



# National Forgetting in the American South: White Innocence and the Racial Violence of Historic Places

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**ABSTRACT** Using a cultural landscape approach, this study examines all National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) sites in Ouachita Parish, Louisiana, located in the southern United States. The NRHP recognizes sites representative of “our” national heritage by listing them on this registry. From analysis of these records and related archival materials and observations garnered from field visits to select historic sites in the parish, this study interrogates the officially-designated memorial landscape of the American South. We find that preservation and reuse practices of NRHP-sites have engaged in racialized “purposeful forgetting” (Roberts 2020) and reinforced power relations while enabling the appropriation of Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) labor and culture.

**KEYWORDS** cultural landscapes, memorial landscapes, historic preservation, National Historic Register (US), American South, African American Studies, Louisiana

## Introduction

An officially-recognized cultural landscape, as sanctioned in the United States by local, state, and national historic preservation practices, conveys the priorities of a jurisdiction. As has been widely observed, these practices have long favored white histories, while the sites that tell the stories of Black Americans and other racial minorities are tremendously underrepresented across the US (Leggs et al. 2012; Buckley and Graves 2016; Cep 2020). Historic narratives are contingent upon who is doing the remembering, and thus the designation of historic sites that are rationalized by these narratives serve to depict certain histories while obscuring others and reproduce social relations and the dynamics of power. Dominant-perspective histories often suppress non-dominant narratives like those of historically oppressed groups and sometimes fail to recognize cultural atrocities. As the United States continues to grapple with institutionalized racism spurred by centuries of racially-based violence against Black Americans and other peoples of color and revisit the meanings of long unquestioned national symbols, landmarks, and artwork in the public realm (see recent controversies over Confederate memorials and the National Anthem), it is a fitting time to examine historic narratives that validate the selection and maintenance of these historic sites. This is especially

pertinent in the American South, where the legacy of slavery and Jim Crow still shape everyday life and impact economic, demographic, and social foundations (Schein 2009).

To examine the officially-recognized memorials of this landscape, this study analyzed records of all National Register of Historic Place (NRHP) sites in Ouachita Parish, Louisiana. Overseen by the United States National Park Service, the NRHP is “the official list of the Nation’s historic places worthy of preservation” (National Park Service 2020), making these sites representative of the dominant culture and thrusting them into public space and public memory. Memories are everywhere within the built environment, but historic sites like public monuments and buildings that have been validated by state-led National Register nomination practices, are representative of a shared national heritage. Ouachita Parish, located in northeast Louisiana (parishes are Louisiana’s administrative equivalent to counties, the more common jurisdictional entity across the US), is an apt place to study official memorial and cultural landscapes because its history is representative of pervasive racist practices in the American South, from forced migration and slavery to the Jim Crow era and more subtle but still commonplace discriminatory practices today.

Despite ongoing movements around national memory and preservation, particularly around Civil War monuments and representations of the racial economy, there is still a dearth of research on race and the officially-designated historic sites and landscapes of the American South. Some scholars have examined preserved sites within the heritage tourism industry (Carter et al. 2014), while others have examined civil rights memorial landscapes (Dwyer 2002), but Ouachita Parish is hardly a tourist destination and in fact appears to have buried most reminders of the Civil Rights Movement. This study’s analysis of narrative content along with archival research and field visits to selected sites demonstrates that preservation and reuse practices of NRHP-listed sites have engaged in racialized purposeful forgetting and have reinforced racial power relations while enabling the appropriation of Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC) labor and culture (Roberts 2020). It finds that preservation practices in the parish sites valorize dominant white supremacist culture despite supposed representation of diverse groups in history.

## **Cultural Landscapes of Ouachita Parish**

### **Landscapes and Racial Capitalism**

Cultural landscapes studies are thought to originate from Carl Saur’s (1925) articulation that a group’s physical alteration of places creates a tangible new landscape that reflects social and cultural values (Howard 2011). Understanding the cultural landscape requires one to undertake a “retrospective process” to “read back” a place’s history by assessing the material culture with the purpose of constructing a past that informs the present (Howard 2011: 10). Over the past century, cultural landscape studies have evolved to include a greater emphasis on social dimensions and power relations, though the basic notion of “reading back” a landscape remains foundational to the field. To read back means to “investigat[e] particular landscapes – to understand how they have come to be, to wonder how they are received and lived in and through, to ask how and why they matter, and to figure out how they work” (Schein 2009: 380). This inquiry reads back both pre-memorialized site histories

and their later trajectories as national monuments to assess the extent to which dominant white supremacist culture has shaped and continues to impact public memory through preservation practices.

