Urban redevelopment as soft memory-work in Montgomery, Alabama

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ABSTRACT

Scholars are increasingly studying memory-work as an essential place-defining force within cities, but few scholars have analyzed urban redevelopers as agents of memory-work. Using the Montgomery Builds effort to redevelop the Kress Building as a "memory moment," we argue for a broader reading of memory-work that recognizes the broad spectrum of social actors, interests, and tensions involved in not only doing justice to the legacies of racialized pasts but also appropriating them in the service of urban capital. Central to our argument is a recognition that urban spaces are not just the product of the labor of remembering and preserving, but that these spaces have an affective and material place and impact within people's lives and connections with the past. In so doing, we articulate how memory works through the remaking of space and place and argue for a broader definition of memory-work, a recognition of the harder and softer socio-political forms they can take in cities, and the way ostensibly painful memories are folded back into urban redevelopment visions in ways that facilitate but also complicate development and racial reconciliation.

Introduction

On April 12, 2018, in downtown Montgomery, Alabama, a privately-owned development company called Montgomery Builds unveiled their completed renovation of the Kress Building in the heart of the city's historic business district. The S.H. Kress & Co. was a chain of department stores first operated in Pennsylvania in the late 1880s. Early innovators in the "five and dime" retail business, Kress sold a wide variety of goods and was even a music pioneer, selling records under its house label Romeo Records (Cohen, 1970). Kress stores could be found coast to coast, and the retail chain often dominated downtown cityscapes until the company was sold in the 1960s. The last Kress-operated store closed in 1981. To distinguish itself from other large retailers at the time including Woolworths, the founder of the chain, Samuel Kress—an avid collector of Italian painting and sculpture (Perry, 1999)—envisioned each store as an architectural work of art. Much of the expansion of the Kress company occurred in the 1920s, many of the buildings incorporated art deco styles of design (Thomas, 1997). This style now makes these buildings attractive to modern developers, who have turned several former Kress structures into a mixed retail and residential spaces, places of entertainment, and anchors for broader urban redevelopment efforts.

Kress stores are perhaps most famous, however, for their role in the modern civil rights movement. In several southern cities, Kress lunch counters were sites of sit-ins and other civil rights protests as African American students and White allies pressed against the system of segregation and protested separate and unequal treatment in downtown public spaces of consumption (Eskew, 1997; Hine, 1996; Schmidt, 2018). It is, in fact, these twined legacies—attractive downtown development

and architectural space *and* being part of the storied legacy of segregation and civil rights protests—that come together to make the Kress redevelopment in Montgomery an important urban landscape and analytical moment for unpacking the work of social memory, public commemoration, historical preservation and its relationship to the changing political economy of downtown urban development projects more broadly. While this relationship is especially meaningful in the context of Montgomery, and many cities of the southeastern United States, it is also a universal dynamic given the prevalence of what Karen Till (2012) calls "wounded cities," those urban areas defined by and in need of addressing the legacies of trauma, inequality, and displacement. The labor of remembering, materializing, and coming to terms with these painful legacies is "memory-work."

Scholars are increasingly studying memory-work as an essential place-defining force within cities and other places (e.g., Baird, 2014; Dowler, 2013; Lombard, 2014; Secor, 2013)—paying particular attention, such as Till, to the role of activists, artists, and some municipal or other government officials. However, there is limited analysis of urban redevelopers as agents of memory-work and how they promote, shape, and complicate the process of recovering (from) racialized pasts and enacting what Till (2012) calls "place-based ethics of care." Using the Montgomery Builds urban redevelopment effort as a "memory moment," we argue for a broader reading of memory-work outside of a strict activist practice and the reclaiming of space and place and instead focus on how memory is put into service of urban capital. Central to our argument is a recognition that urban spaces are not just the product of the labor of remembering and preserving but these spaces have an affective and material place and impact within people's lives and connections with the past. In so doing, we articulate how memory works through the (re)making of space and place and argue for a broader definition of memory-work, and the way ostensibly painful memories are folded back into redevelopment visions that facilitate development while also complicating urban redevelopment projects as well as the efficacy of racial reconciliation.

To address the questions outlined above, we employ a qualitative research methodology grounded in open-ended interviews, archival research, as well as our own experiences in Montgomery. We made two trips to Montgomery and spent several days in the city analyzing the memorial landscape, including the Kress Building. This project employs an analysis of archival materials and open-ended interviews and evaluates those materials to create "thick description" (Geertz, 2008). Our approach is grounded within the broader framework of critical race studies, foregrounding race, and recognizing the multiple and sometimes incommensurate identity positions occupied by research participants. Such an approach allows us to think about the various ways identity manifests itself and the contradictory and intersectional positions we occupy within existing racial hierarchies. Finally, our qualitative methodology illuminates historic and contemporary processes of race and racial exploitation through the making of urban landscapes.

