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A “New Integration” of Memory in the National Museum of African American History and Culture

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INTRODUCTION

On a bright, sunny day in late September 2016, the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) opened next to the Washington Monument, at the very axis of America’s National Mall (fig. 1). It was the Mall’s eleventh Smithsonian-affiliated museum and the second “national” ethnic museum after the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI). Audaciously touting “A People’s Journey, A Nation’s Story,” the NMAAHC invites people to explore American history and culture “through the African American lens.”¹ In doing so, it encourages a national dialogue about race and reconsideration of “what it is to be an American,” which ideally should heal historically inflicted racial scars and bring reconciliation to all Americans.² At the finale of the grand opening dedication ceremony, Barack Obama, the first “black” president, quoted “I, too, am America” from African American poet laureate Langston Hughes, stressing the indispensability of African American experiences to “tell a richer and fuller story of who [Americans] are.”³

Although the opening of the NMAAHC exceeded expectations, the realization of the NMAAHC had an arduous history, beginning with its

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original inception in 1915.⁴ For over one hundred years, African Americans endorsed a federally funded or national-scale African American museum where they could present their often neglected and distorted history and culture. The enactment of the NMAAHC bill in 2003 was to realize this “dream deferred” or “lost dream,” yet their struggle continued to face challenges. When Lonnie G. Bunch III accepted the founding directorship in 2005, he had “no collection, no money, no staff, no site.”⁵ He analogized his position to “taking a cruise at the same time you’re building the ship,”⁶ and over the past thirteen years, he and his staff tirelessly ground “African American lenses” to better discern American history and culture.

At the core of the museum development lies Bunch’s vision of a “new integration.”⁷ Stressing the centrality of African American experience in the



Figure 1. The NMAAHC and the Washington Monument

nation’s history, he asserts this integration will “help all Americans realize how much they’ve been shaped, informed and made better by the African American experience,” ultimately for the reconstruction of the nation’s memory.⁸ While the NMAAHC proclaims that its exhibits materialize this integration for all Americans, it actually bears a double burden of both fulfilling expectations African Americans have historically entrusted to a national African American museum and pursuing new agendas the NMAAHC has acquired as a Smithsonian-affiliated national museum. In other words, the new integration squeezes the NMAAHC “between twin desires to be inoffensive for all Americans and to provide a space for African Americans where none existed before,” as Faun Rice points out in her museum review.⁹ Furthermore, the multiple approaches that the NMAAHC adopts for the effective advancement of the new integration require it to maintain multiple balances at the same time. How does the NMAAHC confront such dilemmas, and how does it actually preserve the multiple balances in its exhibitions? What can we see through the foci of African American lenses?

I explore these questions by providing the historical context to Bunch’s “new integration” and elucidating the challenges that the newly established NMAAHC faces in its memory making. First, I review the century-old history of trying to establish a national African American museum to secure a space for African American (re)presentation, highlighting four periods of activism. Second, after considering the philosophical foundations seen in the NMAAHC’s vision statement and Bunch’s new integration, I briefly review the opening exhibits. Third, I point out three approaches the NMAAHC has incorporated: those of identity museum, emotional museum, and memorabilia museum. The physical construction of the NMAAHC itself is undeniable, but its ongoing construction of memory remains contentious, reflecting the dialectical characteristics that these three approaches embody.

The growth of memory studies and public history in the late twentieth century matched a concomitant rise in interdisciplinary studies on the relationships of African Americans to memory devices and sites such as museums and memorials. Paul Shackel and others document the ways in which African Americans and their allies hotly contested the long white domination of public-memory construction.¹⁰ In *Negro Building*, Mabel O. Wilson locates the African American museum movement in the context of African American efforts to acquire their own “black counterpublic sphere” during the segregation era.¹¹ Twenty-first-century studies advance the discussion about how museums should interpret and (re)present the

racialized past, such as the practice of slavery, because the past often entails emotional pain or embarrassment and incites vigorous controversies among the contemporary public.¹² The more forcefully these studies remind us of the power of previously constructed racialized memories and the sociopolitical forces behind them, the more we realize the weighty expectation of the fledgling NMAAHC to reconstruct those memories.

Endorsement of a national African American museum in the nation's capital has always received media attention. Few academic articles, however, have focused on the NMAAHC or its predecessors before its 2016 opening. While Fath Davis Ruffins compares unsuccessful African American efforts to create a museum in the 1990s to the establishment of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the NMAI, I analyze the major obstacles to NMAAHC bills in the 1980s and 1990s as well as the factors that contributed to the passage of the final bill in 2003.¹³ Just before the museum's opening, Robert Wilkins disclosed his painstaking research on the earlier movements as well as his involvement in the politics critical to passing the NMAAHC bill.¹⁴ On the heels of the media deluge covering the NMAAHC opening, academic scholars and museum professionals are now publishing exhibition and curatorial reviews, but there remains a dearth of historiographical studies.

A CENTURY-OLD DREAM COMES TRUE

African Americans long tried to secure a place, typically in the nation's capital, to inscribe their experiences, which American society had largely ignored or distorted. As the racial environment surrounding African Americans changed over time, their visions and strategies also developed. This transition itself critically affected the process by which the NMAAHC was eventually established and the facets the NMAAHC exhibits as a national ethnic museum.

The origin of the NMAAHC dates back to 1915, when Civil War veterans assembled in Washington, D.C., for the fiftieth commemoration of the war's ending. Unlike the original Grand Review of the Armies of 1865, this commemoration allowed African American Union veterans to participate. While the valor of *white* soldiers in both the Blue and Gray was glorified, disguising sectional ideological conflicts and the race question, discriminatory treatment against African American veterans was rampant throughout the commemoration. To support these "second-class" veterans, African Americans in the capital organized the Colored Citizens Committee

for the Entertainment of the Veterans of the Encampment.¹⁵

With this committee at its core, the National Memorial Association (NMA) was organized in the following year to demand that the federal government erect a memorial statue to honor African American soldiers. By the early 1920s, the NMA changed its goal to having a memorial building. With the NMA's continuous efforts, in March 1929, Congress finally passed a joint resolution (Pub. Res. 70–107) that created the National Memorial Commission for the purpose of erecting a memorial building "as a tribute to the negro's contribution to the achievements of America."¹⁶ The Great Depression, however, left the commission with neither funding appropriations nor presidential and legislative support; under the New Deal reforms of 1933, it eventually withered. This first effort for a national African American memorial building was critically linked to political protests against relentless racism such as lynching. While mainstream museums functioned as "temples" of whitewashed civilization, African American leaders such as Mary Church Terrell and Mary McLeod Bethune tried to secure a nationally sanctified space to remember African American contributions and to earn the full respect of citizenship.¹⁷