Scholars have also demonstrated the importance of investigating US race and racism through cultural landscape studies. Derek H. Alderman's study of commemoration through naming streets after Martin Luther King, Jr. found that area racial composition and socio-economic status were key factors in the outcome of citizens seeking an MLK street (2000). Similarly, Andrea R. Roberts' examination of a mixed-use development at the site of a former sugar factory in Texas demonstrates how planners and developers utilize "purposeful forgetting" to erase the "inconvenient truth of exploited laboring Black bodies" (2020: 232). Other cultural landscape studies have explored memorial landscapes or sites of collective memory to expose the dimensions of race and class in their creation or designation (Mitchell 2003). Schein's Lexington, Kentucky studies of the Ashland Park neighborhood and Courthouse Square demonstrate that the preservation of historic landscapes is often contested and frequently involves a struggle to control, adapt and reuse designated sites (1997, 2009).

These historic places and many others are spaces of struggle and exclusion – they are created and maintained to (re)produce public memory, privileging some memories over others. As Mitchell (2003: 448) notes, these spaces contain "the traces of memory left in the landscape [that] point to the political, cultural and economic forces which cohered at that moment to produce a vision of the way a (dominant) society perceived and represented itself to itself". Similarly, Huyssen (2003) notes that memorial spaces do not symbolize congruent meanings among spectators, and that memory is not uniform for individuals across social lines. A Mellon Foundation survey of over 50,000 US monuments found an unjust representation in the people who were memorialized and that monument narratives distorted history. The study notes that among US Civil War monuments, only one percent mention slavery in their accompanying interpretive texts (Monument Lab 2021). Pulido argues that these sites reproduce "white innocence", a method of retelling that shields and protects white, largely male, historical figures. She further suggests that in this retelling, white supremacy is a "spatial process that was fundamental to the creation of the United States" and its territorial development (Pulido 2022: 1063). These selective narratives are reconstructed and memorialized in the built environment – as statues, monuments, and landmarks – to reinforce power relations and contribute to on-going "cultural trauma[s]" experienced by African Americans and native peoples that began with slavery and forced migration (Eyerman 2004).

Other critics have observed the connection of place-based racial inequities to capitalist accumulation. Anne Bonds argues that "places are processes, produced through specific histories of accumulation, disinvestment, violence, dispossession, and resistance in relation to other places" (2013: 1576). Capitalism relies on difference and hierarchy to produce profit in one place through the extraction of value in another place (Robinson 2021; Bonds 2013). Nancy Fraser (2016) calls this process expropriation and argues that the fabrication and leveraging of hierarchies of difference – such as race, gender, sexuality, and other forms of identity – is integral to capitalism. Other commentators have noted the connections between race and capitalist expropriation (Werner 2011; Bonds 2013; Hawthorne 2019), yet

the complicated economic and social undergirding of historic landscapes are rarely made visible in memorial practices across the American South.

One historic landscape common to the region that demonstrates hierarchical and expropriative relationships is the plantation. As defined by Edgar Tristram Thompson in his seminal 1932 text, a plantation “is a large, landed estate, located in an area of open resources, in which social relations between diverse racial or cultural groups are based upon authority, involving the subordination of resident laborers to a planter for the purpose of producing an agricultural staple which is sold in a world market” (Thompson and Mintz 2010: 3). In the US, the first enslaved groups were Native Americans, but southern slaveholders quickly came to prefer people of African descent due to their resistance to malaria and experience growing rice (Brown and Webb 2007). Plantations are sites of racial violence as the global plantation system was predicated on the subordination of a cultural or racial group by a dominating racial group for economic output (Thompson and Mintz 2010). The cultural landscape of the plantation is not confined by its boundaries and is relationally linked to sites and places that benefited from chattel slavery through the expropriation of Black people. Katherine McKittrick argues that plantations served to naturalize “links between blackness, underdevelopment, poverty, and place” (2011: 51), effectively making Black people synonymous with deprivation. Additionally, she argues that racialization – the fabrication of racial hierarchy – is relationally linked to the plantation and it is “impossible to delink the built environment, the urban, and blackness” (McKittrick 2013: 2). Thus, any cultural landscape examination in these milieus must attempt to “read back” histories shaped by racial capitalism (Brahinsky et al. 2014).

