed as much. Glendora's efforts are outstanding with respect to the size and the location of the town. Nonetheless, the accessibility of the sites is not yet fully developed. Flyers and brochures should be made available in visitor centers throughout Mississippi. Furthermore, Glendora should be included into the *African American Heritage Itinerary* of the Official Mississippi Tour Guide to ensure more publicity. The hours of operation have to be made public in order to avoid having tourists facing closed doors at the museum. Glendora is still quite far away from Jackson, Mississippi's capital, and, thus, it is doubtful whether a one-time visitor will take the drive twice.

The three sites presented so far were chosen for their historical importance as well as the lack or, by contrast, the existence of exemplary efforts taken to preserve and promote them. They all have a very strong emotional appeal commensurate with their special form of display or neglect. The three sites represent the diversity of civil rights sites in the American South as they are all unique and range from suburban private sites to a combination of rural private as well as public site and finally to an urban public site.

### The Urban Civil Rights Sites

A rather different type of civil rights memorial sites can be found in urban areas of the South. These sites can be classified as the 'typical' urban, in-door, high-tech memorials. They are set up as education-oriented museums, they use architectural reconstructions in combination with technology to create an authentic experience and they include highly consumer-orientated elements in their program. The National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, the Lowndes Interpretive Center midway between Selma and Montgomery, the Civil Rights Memorial Center in Montgomery and the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute in Birmingham are such urban, high-tech museums. These museums are remarkable as they manage to communicate an extensive amount of information by creating an attention-grabbing atmosphere.

Especially interesting are the gift shops at these sites. Consumerism in the form of souvenir shopping is an important element of all branches of tourism (Sturken 12). Gift shops represent the economic activities surrounding the preservation of historical sites. Thus, buying souvenirs is a form of consuming history but also of showing a connection to a specific event in history (Sturken 4/12). Consequently, souvenir shopping is not only an element of consumerism but also of memory. This explains why gifts shops are often located near memorials or within museums. Souvenirs, thus, "serve as pocket-sized pieces of history as well as personal mementoes of places in time" (Stanonis 10). Since these keepsakes can be purchased at sites of memory, they represent the interplay between consumerism and memory.

The National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, for example, does not only have one gift shop, but since the museum consists of two buildings, a shop is located at each site. To exit either building the visitor must walk through the gift shop. Obviously, the chosen location of the gift shops is meant to encourage sales. The Museum even has an online gift shop. A flyer with the web address is handed out to the visitor upon the purchase of an item. In addition, a link on the main page of the Museum's website refers to the online shop. At the Lowndes Interpretive Center the same architectural technique is employed. The visitor of the center is directly led into a souvenir shop from the exhibition rooms. The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute promotes its gift shop as superb on a flyer distributed in various visitor centers throughout Alabama.

The civil rights gift shops are part of a tourist industry and sell promotional goods such as T-shirts, baseball caps, tote bags, postcards and pencils. However, along with items honoring Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks or the Freedom Riders, all these shops sell items promoting Barack Obama. Such goods include T-shirts and posters featuring Obama, key chains and magnets with his name and literature. At the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis pencils show the imprint "Inspiring Moments in African American History" followed by a list of important

events, such as the Supreme Court ruling *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka* and the March on Washington, culminating in Barack Obama's election as President of the U.S. in 2008. At the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute figures of Barack Obama and his wife Michelle for children are sold. No doubt, the paraphernalia on sale express the high admiration for the new idol: Barack Obama. As such, he has been admitted into the group of eminently respected civil rights activists and is paid tribute to along with these activists. Barack Obama's victory is celebrated as a result of the civil rights movement. The idolization of Obama is not restricted to the high-tech museums. At the Slave Haven Underground Museum a framed poster of Obama decorates the wall—although most of the other items in that room commemorate the past, this poster represents the present of the African American heritage.



Fig. 9. The gift shop at the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis and Obama-Playing Cards, January 2010.

The inherent message of incorporating Obama souvenirs into the gift shops of civil rights memorial sites becomes very clear at the National Voting Rights Museum & Institute in Selma. Here a variety of books are being sold such as autobiographies of African Americans like the Hollywood star Chris Rock, the basketball legend Ben Green and the retired major of the U.S. Army, Cecil Ward White. Of course, books about Barack Obama are also available for purchase. These books all concentrate on African Americans who gained either fame or money in today's American society. Hence, selling these books reinforces the message of the visualized time line displayed in the Museum that African Americans have come a long way. Overall, the items sold in the various gift stores convey the message that African Americans can be proud of their accomplishments.

## Conclusion

The civil rights sites presented are sites of memory as defined by Nora. They function as keepsakes of the civil rights movement and strengthen the identity of African Americans by conveying a sense of the experiences of the past and presenting the path taken to reach the present. The sites are all very educational as they convey knowledge but also the emotions triggered in the past. Such sites, however, have to be met with skepticism, as they are constructed and preserved by individuals and organizations with political as well as ideological goals. Such goals are, for example, the attraction of tourists to ensure financial profit and revive the economy. Hence, civil rights commemoration in the South has developed into a flourishing tourism industry gaining nationwide attention. Prominent newspapers, such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, but also local newspapers, such as the *Neshoba Democrat* and the *Tuscaloosa News*, report on this fairly new sector of tourism, namely, civil rights tourism.

Consumerism is identified as a prevalent element of civil rights tourism in the form of gift shops. Most of the souvenirs offered cost between \$1 to \$20 and have a logo or emblem of the corresponding site imprinted. Goods promoting the African heritage among them are generally more expensive than the standard souvenirs. Extremely noticeable was the presence of items related to Barack Obama. They convey the message that the past portrayed at the sites is directly connected to Obama's victory today. Hence, to underline their importance to society, the sites employ the fact that an African American has succeeded in becoming the President of the U.S.

Overall, these gift shops remind the visitors that they are still partaking in a consumer orientated business while retracing the past.

Authenticity seems to be the slogan of civil rights tourism and, as explained, tourists seek exactly this quality of being at a genuine site. The various sites achieve this quality by different methods. The Slave Haven Underground Railroad Museum in Memphis can be regarded as the embodiment of an authentic experience due to its location, the preservations of the site with its heritage artifacts and of course the tour guide's presentation. Kelly Ingram Park in Birmingham is a quiet, thought-inspiring and artistic outdoor location, focusing on a combination of neatly kept elements of nature and modern sculptural design. The assembly of the sculptures and the structure of the park enable the visitor to re-experience the threatening situation of that day in 1963. Kelly Ingram Park makes a major disgrace in Southern history public in a way not to be overlooked. Hence, the disgrace of the past is transformed into a symbol of pride for African Americans. Overall the numerous civil rights sites represent the courage of the South to publicly accept and portray scandals of a racist past. Controversial sites and events are not being trivialized or ignored. Consequently, the Southern way of handling its past and the promotion and endorsement of civil rights tourism represent an important aspect of the modern-day South. Civil rights commemoration, thus, contributes to the new identity of the South from the perspective of both Southerners and visitors to the South. Through civil rights tourism Southern communities can shed their racist image and receive a share of the positive re-evaluation of the civil rights movement. The idolization of Barack Obama is a further step towards the consolidation of the South and the formation of the New African American represented in the President of the United States, the ultimate achievement of the civil rights movement.

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