Efforts to create a memorial building gradually faded into oblivion even among African Americans themselves. In the social changes of the mid-twentieth century, African Americans turned to their African heritage, shifting their emphasis from integration into the white mainstream toward Pan-African nationalism. In this social atmosphere, numerous African American communities gathered their meager resources to build neighborhood museums and community centers that would not only spread the too-often-untold story of African Americans but also to instill racial pride and serve their communities' needs. These local museums also symbolized independence: self-control and freedom of expression. The DuSable Museum of African American History in Chicago, originally founded as the Ebony Museum of Negro History and Art in 1961, and the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History in Detroit, originally founded as the International Afro-American Museum in 1965, are just a few of the more successful examples.¹⁸

On the federal level, not only the African American mass protest movement but also the political instability reflected in race riots led to debates on the best ways to recognize African American history and culture. Between 1965 and 1967, liberal white Congressional representatives introduced several bills to establish a commission for a national African American museum. These bills received divided support, however, from

African Americans both inside and outside of Congress. In hearings of March and April 1968 for bills (90-HR12962, 90-S2979) to establish a Commission for the Study of Negro History and Culture, leaders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) supported the establishing of a national museum. Many others, such as Charles H. Wright, however, eschewed federal initiatives establishing white-controlled institutions and programs, preferring federal funding for local African American neighborhood museums and/or African American studies programs. After the hearings, African American representative Clarence Brown (D-OH) tried to secure the establishment of a national African American museum in his home district of Wilberforce, Ohio. In the following two decades, his bills received sporadic consideration in Congress but little interest from the Smithsonian Institute, eventually materializing in 1988 as the National Afro-American Museum and Cultural Center, largely funded by the state of Ohio.¹⁹

The late 1980s and early 1990s saw a third wave calling for a national African American museum. Shocked by the lack of African American cultural presence in the nation's capital, African American businessman Thomas Mack persuaded Rep. Mickey Leland (D-TX) to introduce a bill and resolution to pursue the possibility of a national African American museum. Newly elected representative John Lewis (D-GA) joined the force, introducing at every session a bill to establish a national African American museum in Washington, D.C. Between 1989 and 1993, five congressional hearings persuaded the Smithsonian to consider the proposed museum and resulted in sending bills to the floor in the 102nd and 103rd Congress (102-S523, 103-HR877).²⁰

The bills failed to pass Congress, however, as they encountered several untoward obstacles. Most African American advocates in this era insisted on building *an independent museum right on the Mall*, a larger version of their neighborhood museums. Particularly, those like Mack and Rep. Gus Savage (D-IL), who opposed possible Smithsonian control, gave the American public the impression of being engaged in self-serving identity politics. In the midst of these so-called culture wars, people who wanted to slash budgets and were cynical about political correctness grew reluctant to support governmental programs for minorities. White conservative senator Jesse Helms (R-NC) took advantage of this mood to kill the bill in 1994.²¹

When the possibility of a national African American museum in the capital seemed least likely, the young African American lawyer Robert Wilkins, who sought a place to preserve oft-untold stories of his African

American predecessors, discovered the NMA's earlier effort in the twentieth century. Wilkins approached Lewis, who had repeatedly introduced the museum bill without success. They were joined by African American representative J. C. Watts (R-OK) and white Christian Right senator Samuel Brownback (R-KS), who had their own political and religious beliefs. With political channels to Republican president George W. Bush and the Republican-majority Congress, those two opened a door to a unique bipartisan and biracial coalition capable of maneuvering the complicated politics on Capitol Hill. Biracial advocates appealed that the NMAAHC could become a place for "healing" and "racial reconciliation."²² The result was the formation of the NMAAHC Plan for Action Presidential Commission in 2001 (Pub. L. 107-106) and, finally, the enactment of the NMAAHC bill in 2003 (Pub. L. 108-184).²³

Outside Congress, the tide had been turning to support the biracial effort to pass the NMAAHC bill. Whirling through the culture wars, the concept of the museum as a forum took hold nationwide. Consequently, large museums, once white dominated and authoritarian, had become more participatory and multicultural arenas reflective of social relevancy.²⁴ Furthermore, the general American public became readier to listen to the racially conflicted national past epitomized by African American history. For example, a public poll conducted at this time found that almost half of white respondents regarded museums as a viable form of compensation for slavery.²⁵ These changes as well as the growth of African American neighborhood museums, both in number and scale, caused African American skeptics who feared a large Smithsonian-operated national museum to dwindle in number.²⁶

This lessened skepticism and fear of traditionally white-controlled establishments did not weaken African American commitment to a proper recognition of their story. Nor did it totally erase black nationalist tendencies as expressed in the neighborhood museum movement.²⁷ Embodying those multiple expectations, the presidential commission's original mission statement of the NMAAHC is both an extension of the history of the making of a national African American museum and a new departure from it. Lonnie G. Bunch and his staff received the baton from John Lewis and others to physically establish the NMAAHC, based on the following statement: "The National Museum of African American History and Culture will give voice to the centrality of the African American experience and will make it possible for all people to understand the depth, complexity, and promise of the American experience. The museum will serve as a national forum for

collaboration with educational and cultural institutions in the continuing quest for freedom, truth, and human dignity.”²⁸

BUNCH AND THE CRAFTING OF AFRICAN AMERICAN LENSES

The 2016 opening of the NMAAHC epitomized what African American scholars and curators such as Lonnie G. Bunch had achieved over the past half century in mainstream museums, especially in the Smithsonian Institute, which had been a stronghold of the white establishment. It required “experts with the vision, wisdom, and expertise to bring the museum to fruition.”²⁹ In this section, I focus on Bunch’s museum philosophy, first by looking into the philosophical framework of the NMAAHC, and then by examining the actual exhibits developed from that framework.