### Context of Ouachita Parish

Ouachita Parish is located in northeast Louisiana within the Upper Louisiana Delta and North Central Hill County cultural landscape (Jackson 2014). The parish seat, Monroe, sits across from its twin city, West Monroe, separated by the Ouachita River. Both cities as well as the parish at large have experienced population decreases over the last decade, alongside unemployment and poverty rates higher than those at both the state and national levels. The 2020 population of Ouachita Parish was 160,368 (US Census Bureau).

Until Louisiana gained statehood in 1812, Native Americans comprised the largest percentage of its population. Watson Brake, the oldest mound complex in Louisiana dating back to 5,400 BCE, is in the Ouachita River’s floodplain, about 15 miles south of West Monroe (Walker 1998). In the 19th century, the river supported a strong plantation economy based on sugar and cotton production with labor supplied by thousands of enslaved people. There were more enslaved Black people than (non-enslaved) white people in the parish according to the 1840 and 1850 censuses (Department of State 1854; DeBow 1850). Today, the parish is racially segregated. The population of Monroe city is more Black than other parts of the parish, while the Native American population has been decimated by historical settlement. In 2020, 55% of the parish’s residents were white, 37% were Black, and 0.3% were Native American. In Monroe, 31% of residents were white, 63% were Black, and 0.2% were Native American, while in West Monroe, 54% of residents were white, 35% were Black, and 0.2% were Native American (US Census Bureau).

## Studying Memorial Landscapes in Northeast Louisiana

This study of officially-designated memorial landscapes of Ouachita Parish, Louisiana, largely consisted of document review and analysis. Specifically, we analyzed the nomination forms of all Ouachita Parish properties submitted to the National Park Service for placement on the United States National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). NRHP nomination forms contain extensive historic documentation and present arguments for a site's significance – why it warrants designation (National Park Service 2020). As all submissions for places within Ouachita Parish have been accepted, these forms represent 100% of sites recommended for the register by the Louisiana State Historic Preservation Office at the time of our analysis in fall 2020. The nomination forms were analyzed for content and themes such as physical site details, period of significance, date of nomination, current state of preservation, and association with race or cultural groups. We also compared the emergent themes to historic census data to observe the presence of over- or under-representation of racial groups based on population data from the time of the building's period of significance. Site visits were then conducted for selected properties. The combination of archival research and visitation allowed us to “read back” these officially-designated landscapes to assess memorial narratives and preservation trajectories, capturing both the recorded and un-recorded histories, and identify contemporary or recent events contributing to site identities. By interrogating these landscapes through reading back, we were able to reconstruct landscape histories and meanings, and observe how they work as “discourse materialized”; or how NRHP designation may “normalize/naturalize social and cultural practice, to reproduce [and] to provide a means to challenge [these practices]” (Schein 2010: 226).

## Creating Memorial Landscapes through NHRP Listing

The National Register of Historic Places is an excellent indicator of state cultural value as it is an extensive program with recognized status and benefits. The NRHP was authorized in 1966 as “part of a national program to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect America's historic and archeological resources” (National Park Service 2019). As of 2019, over 95,000 properties have been listed nationally (National Park Service 2020). Designated historic places can potentially benefit from a wealth of preservation resources. They are eligible for federal preservation grants for planning and rehabilitation, federal investment tax credits, preservation easements, and International Building Code fire and life safety alternatives. Depending on their location, NRHP sites may also be eligible for state tax benefits and incentives. The National Register of Historic Places effectively establishes place identity because it assigns heightened cultural value to listed sites, pinning them (and the events that happened therein) as lauded spaces that have shaped national heritage. Sites on the NRHP are recognized nationally, locally, and at the state level, representing places ascribed value at multiple steps in the preservation process.

The National Park Service provides four main criteria for evaluation of site significance: “association with events that have made a significant contribution to *our* history; association with the lives of persons significant in *our* past; embodiment of distinctive architectural

or artistic characteristics; and yielding (or the potential to yield) information important to history or prehistory” (National Park Service 2020; emphasis added). The use of the word “our” in site significance criteria implies a singular national identity and history, while in reality the US people have diverse identities and many (often conflicting) histories. With its traditional, unified view of American history and its emphasis on architectural detail, the collective language used in NRHP nomination forms can potentially obscure less dominant or conflicting histories of landmark sites and landscapes. As Owen J. Dwyer and Derek H. Alderman (2008) contend, officially-recognized memorial landscapes “typically reflect the values and worldviews of government leaders and members of the dominant class” (as cited in Allen et al. 2019: 1006). Registered sites also reflect local preservation priorities and the dominant local historic narratives, while historic sites that are absent from the registry or those that are registered but under-preserved or deteriorating may speak to untidy histories of conflict, violence, or repression.