To make the arguments in this paper, we begin with the context of the Kress redevelopment, and a specific and highly evocative memory moment that occurred at the renovated building's unveiling. From there, we unpack the idea of memory-work and specifically the way this concept and the social and spatial practices it marks tie into a broader set of urban redevelopment processes that have added urgency in a changing retail landscape. Online retailers have put increased pressure on traditional brick and mortar stores, and as a result, property developers are looking to create a set of affective experiences for consumers to connect to place and the past. This often involves creating historically connected redevelopment visions which join to a representation and perception of authenticity. Within Montgomery, this bumps up against a painful past of the segregated landscape of the historic downtown location. How the developers navigate this tension and incorporate aspects of "soft memory-work" into their development is a critical moment to explore the role of memory in urban redevelopment projects. We argue that memory-work encompasses a broad spectrum of social actors, interests, and tensions operating as the past and places from the past becomes reclaimed in the service of urban capital, racial reconciliation, and sometimes contradictory inter-mixings of both processes. Soft memory-work refers to different yet no less critical practices than are employed by politically engaged activists and artists. Recognizing these softer and more development-centered

forms of memory recovery, reuse, and re-materialization does not deny the importance of harder and rawer forms of memorial politics. Instead, the existence of both prompts scholars to pay close attention to the specific and varied configurations of memory-work at operation within cities and highlights the sometimes-contradictory realities of how memory operates and for whom it works. Finally, we highlight how and in what ways memory-works (or does not) in the Kress space.

Unveiling Montgomery's Kress redevelopment

At the ceremonial opening of the renovated Kress Building, a project that took nearly 5 years to complete, developers Mark and Sarah Buller unveiled two giant marble slabs. Chiseled into the stone were the words *Colored* and *White*, which marked the location of the segregated drinking fountains once part and parcel of the everyday landscape of segregation in the South. In explaining why the Bullers wanted to incorporate what ostensibly draws attention to negative histories of segregation into the development project, Mark Buller explained to the city's local newspaper that when the family bought the building they toured the structure and as

> the light of their flashlights bounc[ed] through the long-abandoned department store they had recently bought … the light fell on two stones. The fountains had been ripped away, and the marble was cracked, but two words remained: "colored and white." Our then 8-year old son Jacob said I don't understand, Dad. What does that, mean?

Mark Buller went on to explain that they "wanted to make sure that people will continue to ask Jacob's question." During the unveiling, Sarah Buller, co-owner of the development company, became visibly moved, and tears streamed down her face as the sign was unveiled along with a historical marker that explains the context of the preserved fountain marble. According to Mark Buller, the date of the unveiling was significant because "our family is Jewish. The unveiling coincided with Holocaust Remembrance Day." Moreover, as Mr. Buller explained, "The Buller family stands in solidarity and loving support with all people who have suffered human indignity and loss. We hope for all of our children that our world chooses community, collaboration, and love" (Harper, 2012a, np).

Complicating this story, however, is that the Buller development project fits within a broader framework of urban redevelopment that has come to see buildings with a tangible connection to the past as necessary for selling a kind of staged authenticity attractive to urban elite residents and visitors (Zukin, 2010). The events in Montgomery are part of a much broader market and public movement toward "affective heritage" (Tolia-Kelly, Waterton, & Watson, 2016), which places value on people experiencing and constructing meaning through embodied encounters through designed memorialized spaces. The creation of such heritage experiences are seen as important to tourism development, gentrification, and place promotion. Interpreting the painful histories of marginalized and victimized communities through urban redevelopment is not necessarily an easy task. As Beeksma and De Cesari (2019, p. 1) document what may appear to be a progressive, bottom-up participatory heritage project can represent a more complex and ambivalent site for "mediating conflicting interests and agendas in an urban context that is heavily shaped by local and national policies of urban renewal."