Born in New Jersey in 1952, Bunch grew up in a predominantly white neighborhood, but he acquired a keen sense of history and race. He remembers his childhood when *de facto* racism cast its shadow over even Northern suburbs. After earning a PhD in history and teaching at universities, he assumed the position of founding curator of the California African American Museum in Los Angeles in 1983. Subsequently, he held other prominent positions including being president of the Chicago Historical Society, until he became the director of the NMAAHC in 2005.³⁰ Through his long career in history and museums, he acquired numerous insights and cultivated his own philosophy and practical strategies, both of which were essential for the foundation of the NMAAHC.

Based on the original mission statement created before his directorship, Bunch developed a vision statement where he presented the “four pillars.”³¹ The first pillar declares that the NMAAHC offers everyone an opportunity to learn African American history and culture. The second affirms that the NMAAHC provides visitors with global perspectives. The third encourages visitors to consider “what it means to be an American,” including the “resiliency, optimism, and spirituality” of the African American experience.³² The fourth leads African American museums nationwide to collaborate in promoting their shared mission.

Undergirding these pillars lies Bunch’s idea of a “meaningful and usable” past.³³ Bunch repeatedly affirms that history should function as a “tool,” “even a small weapon,” to “help change America, help force America to confront the chasm between its stated ideals and the reality of life in America for the people who are oppressed and marginalized.”³⁴ In other words, history is a “barometer” to measure the change and accomplishment

that America has made so far and the challenges it has yet to overcome, and a museum like the NMAAHC serves as a "beacon."³⁵ History also functions as a useful tool to "understand the challenges within [our] own life," to navigate through the uncertainties of this global age.³⁶ Thus, the NMAAHC functions as a lens (often referred to in plural as "African American lenses") through which Americans re-view their stories both on collective and individual levels.

To make the NMAAHC function fully as such a lens, Bunch advocates a "new integration." Whereas integration in the civil rights movement era largely was an effort for desegregation and equal treatment in mainstream society, Bunch's "new" integration requires a fundamental reconstruction of national memory.³⁷ It is, perhaps, the NMAAHC building itself that most successfully symbolizes this concept. Designed by up-and-coming Ghanaian British architect David Adjaye, its color (bronze but variable depending on the weather) and shape (a three-tiered corona) as well as its exterior (porch and filigree) all reflect rich cultures born out of the African diaspora, distinctive amid the white neoclassical structures of the National Mall. Its "dark" but "upward" modernist aspirational presence nonetheless imposes itself as an integral part of America's front yard.³⁸

Its huge collection of nearly forty thousand artifacts, covering roughly five hundred years of history of diverse people and areas, requires some creative thinking and tremendous effort to bring to focus on the new integration. In practice, Bunch weaves together artifacts and stories, emphasizing contextualization, humanization, and balance.

Contextualization means not only exhibiting racialized artifacts in the comprehensive context of American history but also explaining them in a longer time span with a global perspective. Such contextualization encourages the visitor to understand the new integration in a larger context.³⁹ For example, in the Slavery and Freedom 1400–1877 section, The Paradox of Liberty exhibit intertwines the American Revolution and the Haitian slave revolt with African bondage at its core, including a Toussaint Louverture statue and a Thomas Jefferson statue with a mountain of bricks behind him inscribed with his slaves' names.⁴⁰ Contextualization sometimes creates a new strain, however, because it not only emphasizes the centrality of African American experience in nation building but also espouses tendencies of black nationalist racial identity. This strain is exemplified in my discussion of the identity museum below.

For Bunch, humanization has two aspects. First, it means recovering the dignity of African Americans after centuries of denial and disregard of their

humanity when they were treated as chattel or second-class citizens. By presenting individual stories, the NMAAHC gives new visual reality to those who have been misconstrued and obscured, to “those famous only to their family” but “whose lives in quiet ways shape this nation.”⁴¹ Such humanization draws visitors’ empathy, which encourages them to engage with the exhibits. In doing so, according to Bunch, visitors “can capture a sense of the emotion and history,” a step toward connecting them to the “seemingly unconnected” past, and then “wrestle with its own individual, regional or national identities.” By doing so, “the museum becomes a touchstone that explains, inspires and transforms” for social justice.⁴² This second aspect of humanization serves as a basis of the emotional museum discussed in the next section.

Because of his commitment to a new integration, Bunch faced challenges of telling “the unvarnished truth,” as his mentor John Hope Franklin espoused.⁴³ Even before the actual museum opening, he expressed his determination not to “flinch from the most tragic episodes in African American history,” in order to make the NMAAHC one of the national forums that were “safe places for unsafe ideas.”⁴⁴ At the same time, the exhibitions “aim to show how tragedy has been channeled into a drive for progress and change.”⁴⁵ After all, his NMAAHC is neither “the Museum of Difficult Moments” nor “the Museum of Tragedy” but a museum of “a balanced history of America.”⁴⁶ Thus, Bunch and his staff assiduously seek “the right tension between moments of sadness and moments of resiliency” in their exhibits.⁴⁷ To balance sadness with resiliency, the NMAAHC takes on characteristics of a memorabilia museum.

Given Bunch’s visions and emphases, how does the NMAAHC display its actual exhibits? Based on my observations, along with media reports and the NMAAHC homepage, I present an overview of the NMAAHC exhibits. In 105,000 square feet of exhibition space, the NMAAHC’s exhibitions are divided into three main areas: (1) History Galleries: The Journey toward Freedom; (2) Community Galleries: Making a Way Out of No Way; and (3) Culture Galleries: Tradition and Innovation. Once visitors enter the spacious Heritage Hall on the ground level, they are escorted to the underground level, after which they walk through the floors above one by one.

The History Galleries occupy the three underground levels, starting with the Slavery and Freedom 1400–1877 section at the lowest. Fully taking advantage of the latest interdisciplinary and international research, the exhibits show the critical role that slavery and the enslaved played in the development of the Atlantic World and the American Republic. The next

section, *Defending Freedom, Defining Freedom: The Era of Segregation 1877–1968*, covers the new type of oppression that African Americans faced, against which they forged a more organized front. Displays such as a segregated railroad car of the Southern Railroad Company vividly illustrate the troubled life of “second-class” citizens. The last section of the History Galleries, *A Changing America: 1968 and Beyond*, traces the progress as well as remaining challenges of the last fifty years. For example, the last exhibitions juxtapose Obama’s presidency and the Black Lives Matter movement triggered by the Ferguson incident (police shooting of Michael Brown) in 2014.