After reviewing Ouachita Parish’s 33 NRHP sites, we selected two sites for detailed examination: the Miller-Roy Building and Logtown Plantation. These sites were chosen because race was central to their historic development and use, and because they represent different types of land use and temporal significance. Also, each has experienced recent preservation and urban development activity involving public discourse. In studying these sites, we consulted public plans and related documents, census data, historic publications, and local news coverage to understand the site’s position within the region and its evolution through the time of our study. Next, we visited these sites in-person or virtually to make qualitative observations about these cultural landscapes. Observation criteria included current state of building preservation or decay, surrounding environment, and current uses.

### **Analysis of Ouachita’s NHRP-designated Sites**

To study the state- and federally-sanctioned component of Ouachita Parish’s memorial landscape, we reviewed all 33 NRHP nomination forms submitted by fall 2020. The earliest nomination form was submitted in 1976, and the latest in 2019. By 2020, all nominations had been accepted, placing the corresponding properties on the Register.

While the nomination process is ostensibly public and open to all, many citizens lack technical knowledge and/or robust access to property ownership information or the services of preservation professionals or advocates. Others who may have a stake simply do not have enough free time to execute or participate in a nomination. Thus, many sites that could be candidates for listing and preservation are never considered and often remain in states of disuse or neglect. The nomination process starts with a questionnaire and a required site visit to first confirm eligibility. If eligible, a completed nomination form will also include maps, digital photographs, a political representation list and ownership verification (Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism 2020). Many parties work with preservation professionals or consultants on the nomination form, which typically requires several drafts with technical and substantive reviews before a required presentation to the state preservation board.

NRHP designation itself does not offer any physical protection unless the site has received funding from a federal agency under Section 106 as a federal undertaking. Thus, based on National Register status alone, owners who have not received any federal funding are not limited in how they may alter (or demolish) a building. However, NHRP listing makes preservation projects eligible for tax credit funding (up to 20% of certified restoration costs), which increases the likelihood of preservation. While some states and locales offer additional preservation incentives, Louisiana does not engage in state-level designations and associated tax credit programs.

### Period of Significance

National Register of Historic Places eligibility requires that a property's period of significance be at least 50 years into the past. Ouachita Parish NRHP sites have periods of significance that range from as early as 1814 to as late as 1965. The median year of significance among the 33 sites is 1898, and the mode decade represented is the 1920s, with seven places having a date of significance during this time. Sites that had significance spanning decades were coded as their middle-occurring decade.

The 1920s corresponds with high development activity in Ouachita Parish. National economic forces alongside the discovery of a large natural gas field near Monroe in 1916 spurred investment that contributed to the parish's growth (Harvey 2007). The enduring architectural quality of structures completed during this period in downtown Monroe and some outlying residential neighborhoods during subsequent decades provided a compelling rationale for NRHP listing and preservation efforts. Of course, access to these places was not spread equally among all residents. Most of the parish's Black residents lacked the capital (or access to capital) required to participate in urban development and property stewardship, at the same time that Jim Crow laws prohibited Black access to many of these places.

### Criteria for Significance

Perhaps the most valuable source of information on the nomination forms regarding sites' intended memorialization is the Applicable National Register Criteria for Significance. Eligibility standards require that sites exhibit a strong connection to either general or architectural history and satisfy at least one of four criteria based on historic association with a) events or b) people, possessing c) exemplary design or construction or d) "information potential" – the capacity to contribute to our understanding of history (National Park Service 2020). Sites in the parish are overwhelmingly deemed significant based on criteria c) design/construction – their architectural characteristics rather than historical association, but some properties have been awarded significance for both architectural and historical elements.

Of the 33 sites, nine well represent the parish's racial history. Three sites are on the register because of their association with Black history: the Grayson House, the home of Jeanes supervisor Emma Blanche Grayson (Jeanes supervisors were Black supervising teachers who worked to improve Black education in the rural south); the Miller-Roy Building, a Black commercial, professional, and entertainment hub; and Robinson Business

College, the parish's first Black professional school. While many listed properties have been well maintained and restored or adapted, these three properties – the only sites primarily associated with BIPOC cultural histories – were vacant and in states of disrepair at the time of this study.