Also, essential and potentially problematic, the Bullers are not from Montgomery, but New York City. In explaining the development vision, Sarah Buller pointed to the preserved stone water fountain markers in the Kress Building as a way to connect with the community and their vision of development in Montgomery, and not coincidentally creating the public impression that the Bullers as outsiders were sensitive to the place histories and interests of residents and patrons. She noted during a PBS *Newshour* program that highlighted the Kress development "for us [Bueller family] especially because we don't live here, to make sure that we could link arms with people in the local community who had—and understood that our visions were aligned for what we wanted. And what we all did share was an interest in really trying to bring downtown Montgomery back." She went on to explain when pressed about making money off of that painful legacy of segregation that "There's no shame in that. I hope that every single square foot is rented, is leased, and it's

a combination of local business and multinational businesses involved with conversations as it relates to their customers and social justice." And while the Bullers may indeed have a genuine desire for solidarity (along with making a profit), they nonetheless hold a very different positionality (as Whites from the Northeast) in this conversation about race and social justice relative to local Black communities. That positionality assuredly shapes how their memory-work in Montgomery is presented and interpreted. Indeed, while many people of color attended the Kress opening and some spoke—most notably Black county official Elton Dean—much of the news coverage of the event centered upon the vision and labor of the Bullers and it reaffirmed, whether knowingly or not, a "White savior" discourse that has long circulated within popular culture and memorial develop-ment (Hughey, 2010).

For the Bullers and conceivably for many urban developers like them, the memory-work of remembering and taking responsibility for the histories of racism in Montgomery is tightly woven into a plan to (re)capitalize the city's landscape and the material and symbolic creation of urban communities and imaginaries, even if they are not native to those communities and imaginaries. Some analysts might pursue the traditional tendency of dismissing the Bullers and the Kress redevelopment as a shallow co-option and commodification of memory. No doubt, there is ample evidence of such co-option in the urban political economy as developers and municipal authorities claim, package, and sanitize painful and emotion-laden memories of the past for profit. Historically, these same social actors and groups had dispassionately white-washed, romanticized, or even refused to discuss these moments of trauma, violence, and racism for fear of turning off consumers as well as admitting their complicity in these injustices (Loewen, 2010). More recently, we have seen growth in marketing and transforming the pain and exclusion of others into heritage experiences and products, often in service of what is termed dark tourism (Stone, Hartmann, Seaton, Sharpley, & White, 2018).

While not discounting the realities of commercial (mis)appropriation, we believe the memory-work-urban development nexus is more complicated and requires a more nuanced analysis sensitive to contradictions, tensions, and varying interests, intentions and consequences. As we document, the Buller's have taken memory-work seriously in their development and have incorporated important elements from the African American community in Montgomery into their development vision. This includes the development of story-sharing space to collect and preserve the history of segrega-tion in the city as well as hiring a community coordinator to work closely with the community. Montgomery Builds has also incorporated voting registration drives and other significant civil rights events into the daily functioning of the redeveloped Kress space. Moving beyond the binary of commercial co-option and progressive memory activism, we use Montgomery as an essential moment to take seriously the ways memory is put into service of broader urban redevelopment schemes *and* the way these schemes sometimes do open space for broader conversations around the contradictory and painful legacies of the past and present where White supremacy and racial and economic inequality are real realities (Bonds & Inwood, 2016).

Taken together, the Kress development, its history, and legacy and its place within a gentrifying Montgomery raise essential questions about the role of memory in urban redevelopment projects and experiences, a subject not been widely covered within the pages of the journal (but see Inwood, 2010; Moore-Cherry & Bonnin, 2018; Podagrosi & Vojnovic, 2008). More specifically, Montgomery Builds highlights the contested and sometimes contradictory work of memorializing painful and often forgotten vestiges of America's urban landscape with urban redevelopment schemes that aim to capture downtown redevelopment dollars. Engaging with this seemingly contradictory reality through "memory-work," the labor of materializing and claiming of memory structures and explor-ing how memory is put into service to facilitate urban redevelopment, raises critical questions about the role of memory, race and White supremacy in a changing urban landscape. Perhaps most importantly, it raises fundamental questions about memory-work itself and the need to broaden how we theorize the possibilities and pitfalls of putting urban memory into service to promote diversity and racial healing in ways that project a positive place image as well as carry out the hard and necessary labor of working through tensions and legacies surrounding America's history of

racial apartheid. The next section seeks to develop, more broadly, the reader's understanding of Montgomery's established and changing landscapes of memory and urban development, as well as the theoretical background behind the memory-work and place branding that comprises urban redevelopment efforts.