The Community Galleries show ways in which African Americans painstakingly have created their own communities, cultivating their own sense of place and identity. For example, *The Power of Place* exhibit focuses on the local histories of ten communities such as Lyles Station, Indiana, settled by free black pioneers in the antebellum period and flourished as a segregated but viable rural farm town with its own institutions in the late nineteenth century. The exhibit also includes cities such as Chicago, a growing black metropolis at the turn of the twentieth century that gave birth to the uncompromising African American newspaper the *Chicago Defender*. Such detailed displays of individual and collective efforts for betterment against racism help visitors see the aspiration and despair that African Americans long experienced.

The Culture Galleries on the top floor cover various genres of African American cultural creativity, characterized by innovation, improvisation, and exchange: *Cultural Expressions*, *Musical Crossroads*, *Taking the Stage*, and *Visual Art and the American Experience*. Arrays of colorful costumes and other entertainment displays dominate the galleries, while explanatory plaques help visitors historicize each artifact and the resiliency of the artists. For example, while admiring the beautiful ensemble dress that Marian Anderson wore for her concert at the Lincoln Memorial in 1939, visitors also learn about the event’s significance, as she broke down the segregation of the capital and America’s stance on race in the following decades.

These staggering exhibits themselves surely provide visitors with a pellucid vision of the indispensability of African American experience to the larger American society. Not only the size of the collection but also the careful use of the vision statement and of Bunch’s philosophy contribute to this effect. At the same time, if we carefully look at each artifact and explanation panel, we can discern that the NMAAHC combines three different approaches to carry out its mission. In the next section, I elaborate

on the museum's accomplishments as well as its continuing challenges in promoting the African American "new integration."

ONE MUSEUM WITH MANY FACES

A. Identity Museum

Inviting all Americans to reconsider their national past for a better future, the NMAAHC puts more emphasis on "American" than on "African," taking a different curatorial position from that of the Charles H. Wright Museum in Detroit, whose main permanent exhibition *And Still We Rise* retells African American history from "our" African American point of view.⁴⁸

For those African Americans whose predecessors tirelessly sought its construction, the NMAAHC is largely an extension of the African American neighborhood museum movement, as well as an overdue recognition of "their" dignity. Surely, the distinctive "dark" architectural design and the very beginning exhibit of the century-long history of the museum's founding would give an African American visitor the impression that the NMAAHC functions as "one of the few places on earth that tells the complete story of my existence as a black person," as Michelle Obama saw it.⁴⁹ Howard Dodson, former director of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, celebrates the NMAAHC as "a place of our own" located on "an iconic part of America's national heritage landscape."⁵⁰ These African American remarks support Charles Taylor's argument that a person or a group's identity formation intertwines with recognition (and its antipode, misrecognition) from the majority population. Many African Americans proudly and amicably call the NMAAHC "the Blacksonian," a shorthand nickname particularly popular on social media.⁵¹

By contrast, Lonnie Bunch has repeatedly displayed discomfort with the name "Blacksonian." Bunch demurs, "This is not a *black* museum. This is a museum that uses one culture to understand what it means to be an American."⁵² Another art curator of the NMAAHC carefully articulates: "We aren't trying to establish an 'African American art canon'" but are "working to erase that type of illogical racial categorization" because "all of the art in our galleries expresses the beauty, struggles, triumphs, and history of American experiences in some shape or form."⁵³ As Andrea Burns points out, Bunch and his staff probably had much to learn from the negative example of the NMAI, which is sometimes cynically called the national

"tribal" museum because of its strong indigenous identity and multifaceted non-Western worldview.⁵⁴ The NMAAHC's stance, softening its racial color to appeal to a larger audience, received negative reviews from African Americans who are critical of systemic racism that is still profound in the nation. For example, African American journalist Vann R. Newkirk II goes so far as to say that the NMAAHC "muddles and undermines the interracial narrative of progress that undergirds the American nationalist project."⁵⁵

For others, "Blacksonian" has different connotations. Vocal white museum critic Edward Rothstein lauds the NMAAHC as "a premier example" of the identity museum, which he defines as "devoted to recounting the struggles and triumphs of a people whose place in the larger society is, at first, barely tolerated. They . . . then gradually carve a place for themselves—discovering their identity."⁵⁶ However, such museums create problems when they "disguise obvious differences and define a single identity" for their celebratory collective memory and identity, disfiguring it through "simplification and even delusion."⁵⁷

Actually, it is not difficult for a person familiar with African American history and basic academic historiography to discern omissions or generalizations in the NMAAHC exhibits. For instance, in the section focusing on the late 1960s, communitarian aspects of the Black Panther Party and other revolutionaries overshadow their violent black nationalist side. The NMAAHC is also conspicuously silent about contemporary African American conservatives such as Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, the AIDS epidemic among the African American community, and the Critical Race Theory. The Culture Galleries' celebratory displays overwhelm any careful descriptions.⁵⁸ This means that "African American lenses" sometimes blur historical facts that seem too confrontational or less relevant to the dominant African American memory and identity. The contrasting criticisms by Newkirk and Rothstein epitomize the tightrope that the NMAAHC must traverse between racial identity and the broad nationalistic appeal expected of a federally funded ethnic museum.

Although Bunch aims to "centralize the narrative of African American history in a manner that is ripe with meaning, ambiguity, and complexity,"⁵⁹ the ironical resonance between the traditional American Story and the story depicted by the NMAAHC threatens not only the uniqueness and originality of the museum but also that of the people it represents. The traditional American Story exalts the myth of progress, of overcoming challenges and difficulties to emerge triumphant. If the NMAAHC story borrows too heavily from the myth of progress, in overcoming challenges and difficulties

in moving from slavery to freedom even while it makes itself acceptable to the general American public, it loses the chance to fundamentally challenge the dominant national mythology. In representing the Nazi past of Nuremberg, Sharon Macdonald defines “difficult heritage” as “a past that is recognised as meaningful in the present but that is also contested and awkward for public reconciliation with a positive, self-affirming contemporary identity.”⁶⁰ In our case, both African American identity and, more generally, American identity are challenged in the reorientation of the national memory.

Whatever the NMAAHC is called, it risks reductionism unless it can master an acrobatic balancing act, a new integration gaining the approval of both non-African American visitors and African American visitors, while somehow fundamentally reconstructing the national memory.