The parish's other six sites with strong associations with racial histories are plantation homes, which were economically reliant on the possession of and forced labor of enslaved people of color (while mostly African and African-descended peoples, sometimes Indigenous peoples were also enslaved). These sites are the Bosco Plantation, Boscobel Cottage, Logtown Plantation, Lower Pargoud, Mulberry Grove, and Whitehall Plantation House. All the parish's NRHP plantations are significant because of their architecture but Logtown's significance is also based on it being the eighteenth century residence of Jean Baptiste (Don Juan) Filhiol, Monroe's founder. Because the state's legal racial division was very strict until about fifty years ago, it is unlikely that there would have been much if any racial diversity among the people associated with parish NRHP sites that are not plantations or officially associated with Black history.

It should be noted that the parish possesses one additional eligible (but yet to be listed) site, the Filhiol Mound Complex (eligibility determined by the Federal Highway Administration in 1977). Although named for the European settler Don Juan Filhiol, the mound complex is a significant Native American burial site. The complex has yet to go through the official nomination process.

## **Detailed Histories and Field Observations**

### **Miller-Roy Building**

Located in Monroe's historic Five Points district, the Miller-Roy Building (1001 Desiard Street) functioned as a Black business hub, political center, and cultural destination from 1929 until the early 1970s. Miller-Roy was added to the NRHP in 2011 as consistent with Criterion A: Historical significance. While vacant and deteriorating for nearly 50 years, in 2022–23 the building was renovated as mixed income housing and nonprofit office space, facilitated by historic preservation tax credits and state low-income housing credits.

The parish's first Black-owned commercial building, Miller-Roy was instrumental to the formation of Five Points, Monroe's one-time thriving Black business district. It is the district's only surviving building. The building's uses were significant in several capacities. Its first floor housed storefronts such as restaurants, beauty shops, and a pharmacy, which attracted high volumes of customers and patrons and employed several people (Kinkead 2020). The second, middle floor housed professional offices and social uses. Occupants included lawyers, tailors, insurance companies, the local African American newspaper, and doctors. The namesake doctors Miller and Roy, who built and owned the building, also kept their offices on this floor (US Department of the Interior 2011). Other tenants included the regional offices for civil rights groups including the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) and CORE (Congress of Racial Equality), and locally-aligned groups. Civil rights protests, sit-ins and other forms of resistance that led



to the desegregation of the local bus system, public library, state university and area businesses were organized at the Miller-Roy in the 1960s (US Department of the Interior 2011).

Until 1949, the third, top floor served as the Savoy Ballroom, an entertainment venue on the Chitlin' Circuit, the network of performing arts venues across the United States safe for Black entertainers and patrons. Notable artists who performed at the ballroom included Louis Armstrong, Count Basie, Turner Bradshaw, and Lina Horne (US Department of the Interior 2011). Influenced by the Savoy's success, Desiard Street also became the spine of a Black entertainment district with movie theaters, pool halls, and restaurants. The Savoy closed in 1949, making way for Lucius White's Tailoring School, which was inspired by the Tuskegee Institute's vocational programs and operated until 1960 (US Department of the Interior 2011). Like Robinson Business College, the tailoring school increased the breadth of Black professionals in Ouachita Parish.

The Miller-Roy was arguably the most consequential structure in the advancement of the local civil rights and Black self-determination movements. In the early twentieth century, national leaders including Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. DuBois, and Marcus Garvey encouraged the establishment of Black businesses despite hurdles such as racial bias in lending, exclusion from principal commercial districts, restricted access to business training, and denial of property rights (Boyd 2001). Black business owners and professionals became powerful advocates for progress and prosperity as Black commercial districts formed in every Southern city. Other aligned organizations and movements, such as those concerning the advancement of women, veterans, and church groups, also gained capacity and status in these districts. These groups often held meetings at the Miller-Roy and promoted not just economic and social welfare, but also cultural identity and vitality. Historical spaces that fostered Black growth maintain their importance to this day, as Black urban social formations provided an environment to redevelop narrative frames around African American identity, the meaning of slavery, and other seminal institutions and movements that have defined Black life in the United States (Eyerman 2004).

The shuttering of the Miller-Roy in the early 1970s coincides with the years during which the last strongholds of de jure segregation fell in Ouachita Parish. While Blacks started patronizing white-owned businesses, the integration only went in one direction: whites continued to avoid Black-owned businesses, cycling wealth away from African Americans and into the hands of whites (Rymer 1998). In part an unintended consequence of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the demise of Black business districts across the US was also facilitated by suburbanization and the growth of automobile travel, which shifted patrons away from downtown commercial hubs. Many of these districts were also lost to postwar urban renewal and highway and road building projects.