Conceptual background

The wider Montgomery landscape of memory

Memorial mania (Doss, 2012, p. 2) describes the proliferation of memorials in the United States as part of a widening and intensifying public "obsession with issues of memory and history" that have come to dominate public spaces across the nation. The personal and collective stories we tell about ourselves reflect changes taking place as cities have diversified (Rose-Redwood, Alderman, & Azaryahu, 2008). In many cities, the inner core is a now a desirable location for redevelopment and opportunities arise to remake and remember particular aspects of a city's past. Sometimes this is related to uncovering histories long-forgotten (McKittrick, 2013). Other times, as is the case with memorials dedicated to the Confederacy, those markers and monuments no longer serve their intended political purpose or those memorials no longer have a place of legitimacy (if they ever truly did) amongst the diversity that defines many urban areas (Brundage, 2018; Inwood & Alderman, 2016). In other cases, the shifting political realities of U.S. cities means that groups or constituencies that were excluded now advocate for the incorporation of their stories and histories into the urban scene (Boyd, 2008). These instances reveal the institutional and political context in which memory is made and remade across the U.S. urban landscape and memory is essential and often revelatory of a range of material practices that takes place within cities (Alderman & Inwood, 2013, p. 194). The city of Montgomery, Alabama, reflects memorial mania and the contested and sometimes contradictory memory politics that circulate, structure, and struggle to claim dominance within the urban environment.

Montgomery is located along the Alabama River, the waterway that carried the region's indigenous peoples throughout the area. As settlers destroyed native communities, it became a vital river for transporting timber and agricultural products as well as slaves to the Gulf of Mexico (Neeley, n.d.; Figure 1). Montgomery was an important trading post and slave port up until the eve of the U.S. Civil War and was a gateway city of the domestic slave trade and was central to the spread and expansion of slavery westward throughout the early part of the 19th century (Sellers, 1994). Montgomery had the most extensive domestic slave market in the United States (Sellers, 1994). This economic prominence was why Montgomery was chosen as the first capital of the Confederacy on the eve of the Civil War. Jefferson Davis, the first and only president of the Confederacy, was sworn into office on the steps of the state capitol and that spot is marked with a small plaque and a looming statue of Davis remains fixed on the capitol grounds. Also, on the capitol grounds is a large memorial to Confederate Veterans of the Civil War that commemorates the "Lost Cause." The Lost Cause is one of the major ideological underpinnings and historical myths for justifying southern White supremacy; it represents the region's participation in the Civil War as a just and noble effort against an oppressive federal government rather than what it was in reality, a defense of the institution of slavery (Foster, 1988).

Illustrating the jarring contradictions in Montgomery's urban landscape, located a couple of hundred feet away from the spot where Davis stood is Dexter Avenue Baptist Church where Martin Luther King Jr., rose to national prominence as one of the visible leaders of the Montgomery Bus Boycott that ended, at least legally segregated transportation in the United States (Alderman, Kingsburgy, & Dwyer, 2013). Mere feet from King's church is a significant and vital marble marker commemorating the famous Selma to Montgomery civil rights march of 1965. The march's bloody start at the Edmund Pettis Bridge in Selma and the highly publicized determination of marchers drew national attention and led to the passage of the U.S. Voting Rights Act. Across the street from that marker is an identical marble marker which is another commemoration of
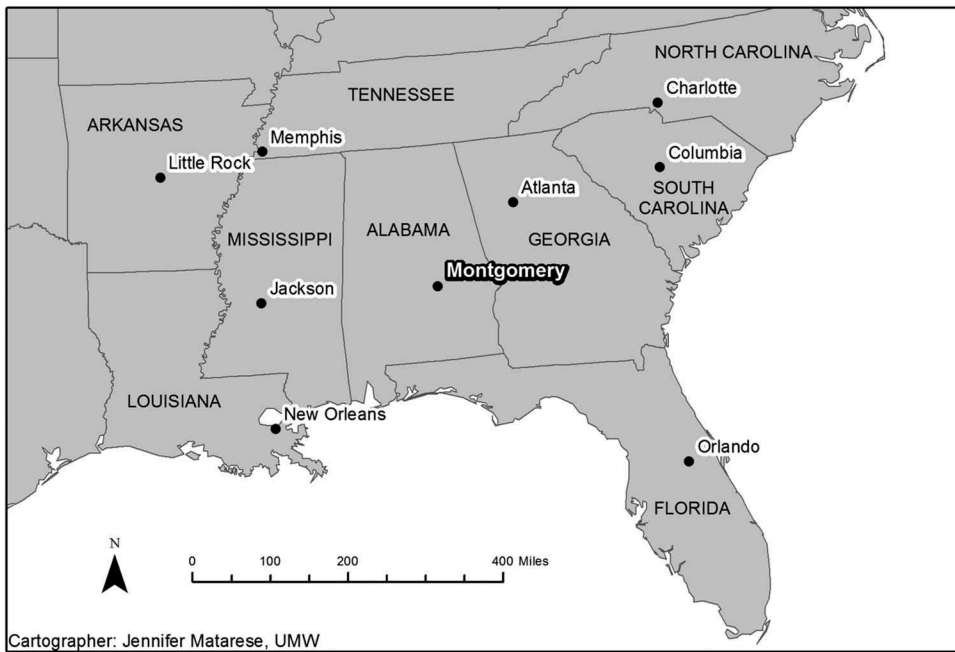
Figure 1. Regional map of Montgomery, Alabama. Map created by Jennifer Garrard, University of Mary Washington.