B. Emotional Museum

The concept of the emotional museum is endorsed by David Fleming, director of the National Museums Liverpool, which include the International Slavery Museum. The concept closely evolved with growing interest in “dark tourism”: museums, especially history museums, are expected to include the dark and often-neglected side of human history in order to advance social justice.⁶¹

According to Jenny Kidd, the emotional museum poses “a radical reconceptualisation” because it “seeks to foreground the emotional work done in heritage interpretation practices, taking ownership of it within institutions, rather than seeing it solely as an ‘outcome’ to be ‘experienced’ by the visitor.”⁶² In other words, the emotional museum not only displays exhibits with emotionally disturbing narratives and artifacts but also empathetically engages and transforms its visitors. It tries to shake its visitors out of their amnesia and anemia to wrestle with their difficult history as well as its present legacies. For example, the International Slavery Museum and other emotional museums in Britain often use atrocity materials, such as the very shackles and chains that manacled Africans in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Those materials usually provoke visitors’ empathy for the downtrodden and their indignation against inhumane practices, opening up a new possibility for moral commitment.⁶³

In the NMAAHC’s exhibits, especially those in the History Galleries, visitors find the approach of the emotional museum. For example, the Slavery and Freedom section displays vivid evidence of the slave trade and

forced labor: counterweights against human cargo from the wrecked slave ship *São José Paquete Africa* found off the coast of South Africa and an auction block stone on which the enslaved were forced to stand for their sales in a Maryland town. In the *Defending Freedom, Defining Freedom* section, visitors are disturbed not only by seeing the coffin of Emmett Till but also by being confronted with hundreds of small plates inscribed with the names of victims killed by brutal lynching.

As Geoffrey Cubitt shrewdly points out, however, some visitors’ temporary “emotional usurpation” does not last long after they go back to their everyday lives; other problems include familiarity and overexposure to such materials, reductionist victimization of the enslaved, and distraction from historical and contemporary contexts.⁶⁴ The NMAAHC exhibits consciously address these dangers and shortcomings. For example, placed alongside tiny shackles is a baby’s cradle, which provokes visitors’ emotions by the juxtaposition of inhumanity and motherly humanity. Visitors are moved by a linen cloth called “Ashley’s sack,” which an enslaved mother hurriedly packed along with a lock of her hair and some pecans and gave to her departing daughter, who was being sold elsewhere. (The family later embroidered the story on the cloth.) The NMAAHC exhibits its lynching nameplates in the context of the antilynching movement led by Ida B. Wells-Barnett and others.

The NMAAHC also takes scrupulous care of visitors who are overwhelmed with anger, sadness, or sheer shock. Throughout the exhibition space, trained docents are ready to assist those emotionally overwrought visitors; at the Reflections Booth visitors are welcomed to share their stories and thoughts; and at the Contemplative Court, visitors can sit down to meditate or calm down while watching the cleansing streams of the Oculus Fountain (fig. 2).⁶⁵ Although it is hard to measure their effect on visitors’ transformative experiences toward memory reconstruction and racial healing, and the risks Cubitt points out do remain, this approach certainly resonates with Bunch’s ideal of humanization.

C. Memorabilia Museum

The *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* defines “memorabilia” as “things that people collect because they once belonged to a famous person, or because they are connected with a particular interesting place, event or activity.” Brief net surfing easily leads to numerous museums that boast “memorabilia” collections, such as the Cedartown Museum of Coca-Cola



Figure 2. The Oculus Fountain at the Contemplative Court

Memorabilia in Cedartown, Georgia, and the Burlingame Museum of Pez Memorabilia in Burlingame, California. Most memorabilia museums value the entertaining and recreational aspects of their collections themselves over the historical contexts or social meanings that those collections convey, with a few exceptions like the Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia in Big Rapids, Michigan. In a sense, all of the heavily artifact-based Smithsonian museums, nicknamed collectively “the national attic,” could be called huge memorabilia museums. Visitors’ impressions of the NMAAHC upper floors clearly reflect this tendency.

As mentioned, Bunch makes it a principle to seek “the right tension between moments of pain and stories of resiliency and uplift.”⁶⁶ This balance is sought not within each exhibition floor, however, but across all floors overall.

On the low-ceilinged, dimly lit underground floors, visitors move through the exhibitions of slavery and segregation full of atrocity material artifacts in a somber mood; on the more spacious and brighter upper floors, they smile and even revel at the remarkable historical journey as well as the energetic cultural creativity of African Americans. State-of-the-art multimedia technology and other interactive devices, as well as inspiring artifacts and colorful pictures of celebrities, command the Cultural Galleries. In the Musical Crossroads section, it is rather difficult to find a visitor not

humming a tune or swaying to the music. Consequently, these galleries create an aura of celebration, despite some contextualized explanations of racism. Social justice advocate and journalist Eithne Nightingale relates feeling "dizzy" surrounded by memorabilia such as Chuck Berry's red Cadillac and the P-Funk Mothership.⁶⁷ Even public historian William Walker experienced these sections as a kind of "dessert."⁶⁸ Surely, the Cultural Galleries may inspire African American visitors who feel frustrated or helpless with persistent racism in their own lives. Overall, visitors experience "the gamut of emotions" with elation at the end of the visit.⁶⁹

The upbeat ending of the museum tour unwittingly avows morality and markedly contrasts with the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool, which concludes with strong moral messages inveighing against contemporary slavery and other inhumane activities. At the media preview, African American social critic Steven W. Thrasher barely concealed his cynicism, commenting that the NMAAHC is "truly joyous . . . with adult black journalists from around the country as giddy as kids going to Disneyland."⁷⁰ Indeed, these "spectacular, immediately accessible and enjoy[able]" exhibitions are what a management professor recommends museums adopt from theme parks as a viable possible marketing approach.⁷¹ Long lines in front of the gift shops also suggest the commodification of history and the dilettantism of its visitors, both of which offset the moral indignation and responsibility visitors feel on the lower floors. Memory historian Bernard Armada warns of a similar "consumptive entertainment" tendency in the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, Tennessee.⁷² Armada also points out that exhibits with excessive artifacts and multimedia displays cause "sensory overload" that discourages visitors from "engag[ing]" meaningfully the idea of the personal responsibility for social activism.⁷³

As if to redress the balance, the NMAAHC has been holding thought-provoking lectures, symposia, and film screenings almost every week. For example, during its first six months, it screened eight films including *13th*, *BaddDDD Sonia Sanchez*, and *Moonlight*.⁷⁴ In May 2017, when a noose was found in a room that dealt with KKK activities, Bunch immediately made a public statement declaring his museum proactive for social justice: "This was a horrible act, but a stark reminder of why our work is so important."⁷⁵ Ironically, sporadic racially motivated incidents like this dampen the celebratory mood. So far, the NMAAHC uniquely integrates entertaining memorabilia with somber topics, maintaining a fine balance in this dichotomy.