Vacant, deteriorated and surrounded by vacant land, the Monroe city council in 2010 voted to demolish Miller-Roy. But the building's National Register listing in 2011 spurred local investors led by developer Michael Echols to purchase the building. Already possessing a portfolio of properties in and around Monroe, Echols was adept in building upon his political capital to obtain preservation and development incentives, including New Markets Tax Credits, Low Income Housing Tax Credits, Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits, state historic tax credits, and eight million dollars in Multifamily Housing

Revenue Bonds (Louisiana Housing Corporation 2020; Brian & Wishneff Associates 2018). The adaptation plan for the Miller-Roy, which also encompasses an adjacent newly constructed 50,000-square-foot building, includes 66 affordable housing units set aside for families making between 20% and 80% of the area's mean income, and a 5,000 square foot, ground-floor community resource center that will be occupied and used by various local nonprofits. The \$45 million project, which received broad endorsement among diverse Monroe stakeholders, broke ground in 2020 and was completed in early 2023, and includes a ground floor museum installation depicting the building's illustrious history (Robinson 2022; United Way of Northeast Louisiana 2023).

While not restoring Miller-Roy with commercial enterprises and entertainment uses that made the building such a vital cultural hub in its heyday, the community spaces will be occupied by established Monroe area nonprofits with significant roots in the parish's Black community and involve several Black stakeholders. The press around the project suggests it enjoys broad support among community leaders in Monroe and housing advocates across Northeast Louisiana. The adaptation represents a satisfactory outcome for a building that was vacant for a half century and at the brink of erasure. While its developers are white, given the region's demographics we assume that at least some (if not more) of the building's residents will be Black, and Black stakeholders will be well represented among the users of the building's community space.

### Logtown Plantation

Logtown Plantation is one of Ouachita Parish's oldest National Register properties and was among the first to receive this recognition in 1980. Its period of significance is 1840, the year the main house was constructed by Monroe founder Don Juan Filhiol's grandson Jean Baptiste Filhiol (US Department of the Interior 1980). Today the plantation is owned by members of the popular reality TV show family, *Duck Dynasty*. Although Logtown remains privately owned, 12 of its acres are publicly accessible if rented out for lodging or events and it is a popular site for weddings (Logtown Plantation 2020).

The Logtown property was owned by the Filhiol family starting in 1785. As the first white settlers, the Filhiols had a direct hand in ousting area Native Americans and helped build Fort Miro, the precursor to the city of Monroe. The Filhiol family is thus synonymous with early (white European American) Ouachita Parish history and commemorated as pioneers in Monroe's cultural landscape (Kinkead 2020). Although the Filhiol name abounds throughout Monroe's official history and built environment, the names and histories of BIPOC residents, workers, and other actors that were affiliated with Ouachita Parish at large, and Logtown Plantation specifically, are obscured from these dominant histories. Like the other plantations on the NRHP, Logtown Plantation purposefully forgets the racial violence implicit in its past. In 1860, 15 enslaved individuals ranging from one year to 35 years old, lived and labored on the plantation (National Archives n.d.), but the site's nomination form entirely neglects discussion of chattel slavery despite Logtown once being a "sizeable complex" with "perhaps ten buildings" spread across 12 acres among over 100 acres of cotton fields (US Department of the Interior 1980).

Although not mentioned in Logtown's official histories, enslaved individuals in the American South had rich cultural traditions that shaped the landscape. Despite (but also due to) frequent family separations, enslaved people developed and transmitted both new and traditionally African cultural patterns and values among linked plantations (Wood 2003). This process had its "fullest effect in the Lowcountry" (deeper American South), where "the combination of native Africans, larger plantations and absentee owners allowed the development of a rich African culture on the rice plantations" (Brown and Webb 2007: 49). In some ways this culture was tied to the physical land of the plantation. In the American South, many enslaved people were granted garden plots where they could grow their own food. For planters this was a way to encourage enslaved people to connect with the plantation land so they would be dissuaded from escaping, but for enslaved people garden plots provided "amusement, pleasure, and profit" (Brown and Webb 2007: 47). Other plantation-developed cultural traditions included religious practices, music, ways of dress, intellectual discourses, oral histories, and arts and crafts (Wood 2003).

