Public History Reviews

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Contributing Editors

Over the last several decades and amid recently renewed global demands for reparative justice in the face of ongoing anti-Black violence, universities across the nation have issued calls and formed committees to study their institutional complicity in slavery and racial injustice. Others study the centuries of harm by land grant universities, colloquially renaming them "land grab universities" to better reflect the expropriation of 11 million acres of Indigenous land used to fund higher education since the nineteenth century. Still more institutions and municipalities are working to strip colonial and Confederate names from buildings and streets, and establish "truth and reconciliation" panels, as California is doing with its first-in-the-nation reparations task force to study the consequences of slavery and systemic racism against African Americans.

All of the public history projects reviewed in this issue of the *JAH* offer means of reckoning with these histories of racial violence and seek to reclaim lives and livelihoods lost and narratives forgotten or erased from public view. Modupe Labode's eloquent description of the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers at the University of Virginia (UVA), for instance, conveys the profundity of honoring the over four thousand enslaved and free Black people who built and worked on the campus before 1865. UVA's location in Charlottesville, the city of deadly conflict in 2017 over the removal of a Robert E. Lee monument, imbues the space encompassed by the memorial with additional meaning, as a place of both reflection and close scrutiny. The thousands of marks representing unnamed enslaved people combine with given names, relationships, and first-person accounts inscribed on the Memorial's walls and timeline, serving, as Labode puts it, as "reminders of the unremitting violence of slavery." She takes care to note that while the research findings published in the UVA *President's Commission on Slavery and the University Report to President Teresa A. Sullivan* and represented in part within the memorial offer up "the fierceness with which formerly enslaved people regarded their own experiences and historical memory," the primary sources still cannot come close to capturing the psychological violence or "extent to which the university accepted and accommodated itself to violence against enslaved women, men, and children." The memorial is just a start in the "ongoing work of repairing the damage of slavery."

Similarly addressing the necessity of ongoing repair work, Marne L. Campbell explores Historic Belmar Park in Santa Monica, California, where the historian Alison Rose Jefferson and the public artist April Banks have installed the Belmar History + Art Project, a series of outdoor interpretive panels and a sculptural work entitled *A Resurrection*

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in Four Stanzas. The project reclaims the stories of Black community members who once resided in the area of the park and in other nearby beach-side enclaves—a surprise when one considers the demographics of the area today, which is largely white and wealthy. Less surprising, as Campbell explains, is the common refrain also heard nationwide, of how the racism and white supremacy of eminent domain violently displaced Belmar's Black residents and businesses, in the name of urban renewal. Though the story of Black Santa Monica presented through Belmar History + Art Project is uniquely local and "challenges the narrative of California as the state where liberal progressivism and equal opportunity reign," it also represents larger national narratives of Black migration and settlement. The project serves as a keen marker of long histories of displacement up to today's gentrification, especially when one considers it in tandem with the nearby Tongva Park, commemorating Native Americans whose homelands are occupied by the city of Santa Monica.

"When I Remember I See Red: American Indian Art and Activism in California," organized by the Crocker Art Museum in Sacramento, and reviewed by Jillian Surdzial when the exhibition was at the Autry Museum of the American West in Los Angeles, offers multiple modes of interpreting the history and racial violence of settler colonialism. Featuring forty Native American artists who live or work in California, the exhibition pushes beyond the important though familiar expression of "we're still here" to embrace, as Surdzial puts it, "Indigenous futurity, ensuring that the traditions nearly annihilated by state violence are preserved and renewed by the next generations." Such works include Julian Lang's video installations that project Karuk words into the museum galleries as an act of Indigenous language survival; traditional crafts and ceremony presented with a contemporary, pop culture edge by Gerald Clarke, James Luna, and Jamie Okuma; and multiplied lithographic images by artist, activist, and exhibition co-curator Frank LaPena, with words printed in blood red that offer a powerful chronology of genocide, forced assimilation, and resistance. The text that introduces the Autry exhibition identifies goals that might likewise be said to apply to the Belmar History + Art Project and the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers, of resisting "erasure and invisibility" and reasserting values of social justice and activism. Each fulfills these goals in powerful ways that also reckon with and provide means to reconcile the past and present.

As always, we welcome your responses to these reviews and invite suggestions of exhibitions, memorials and monuments, historic sites, performances, multiplatform projects that combine media or modes of presentation, and other programs.

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