CONCLUSION

Although the Trump presidency has aggravated the racial divide in American society, the NMAAHC's visitors far exceeded the two million mark that the NMAI achieved during its first year. In contrast to the average 75 to 120 minutes that visitors spend at other Smithsonian museums, many people spend up to six hours at the NMAAHC, proving the depth as well as breadth of its appeal of African American experience.⁷⁶ As noted, the visions of the national African American museum were different in each period of activism. Thus, the NMAAHC carries expectations and legacies from the past, while its own history critically reflects the long way to the "new integration" of the national memory.

To endorse this new integration, Lonnie Bunch and his staff developed the NMAAHC as a lens through which visitors can re-view their own past, present, and future as well as their nation's. He has well utilized his unique expertise in building the NMAAHC: artifacts are carefully contextualized with real tear-jerking and laugh-provoking human stories. Employing the approaches of identity museums, emotional museums, and memorabilia museums, the NMAAHC attracts diverse visitors to its sophisticated and appealing exhibits. Its focus requires a delicate balance, however, between African American identity and broad Americanism, between transformative emotional engagement and temporary emotional clutter, and between morality and entertainment. Even a slight imbalance risks downplaying the very vision that the NMAAHC endorses, resulting in loss of focus or "cracks" in its lens.

What can we see through this clear polished lens? By reconstructing the national memory in intriguing ways, will the NMAAHC lead to a more inclusive future, eventual healing, and racial reconciliation? In his review, Ken Burns compares the NMAAHC to his documentary film *Jazz* and Bunch and his African American predecessors to jazz musicians who invented and improvised jazz in a racially strained environment: jazz "negotiates and reconciles the contradictions many of us would rather ignore."⁷⁷ Therein we find glimpses of "our oft-neglected conscience, a message of hope and transcendence for all people, of affirmation in the face of adversity."⁷⁸ Perhaps we cannot yet fully understand the complicated melodies and rhythms of the NMAAHC that Bunch and his staff continuously improvise.

At the White House reception held before the dedication ceremony, President Obama appreciated Bunch's leadership and staff teamwork, saying

the NMAAHC "could not have been done without the persistence, the wisdom, the dedication, the savvy, the ability to make people feel guilty . . . the begging, the deal making, and just the general street smarts of Lonnie and his entire team."⁷⁹ As Bunch himself once confessed, "You cannot be a director at a place like the Smithsonian without being political."⁸⁰ So the future of NMAAHC and racial reconciliation will be closely tied to Bunch's effective political improvisation in which visitors find themselves involved through their engagement. After all, construction of public memory, especially on the Mall, has always been a contested political endeavor. Moreover, as one gallery's name, Making a Way Out of No Way, implies, political improvisation has been the African American tradition—probably the best strategy for navigating "postracial" streams toward a more inclusive society.

NOTES

¹ NMAAHC homepage, <https://nmaahc.si.edu>.

² Ibid.

³ The quotation is from Barack Obama's speech at the opening dedication ceremony. See "Highlights from Our Dedication Ceremony," NMAAHC, <https://nmaahc.si.edu/dedication-highlights> (hereafter cited as "Highlights").

⁴ The museum eventually established as the NMAAHC was called numerous names over the century. Bridging those names, I will use the term "national African American museum" except when referring to specifically proposed museums.

⁵ Vinson Cunningham, "A Darker Presence," *New Yorker*, August 29, 2016, 35.

⁶ Lonnie G. Bunch III, "Making a Way Out of No Way," *Smithsonian Magazine*, September 2016, 30.

⁷ Lonnie G. Bunch III, *Call the Lost Dream Back: Essays on History, Race and Museums* (Washington, DC: AAM Press, 2010), 69–70.

⁸ The quotation is from Lonnie Bunch's speech in "Highlights."

⁹ Faun Rice, "National Museum of African American History and Culture: A New Integration?" *Curator* 60, no. 2 (2017): 256 (hereafter cited as Rice, "NMAAHC").

¹⁰ Paul A. Shackel, *Memory in Black and White: Race, Commemoration, and the Post-Bellum Landscape* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2003); and Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

¹¹ Mabel O. Wilson, *Negro Building: Black Americans in the World of Fairs and Museums* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

¹² James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, eds., *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory* (New York: New Press, 2006); and Julia Rose, *Interpreting Difficult History at Museums and Historic Sites* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016).

¹³ Fath Davis Ruffins, "Culture Wars Won and Lost: Ethnic Museums on the Mall, Pt. 1: The National Holocaust Museum and the National Museum of the American Indian," *Radical History Review* 68 (1997): 79–100; Fath Davis Ruffins, "Culture Wars Won and Lost, Pt. 2: The National African-American Museum Project," *Radical History Review* 70 (1998): 78–

101; and Akiko Ochiai, “‘Jinshu no Gajo’ kara ‘Wakai no Ba’ e: Kokuritsu Afurikakei Amerikajin Rekishi Bunka Hakubutsukan no Setsuritsu” [From a “stronghold of race” to a “place for racial healing”: The establishment of the National Museum of African American History and Culture], in *Gendai Amerika no Seijibunka to Sekai* [The political culture of modern America and the world: From the beginning of the twentieth century to the present], ed. Yoshio Higomoto, Ryo Yamazumi, and Toru Onozawa (Kyoto: Showado, 2010), 210–34. See also Akiko Ochiai, “‘Kokujin Monogatari’ wo Kataru Ba wo Motomete: Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan no Kensetsuchi wo Meguru Kioku no Poritikusu” [In search of a site for the “African American story”: Memory politics over the National Museum of African American History and Culture], *Journal of the Graduate School of International Cultural Studies* [Tohoku University] 17 (2009): 15–29.

¹⁴ Robert L. Wilkins, *Long Road to Hard Truth: The 100-Year Mission to Create the National Museum of African American History and Culture* (Washington, DC: Proud Legacy Publishing, 2016).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 15–30. On the racialized sectional reconciliation between the North and South, see, e.g., David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001).