Montgomery as the first capital of the Confederacy. More recently Montgomery has received international attention for the efforts of Bryan Stevenson, a nationally prominent civil rights lawyer and founder and Executive Director of the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI), which is based in the city (Robertson, 2018). Stevenson and EJI have worked with city leaders to emplace urban historical markers discussing the role of slavery and slave trade in developing Montgomery while also opening to much public acclaim the nation's first national memorial to lynching (called the National Memorial to Peace and Justice) and a highly evocative Legacy Museum that links slavery and historical racialized violence to current social and economic inequalities and injustices (Wegman, 2018). Within the downtown core it is not possible to walk a city block without some marker, monument, or plaque drawing attention to Montgomery's place in civil rights history or the role of prominent Montgomery citizens in the history of the city, the region or the nation. Located in the heart of this memorial tableau, the Kress Building stands at the crossroads of American history and its location makes it a prime redevelopment opportunity (Figure 2). It also raises fundamental questions about how memory is (re)worked, who performs memory-work, and the place of this memory-work in urban redevelopment projects.

Memory-work and urban redevelopment

The idea of memory-work emerged from the broader field of memory studies which has gained prominence since the 1980s. Karen Till (2008, p. 101) explains that memory studies were focused on a range of contradictory phenomena that both incorporates state-funded projects including museums and memorials, but also counter-memory projects that include the work of artists, activists, and planners and which often address forgotten or hidden histories. Till (2012) defines memory-work largely in terms of the full range of emotional, physical, intellectual, and political labor expended by these activists, artists, and planners to create commemorative structures that explicitly work through histories of racial discrimination and dispossession. For other scholars, memory-work refers more generally to the materialization of collective memories through

Figure 2. Historical photo of the Kress Building. Date unknown. Used with permission of the Library of Congress.

landscapes, commemorative performances and other rituals, which a variety of social groups carry out for varying ideological purposes (Johnson, 2013). While seeking to retain the progressive and reformist bent of Till's conception of memory-work, we build on her focus to examine what constitutes memory-work, who carries it out, and for what multiple purposes and interests is that work put into service.

Loughran, Fine, and Hunter (2015) discuss the importance of memory in understanding the production and use of urban spaces and they argue for more work that theorizes the intersection of collective memory and urban change and development. Importantly, they note that the active representation and performance of urban memory is not confined to a single social group. Instead, the material and symbolic construction of cities and their spaces are carried out through a dialectical process, in which collective memory-claiming and making "from above," "from the middle," and "from below," each factor and influence urban (re)development politics. The "from above" are powerful political and economic actors and institutions and "from below" refers to the activities of mobilized activists and residents. Independent resource-rich actors who shape neighborhoods and produce and consume urban memory constitutes those "from the middle." The Bullers, as real estate developers, fall within the "from above" category or perhaps "from the middle" in terms of their positions of power and influence, but their relationship to Montgomery's racialized past is heavily informed by the experiences "from below" and dismissing their actions as sheer co-option or commercialization misses an opportunity to see how capitalist interests of urban redevelopment are put in direct conversation with the wounds of racial segregation and discrimination.

Critical to understanding the memory-work carried out by the Bullers is how it fits within a broader understanding of the way the making of urban space and place is tied to downtown redevelopment. The memorial landscape of Montgomery is a "lieux de memorie" a term that reflects a site that is filled with complex and sometimes contradictory stories that situate the city in a collective past (Hunter, Loughran, & Fine, 2018; Nora, 1989). Cities that have a deep connection to the past are increasingly attractive to developers because they are seen as able to market themselves better and distinguish themselves from other metro areas (Caffyn & Lutz, 1999;

Greenberg, 2000). Within the field of urban planning, the longer and deeper connection accorded to history also connects to a set of civic ideas that reinforce and sustain understandings about the city and the civic culture within each city (Hunter et al., 2017, p. 332). In other words, because cities have unique histories and collective pasts, these pasts necessarily come to shape the content and understanding of how the city was founded, who belongs in the city and the way a city's unique cultural components can be used constructively to attract and sustain urban capital. Within the urban planning and studies literature, the idea of collective past has variously been defined but revolves around the way memory can help to "reinforce the socially constructed quality of a city's cultural and political borders" (Hunter et al., 2017, p. 332).