Logtown is significant to Louisiana's history, but could also be considered nationally significant. The site is owned by Jase and Missy Robertson of A&E's successful reality television series, *Duck Dynasty*, set in West Monroe. In the show, the wealthy white Robertson family "plays redneck" by hunting and fishing, wearing camouflage, flaunting their Christianity, and denigrating people who are different from them (O'Sullivan 2016; Holladay 2018). In 2013, A&E suspended the show after the family patriarch told a magazine reporter "that gays are sinners and African Americans were happy under Jim Crow laws" (Associated Press 2013). Louisiana's governor and many parish residents stood by the Robertsons, underlining the show's dominant cultural position in the region (Associated Press 2013).

The Robertsons' touristic administration of Logtown celebrates the dominant cultural aspect of the plantation while ignoring histories of non-white inhabitants. The plantation's motto, "Where Hospitality is Key" and its website, which invites patrons to "Come Stay Awhile" (Logtown Plantation 2020), is perhaps tone-deaf at best given its history of chattel slavery and begs reflection on who the Logtown keyholders have been and whom they have held captive. Although parts of the complex's surrounding area have been developed over the past centuries into new residences, the Logtown Plantation property has remained substantially preserved. Adjacent fields are still being used for agricultural purposes and several of the original or early architectural elements remain intact (Kinkead 2020).

Like other publicly accessible historic plantations across the American South, Logtown could be considered a "bastion of white planter culture" unwilling to make visible or grapple with the contributions and struggles of those enslaved on site. Its touristic presentation has been "preoccupied with crafting and ensuring the 'emotional comfort' of their visitors rather than necessarily achieving historical accuracy and responsibility" (Bright et al. 2018: 1744). Venerating wealthy enslavers, this site reinforces white supremacy and disenfranchises Black Americans of their cultural history. As Carter et al. (2014) note, Black Americans did not exist before the plantation while the cultural trauma of slavery continues to inform a collective Black identity in the United States (Eyerman 2004). Scholars have also noted the links between antebellum plantations and current-day racial violence,

arguing that the enslaved plantation workforce “normalized black dispossession, white supremacy, and other colonial-racial geographies, while naturalizing the racist underpinnings of land exploitation as accumulation *and* emancipation” (McKittrick 2011: 949; emphasis in original).

As a plantation memorialized by NRHP listing, Logtown represents the dominant cultural landscape with its history of racial violence (Thompson and Mintz 2010). However, the site’s public accessibility and notable ownership still offers the possibility of telling a crucial story of Black America and Black Americans, even as its owners, empowered by in part by NHRP listing, have thus far opted to ignore this history.

### **Conclusion: Preserving Difficult Southern Legacies**

Our analysis of National Historic Register sites in Ouachita Parrish, Louisiana, found very limited connection to Black history, even as the historic essence of these places is inseparable from the stories of Black enslavement, Jim Crow discrimination, and other racist practices. At the same time, sites of Black commerce and culture – of Black prosperity and joy – have mostly been erased and those that have survived, are long neglected. Logtown’s crassness and blatant tropes of southern white gentility in particular, may seem like an extreme case of national forgetting, yet our analysis found a similar absence of Black stories and interpretation in the NHRP nominations for the parish’s other five plantation sites. Such preservation and reuse practices are common at similar sites across the American South. Meanwhile, in sum, the parish preservation practices to date have done little to remember and make visible other racist practices, including public lynchings that were staged in the Downtown Monroe Historic District (McHenry 2010). The Ouachita’s 38 reported public lynchings of Black people is second among all Louisiana parishes, and the state’s overall total of 589, is third among US states, only behind Mississippi and Georgia (Equal Justice Initiative 2017). Additionally, the histories of other minority groups have also been neglected by parish preservation efforts. The nomination of the Filhiol Mound Complex, a Native American burial site, NRHP-eligible since 1977, has not been pursued by property owners or the state of Louisiana. While property owners cannot be compelled to publicly share and disseminate the histories contained or embodied by the sites they legally possess, surely US preservation practices can better incentivize the telling of these long-suppressed narratives at sites that continue to exploit the cachet of “historic” while denying their own racist pasts.

Monroe and its parish may seem like a relative backwater, an exception to a state synonymous with well-preserved places that invoke its history, like the French Quarter and Garden District of New Orleans and its vast bayou landscape where unique settlements and building stock are maintained by intricate systems of levees, dykes, canals and pumping stations. Louisiana’s Cajun and Creole cultures are well celebrated, yet the places of Black history have been grossly neglected and the state has yet to fully wrestle with, let alone redress, the complicated legacies of slavery and Jim Crow. While recent US events including racially-motivated mass shootings, police brutality and state-sanctioned violence targeting African-Americans have sparked protests and uprisings and have brought long suppressed issues to the back to the forefront of American political discourse, Louisiana’s state

preservation plan (Louisiana Office of Cultural Development 2017) barely mentions slavery or post-slavery racist practices. Indeed, the tourism-oriented plan's operative metaphor, "First you make a roux" (and cover image), is emblematic of the state's tourism-friendly French heritage, while its more difficult Black (and Native American) legacies seems to have been forgotten.