¹⁶ Pub. Res. 70–107, 45 Stat. 1699–70 (1929).

¹⁷ Wilkins, *Long Road*, 31–46. On African American struggles to secure their public spheres in this period, see Wilson, *Negro Building*, 84–190.

¹⁸ On the development of the DuSable Museum and the Charles H. Wright Museum, see Wilson, *Negro Building*, 242–96. African Americans in the Washington area established a neighborhood museum affiliated with the Smithsonian; it is now called the Anacostia Community Museum. See Kylie Message, *Museums and Social Activism: Engaged Protest* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 196–225.

¹⁹ Wilkins, *Long Road*, 47–55; and John Fleming, “African-American Museums, History, and the American Ideal,” *Journal of American History* 81, no. 3 (1994): 1020–26.

²⁰ Wilkins, *Long Road*, 57–59; and Ochiai, “Jinshu,” 214–15.

²¹ Ruffins, “Culture Wars, Pt. 2,” 80–96; Wilkins, *Long Road*, 59–68; and Ochiai, “Jinshu,” 215–21.

²² These words are found in Legislation to Establish within the Smithsonian Institution a National Museum of African-American History and Culture, H.R. 2205, 108th Cong., 1st sess. (July 9, 2003), 5, 8, 10, 28, 59.

²³ Wilkins, *Long Road*, 67–123; Ochiai, “Jinshu,” 221–24; and Lynette Clemetson, “Long Quest, Unlikely Allies: Black Museum Nears Reality,” *New York Times*, June 29, 2003.

²⁴ On the development of the forum-type museum, see, e.g., Spencer R. Crew, “Involving the Community: The Museum as Forum for Dialogue and Learning,” in *The Manual of Museum Learning*, ed. Barry Lord (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2007), 107–33.

²⁵ Shelly Campo, Teresa Mastin, and M. Somjen Frazer, “Predicting and Explaining Public Opinion Regarding U.S. Slavery Reparations,” *Harvard Journal of Communications* 15, no. 2 (2004): 115–30, esp. 124.

²⁶ National Museum of African American History and Culture Plan for Action Presidential Commission, *The Time Has Come: Report to the President and to the Congress* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2003), 41–43, 71–78; and Ochiai, “Jinshu,” 224–29.

²⁷ *Time Has Come*, 17–20. See also Andrea A. Burns, *From Storefront to Monument: Tracing the Public History of the Black Museum Movement* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013), 156–78, esp. 173–75.

²⁸ *Time Has Come*, 1.

²⁹ Wilkins, *Long Road*, 124. See also Philip Kennicott, “Look in, Step forward,” *Washington Post*, September 22, 2016.

³⁰ Bunch, *Call the Lost Dream Back*, 17–29; and “Lonnie Bunch,” The History Makers, September 5, 2003, <http://www.thehistorymakers.org/biography/lonnie-bunch-39>.

³¹ “About the Museum,” NMAAHC, <https://nmaahc.si.edu/about/museum>.

³² *Ibid.* On the four pillars, see also Mabel O. Wilson, *Begin with the Past: Building the National Museum of African American History and Culture* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2016), 44.

³³ Bunch, *Call the Lost Dream Back*, 62.

³⁴ Anthony Bogues, “This Museum Is about American Identity as Much as It Is about African American History: An Interview with Lonnie Bunch,” *Callaloo Art* 38, no. 4 (2015): 705.

³⁵ Lonnie G. Bunch III, “The National Museum of African American History and Culture: The Vision,” *Journal of Museum Education* 42, no. 1 (2017): 10.

³⁶ Bunch, “Making a Way Out of No Way,” 30.

³⁷ Bunch, *Call the Lost Dream Back*, 69–70. See also Rice, “NMAAHC,” 249–58.

³⁸ On the NMAAHC’s architectural aspects, see, e.g., Wilson, *Begin with the Past*, esp. 48–111; and Charles Henry Rowell, “Designing a Nation’s Museum: An Interview with David Adjaye,” *Callaloo Art* 38, no. 4 (2015): 763–69.

³⁹ Bunch, *Call the Lost Dream Back*, 61–70; and Bogues, “This Museum,” 705–7.

⁴⁰ The following observations of the exhibitions are based on my visit on September 25, 2016, supplemented by media reports and the NMAAHC homepage.

⁴¹ Bunch’s speech in “Highlights.”

⁴² Bunch, *Call the Lost Dream Back*, 36.

⁴³ Bunch, “National Museum of African American History and Culture,” 11.

⁴⁴ Mike Boehm, “Founding Director Lonnie Bunch Reflects on the Journey of the Smithsonian’s African American Museum,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 28, 2014.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *60 Minutes*, “A Monumental Project,” CBS Broadcasting, May 17, 2015, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/african-american-history-culture-smithsonian-institute-60-minutes>.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ On the And Still We Rise exhibit, see, e.g., Charles Pete Banner-Haley, “The Necessity of Remembrance: A Review of the Museum of African American History,” *American Quarterly* 51, no. 2 (1999): 420–25.

⁴⁹ “Exclusive: Obamas Tour National Museum of African American History and Culture,” ABC News, September 23, 2016, <http://abcnews.go.com/GMA/video/exclusive-obamas-tour-national-museum-african-american-history-42297238>.

⁵⁰ Howard Dodson, “A Place of Our Own: The National Museum of African American History and Culture,” *Callaloo Art* 38, no. 4 (2015): 740, 736.

⁵¹ Markeshia Ricks, “The ‘Blacksonian’: A Way Out of No Way,” *New Haven Independent*, October 20, 2016, <http://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/blacksonian>. On the politics of recognition, see Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and “the Politics of Recognition”*: An Essay, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

⁵² Cunningham, “Darker Presence,” 36.

⁵³ Bridget R. Cooks, “Curating the National Museum of African American History and Culture: A Conversation with Tuliza Fleming and Jacquelyn Serwer,” *Archives of American Art Journal* 55, no. 2 (2016): 74.

⁵⁴ Burns, *From Storefront to Monument*, 172–73.