Branding the Kress Building: Contested histories of urban redevelopment and memory-work in Montgomery

Connected to memory-work and a city's lieux de memorie are the myriad ways actors from a range of positions come together to use memory to produce space and place. Within this context, we argue it is crucial to understand how memory-work is put into service to bolster and sustain urban redevelopment schemes. Focusing on how developers and city officials tap into memory is an essential avenue for understanding the broader ways memory intersects with a range of processes related to the making and remaking of space and place (Govers & Go, 2009). Not least of which is the fundamental way memory-work is deployed strategically to create particular kinds of redevelopment visions or projects (Govers & Go, 2009). The reality is that in an era of increased place homogenization in which corporate and chain restaurants and stores have come to dominate urban landscapes the quest for "authentic" experiences which tie into a place have become important drivers of urban development projects (Zukin, 2010).

As a result, one aspect of memory-work that we explore is the strategic ways memory is deployed to create what Carter (2019) calls an atmosphere or "aura of authenticity" through the redevelopment of the Kress Building. Included in the Kress development was the installation of highly affective historical markers that drew attention to segregation, but also the reuse of bricks and other materials made by slaves and wooden boards from a nearby abandoned historic theater in Montgomery. The theater was the site of the last performance of John Wilkes Booth, the man who assassinated President Abraham Lincoln. The Bullers, as we detail in subsequent sections, actively incorporated memory-work into various sites and experiences within the Kress Building, including an art gallery and a story booth that collects the reflections of people who live or visit Montgomery. Importantly, the Kress site does not necessarily shy away from Montgomery's contested past or the city's association with some of the most divisive periods in American history, instead and through the strategic use of memory-work, including a story booth, art galleries as well as architectural features outlined above, the developers are managing memory in ways that facilitate their broader redevelopment interests. Importantly, this ties into historic processes of race and racialization that are central to producing the variegated urban landscape. Thus, an essential contribution of this paper and its analysis of Kress and Montgomery is the examination of how the work of memory is managed in and through specific geographic configurations of place and power. But of course, since the management of memory is also and everywhere contested, the case study illuminates how users of the Kress space come to understand, and appropriate memory and these understandings and appropriations sit in tension with and through the broader redevelopment vision. It is, in fact, the intersections of these tensions that make the Kress Building a helpful site for understanding how and in what ways memory operates and works through the making of the contemporary urban landscape.

These insights are derived from the broader literature on neighborhood and city branding, which is focused on the way cities and neighborhoods utilize a range of discursive strategies to make their communities desirable and memorable for urban gentrification (Masuda & Bookman, 2018). Urban place marketing has long been used by local, regional, and city governments to attract capital for

investment in urban areas (Insch, 2011). In a seminal piece, Michalis Kavaratzis (2004) notes that branding for cities is vital in a 21st Century context of increased global competition. Neoliberal economic policies have facilitated the movement of resources including jobs and money across municipal, regional, state and national borders and attracting that capital is important to city leaders as they try to leverage their position to attract those jobs and capital into their communities and regions. This is especially true of post- and de-industrialized cities which have been working to reinvent themselves to attract capital and residents back to the urban core (Hall & Hubbard, 1996). Crucially a significant piece of drawing jobs and capital is focused on the creation of authenticity (Zukin, 2010). As a result, marketing a city has increasingly come to dominate the efforts of civic leaders, and city or place branding is central to these efforts.

Critical to the marketing of a city's reputation is the successful management of perception and image and the way those are circulated in and through a variety of mediums (Kavaratzis, 2004). City marketing and branding efforts fit within a broader neoliberal development ethos. What is crucial for these efforts is getting community buy-in from locals who can enhance the strategic marketing of place branding and lend authenticity to the branding effort. This was especially important in the Kress redevelopment and a theme that one of the principal developers explained to us in an interview. When the Bullers became interested in the Kress Building and the Dexter Avenue corridor, they were initially attracted to the space because of the architecture of the building and the surrounding buildings along the avenue. Sarah Buller noted, "her husband loved architecture and urban design" and when they began to look at Montgomery to locate one of their other businesses, "the layers of history on the street really attracted them to the corridor." As Bullers also realized, however, and as they began to work with the city on a broader redevelopment vision, it was necessary for them create a context in which residents would buy into or at least not oppose the Kress redevelopment given the racialized history of the street corridor and of the building itself and because they were from outside of the community.