The Miller-Roy building provides a window to another problematic aspect of these practices. Its decades of vacancy and deterioration speak to a cumulative racism by neglect to which many parties and institutions may have played a role. Even now that the building is being renovated, thanks to its 2011 NHRP listing and investors who had the capacity to cobble together various public incentives to adapt it for new uses, it is an outlier and demonstrates the persistent issues of preserving Black business and cultural sites through the US's largely market-based preservation mechanisms. Small and medium sized commercial buildings have long been a blind spot in preservation policies and practices, even more so now in our post-pandemic world where work-from-home, entertain-at-home, and cultural gatherings via remote video have lessened the market value and desirability of even marquee office structures. Yet the erasure of the Five Points district once anchored by the Miller-Roy long predates the pandemic and other twenty-first century shifts in culture and lifestyle.

Across the US, there are many Black cultural landmarks that have languished or been demolished, in part because the market-based incentives are not enough to overcome market-weakness long sown by racist practices such as Jim Crow and redlining, and sometimes federal urban renewal and highway building (see Leggs et al. 2012; Cep 2020). Monroe, Louisiana, represents a particularly weak market for real property investment at the same time that most established property development stakeholders with access to capital are white. Yet even in stronger markets with greater Black wealth and participation in urban development practices, Black landmarks have fallen with often stunning regularity while localities, states and the nation at large have struggled to recognize and remedy the injustices associated with the forgotten or suppressed erasures of Black cultural landscapes. The deterioration and loss of Monroe's Five Points district pales in comparison to the erasure of Tulsa's Greenwood neighborhood with its "Black Wall Street" – the site of the 1921 Tulsa Massacre, an act of white supremacist terrorism that destroyed 35 blocks of the city and killed over 300 people, injured another 800 and made 8,000 to 10,000 Americans (nearly all Black) homeless. The relatively recent (2001) acknowledgement and subsequent compensatory payments by the State of Oklahoma, eight decades after the event that wiped out one of the most vibrant Black business districts in the Jim Crow South – a tremendous generator of a Black prosperity, urbanity and culture that had generated resentment among the city's white population – has not been an entirely cathartic act of remembrance, and the city is still working to find and identify the graves of massacre victims (McCarthy 2023). The corrupted politics of memory in erased Black cultural landscapes can be seen elsewhere in the US South. The National Trust for Historic Preservation working with local and state governments is involved in a long campaign to remember, reconstruct, and address atrocities and neglect at Shockoe Bottom in Richmond, Virginia, where hundreds of thousands of Black slaves were born or sold into bondage, labored, lived, and died. At Shockoe's once extensive

Burial Ground for Negroes, history was not only forgotten but also cleared, redeveloped, and claimed for other uses including a jail, dog pound and Interstate 95, which runs through the core of the site (Leggs et al. 2012, Cep 2020). Similarly, the Sugar Hill neighborhood of Jacksonville, Florida, and its own Black business district was destroyed by the construction of that same interstate (aka Jacksonville Freeway, completed 1960) and the subsequent deterioration of the would-be historic buildings that remained in the elevated highway's shadow (Jacksonville Metro 2015).

As these examples and our Ouachita Parish, Louisiana, National Historic Register-designed cultural landscape survey demonstrate, the memory of place remains a critical terrain of struggle for oppressed minority cultures. In the parish, the NRHP has in some cases been used to perpetuate white supremacy and privilege, and in others, been powerless or exercised too late to preserve vital Black cultural sites. Clearly, it is a weak tool to bring more just historical narratives to the public consciousness and serve as evocative and lively markers of lost culture. Its potential to serve as a restorative generator of Black wealth and urbanity also seems limited, even as the Miller-Roy's renovation speaks to some hope of both remembrance and urban regeneration. As the discourse both broadly and around specific sites continues to evolve, more national resources need to be directed in support of preservation efforts that aim to remember and share Black histories and those of other historically marginalized groups. Likewise, an enhanced equity lens and participatory mechanisms may help bring formerly disenfranchised stakeholders back into the decision-making process at a variety of historic sites and offer the possibility of many more preserved sites that tell the stories of Black people and others within and beyond Northeast Louisiana.

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