⁵⁵ Vann R. Newkirk II, “How a Museum Reckons with Black Pain: The Smithsonian’s New Memorial of African American History and Culture Is at Once Triumphant and Crushing,” *Atlantic*, September 23, 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2016/09/>

national-museum-of-african-american-history-and-culture-smithsonian/501356. See also Steven W. Thrasher, "The Smithsonian's African American Museum: A Monument to Respectability Politics," *Guardian*, September 16, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2016/sep/16/smithsonian-museum-african-american-history-respectability-politics>.

⁵⁶ Edward Rothstein, "Arts in Review: National Museum of African American History and Culture," *Wall Street Journal*, September 15, 2016.

⁵⁷ Edward Rothstein, "The Problem with Jewish Museums," *Mosaic*, February 1, 2016, <https://mosaicmagazine.com/essay/2016/02/the-problem-with-jewish-museums>. Rothstein criticizes other ethnic museums for the same reasons.

⁵⁸ See, e.g., Al Martin, "African-American History: Did Smithsonian's New Museum Shun Clarence Thomas?" *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, October 25, 2016; Kennicott, "Look in, Step forward"; and Rice, "NMAAHC," 252–53.

⁵⁹ Lonnie G. Bunch III, "'All the Day, Every Day': Reflections on Thirty Years of Interpreting African American History," foreword to *Interpreting African American History and Culture at Museums and Historic Sites*, ed. Max van Balgooy (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), x.

⁶⁰ Sharon Macdonald, *Difficult Heritage: Negotiating the Nazi Past in Nuremberg and Beyond* (London: Routledge, 2008), 1.

⁶¹ See, e.g., David Fleming, "Human Rights Museums: An Overview," *Curator* 55, no. 3 (2012): 251–56; Richard Sandell and Eithne Nightingale, eds., *Museums, Equality and Social Justice* (London: Routledge, 2012); and Karen Busby, Adam Muller, and Andrew Woolford, eds., *The Idea of a Human Rights Museum* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2015).

⁶² Jenny Kidd, introduction to *Challenging History in the Museum: International Perspectives*, ed. Jenny Kidd, Sam Cairns, Alex Drago, Amy Ryall, and Miranda Stearn (Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2014), 10.

⁶³ David Fleming, "The Emotional Museum: The Case of National Museums Liverpool," in *ibid.*, 23–31.

⁶⁴ Geoffrey Cubitt, "Atrocity Materials and the Representation of Transatlantic Slavery: Problems, Strategies, and Reactions," in *Representing Enslavement and Abolition in Museums: Ambiguous Engagement*, ed. Laurajane Smith, Geoffrey Cubitt, Ross Wilson, and Kalliopi Fouseki (London: Routledge, 2011), 229–59, quote at 247. See also Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America, 1780–1865* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2000).

⁶⁵ Peggy McGlone, "300 Volunteers for African American Museum: 'We're Ready,'" *Washington Post*, June 7, 2016. While Bunch took a cue for his Contemplative Court from the Anti-Japanese War Museum in Beijing, which has a memorial space for visitors to consider what they learned from the exhibitions, he also sought consultation from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the National September 11 Memorial & Museum. See Bunch, *Call the Lost Dream Back*, 44; and Krissah Thompson, "Painful but Crucial Pieces of History," *Washington Post*, September 19, 2016.

⁶⁶ Bunch, "Making a Way Out of No Way," 28.

⁶⁷ Eithne Nightingale, "'At Last, I Am Free': A Visit to the National Museum of African and American History and Culture," December 30, 2016, <https://eithnenightingale.com/2016/12/30/at-last-i-am-free-a-visit-to-the-national-museum-of-african-and-american-culture-and-history>.

⁶⁸ Will Walker, "A Visitor's Observations on the National Museum of African American History and Culture, Part 2," National Council on Public History, June 1, 2017, <http://ncph.org/history-at-work/a-visitors-observations-on-the-national-museum-of-african-american-history-and-culture-part-ii>.

⁶⁹ Flash Wiley, "Understanding African-American History and Culture," *Boston Globe*,

October 4, 2016.

⁷⁰ Thrasher, “Smithsonian’s African American Museum.” On the International Slavery Museum and its exhibits, see Richard Benjamin and David Fleming, *Transatlantic Slavery: An Introduction* (Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press, 2011).

⁷¹ Alexandra Zbucea, “Museums as Theme Parks: A Possible Marketing Approach?” *Management Dynamics in the Knowledge Economy* 3, no. 3 (2015): 504.

⁷² Bernard John Armada, “‘The Fierce Urgency Now’: Public Memory and Civic Transformation at the National Civil Rights Museum” (PhD diss., Pennsylvania State University, 1999), 120.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 115, 119.

⁷⁴ “Recent Events,” NMAAHC, <https://nmaahc.si.edu/calendar/recent>; and “National Museum of African American History and Culture Celebrates First Six Months,” NMAAHC, March 24, 2017, <https://nmaahc.si.edu/about/news/national-museum-african-american-history-and-culture-celebrates-first-six-months>.

⁷⁵ Clarence Williams and Peggy McGlone, “Noose Found at Exhibit in African American Smithsonian Museum,” *Washington Post*, May 31, 2017. See also Lonnie G. Bunch III, “A Noose Brings History to Life: Commentary,” *New York Times*, June 23, 2017; and Deirdre Cross, “Talking about Social Justice in a National Museum,” *Journal of Museum Education* 42, no 1, (2017): 32–40.

⁷⁶ “National Museum of African American History and Culture Celebrates First Anniversary with Festivities and Extended Hours Sept. 23–24,” NMAAHC, September 13, 2017, <https://nmaahc.si.edu/about/news/national-museum-african-american-history-and-culture-celebrates-first-anniversary>; and “National Museum of African American History and Culture Reaches Milestone of 1 Million Visitors,” Newsdesk: Newsroom of the Smithsonian, February 21, 2017, <http://newsdesk.si.edu/releases/national-museum-african-american-history-and-culture-reaches-milestone-1-million-visitors>.

⁷⁷ Ken Burns, “Why the African American History Museum Belongs to All of Us,” *Washington Post Magazine*, September 15, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/magazine/ken-burns-why-the-african-american-history-museum-belongs-to-all-of-us/2016/09/14>.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Grand Foyer, “Remarks by the President at Reception in Honor of the National Museum of African American History and Culture,” September 23, 2016, the White House President Barack Obama, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/09/23/remarks-president-reception-honor-national-museum-african-american>.

⁸⁰ Graham Bowley, “Battle to Build an African-American Museum,” *New York Times*, September 5, 2016.