The reality that the Kress Building would need community buy-in intersects with several aspects of urban redevelopment work, but also how memory is central to understanding the challenges for branding space in wounded places that carry the legacies of racial exclusion, dispossession, and mistrust. Any effort to cultivate and secure community buy-in required the Bullers to recognize, rather than ignore, the histories of racism and violence that engulfed the Kress Building. Working through the concept of *oeuvre* (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 101) Till notes that as humans and non-human lives engage in an area, there is an intermixing of the symbolic and material and as a result of a complex place identity forms. In cities that have been structured by violent geographies including "histories of physical destruction, displacement, and individual and social trauma resulting from state-perpetuated violence" these cities remain violated, and as a result, Till defines these cities as "wounded" (2012, p. 6). Critically, the way in which cities come to be wounded not only has lasting symbolic and material effects on those who live and work within their confines, but those wounds are geographically grounded in the specific histories of violence and trauma. Montgomery was the scene of intense struggles around race and racism throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, but perhaps no era has so dominated the city's history as the legacy of Jim Crow segregation and broader efforts by civil rights activists to undermine and destroy that system of inequality and degradation in the American South. The haunting influence of these painful memories was evident and arguably unavoidable from the moment that Montgomery Builds took on the redevelopment project. In talking with community members, we discovered a racially bifurcated way in which residents remember the Kress Building and its connection to the local community.

Nowhere is this more evident than in how people remember and connect with the very layout of the Kress Building itself and the legacies of wounding that circulate through and around its racialized architecture (Figure 3). In talking with a local activist who has long worked to preserve and remember the African American experience in the city and present those memories to visitors in organized tours and storytelling programs she described how the Kress Building has two entrances. These entrances are direct legacies of the history of segregation in the city. The first is on Dexter
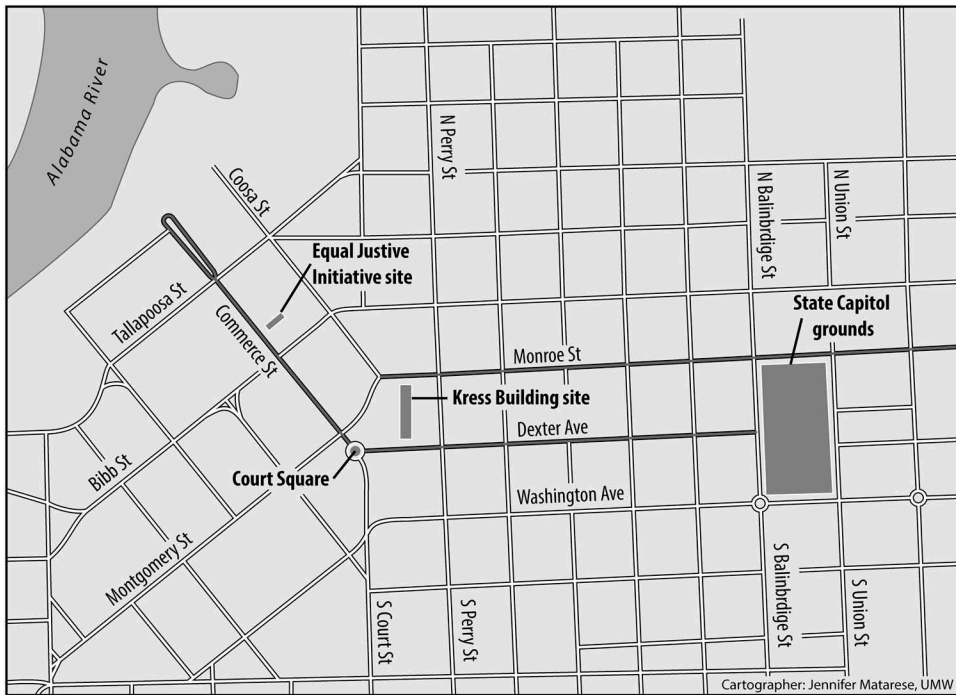
Figure 3. Location of the Kress Building in Downtown Montgomery. Map created by Jennifer Garrard, University of Mary Washington.

Avenue, a broad thoroughfare that begins at the steps of the state capitol and runs into the downtown business district. This was the main "White entrance" to the building, and it was the entrance White patrons of the Kress Building would have used while shopping up and down Dexter Avenue. The second entrance on Monroe Street represented the "Black entrance." Monroe Street was the Black business district and, according to our activist informant, White people referred to this as "Nigger Street."[1] During the era of segregation, Monroe Street was one of the most prominent Black business districts in the country.

In an article talking about the history of Monroe Street and published in the *Montgomery Advertiser*, Valda Montgomery, a resident whose father was a prominent African American business owner during this era explained: "As a child [I had to enter] the Kress Building through the back door and then headed downstairs. Only Whites could shop upstairs, or eat at the lunch counter" (as quoted in Harper, 2012b, np). She describes, however, that once you left the Kress Building onto Monroe Street that the atmosphere was different. "It was filled with people like her—shopping, going to the movie theater or getting their hair done along with a stretch of Black-owned businesses" (Harper, 2018). In talking about Monroe Street, she goes on to note that in a more contemporary context, "We had a Black business district, it bothers me every time I go down Monroe Street to see nothing about the Black business district" (Harper, 2018). Amplifying these silences is the fact that during the Montgomery Bus Boycott several of the businesses along Monroe Street contributed resources and money to the famous boycott and helped to financially sustain the over year-long effort to end segregated transportation in the city. The street was an essential resource for the African American community in Montgomery, and those resources helped to sustain the movement and its young leader Martin Luther King Jr.

Given Monroe Street's historical significance, the street was declared a significant historic site and placed on the National Registry of Historic Places in 1984. The historic designation and the plethora of markers and memorials that dominate the landscape of Montgomery one might expect to find

a series of signs or memorials that highlight and narrate this important history, but the reality is that large sections of Monroe Street were destroyed to make way for the headquarters of the Retirement System of Alabama's headquarters, the "RSA Building."

Despite the designation on the National Register of Historic Places in the 1990s the city of Montgomery and the state of Alabama demolished several blocks of Monroe Street, including some of the most historic buildings, to make way for a parking deck needed for new development and high rise building in the city. Today, to walk along Monroe Street is to walk along a city block dominated by the Doubletree Hotel, an ample green space as well as the parking lot and RSA high rise. This contentious history of redevelopment as the sacrifice of preserving and interpreting prominent African American histories has long troubled redevelopment projects in Montgomery and fits into a broader pattern of urban redevelopment that has removed historically significant African American business districts from the urban core (Brand, 2012; Gotham, 2001, 2005). Such a history influences our understanding of how redevelopment takes place in Montgomery, but it is also symptomatic of the simultaneous erasure and inscription of race on the city and contributes to the continued wounding of Montgomery. Critically, to recognize how the demolition and redevelopment of Monroe Street contributes to the wounding of the city requires understanding the way the history and legacy of redevelopment is part of longer and more sustained geographies of containment and displacement that perpetuates histories and legacies of racism within the United States and in the development of American urban space and place (Brand, 2018; Shabazz, 2015; Wilson, 2000).

While we often associate the wounding of places with traumatic and seemingly dramatic events, Derickson's (2017) piece *Urban Geography in the Age of Ferguson*, is a reminder that the wounding of place is more often than not a structural condition, built into the socio-spatial dialectic and the ways cities are made and remade, including through seemingly positive redevelopment and renewal processes. Thus, and as she articulates, urban development has long focused on a set of reified practices that come to reinforce and create broader racialized exclusions and which tie into a vast array of methods and disciplines and are central to understanding the material conditions which make cities wounded in the first place. It is the economic, political, and social structure that wound cities deeply and make healing from wounds nearly and almost everywhere, impossible. Returning to Montgomery, it is not just that the historically significant African American business district was torn down to make way for a state-supported high rise and redevelopment project or that large sections of the city's Black business district was erased and razed from the landscape; it is the way that material reality is reflective of and reinforces a much longer legacy of urban displacement and removal that has been at the heart of U.S. urban development since at least the 1940s (Bonds, Keny, & Wolfe, 2015). As Derickson reminds us, the history of urban development in a postwar era is reflective of how a range of "government policies in the postwar era intersected with deeply racist cultural attitudes in real estate development, mortgage lending and appraisals, community activism, and labor unionizing to limit the access of Black and other people of color" that contributes to the "enduring racialization" of U.S. cities (2017 pp. 232–233).

The Kress Building, literally and figuratively, sits at the crossroads of these historical realities of wounding. The Kress's apartheid architecture was shaped and used in the service of segregation and discrimination and was a tool for communicating and reaffirming the second class status of Montgomery's African American consumers. Additionally, Kress sits along a street of racial wounding, memory erasure, and place annihilation at the hands of post–civil rights era redevelopment, serving as a powerful racialized inter-generational reminder of who belongs or whose histories matter in the city. While a city's trauma is often made most visible during dramatic events (civil rights protests for example), it is also made through longer histories of urban redevelopment, displacement, legacies of urban planning and a range of other race connected realities. These legacies, while important to memory-work "from below" and to the activists we interviewed, were also crucial in shaping the commemorative and redevelopment atmosphere in which the Bullers conceptualized and materialized a redeveloped Kress Building.

As a result, we argue that in exploring the ways in which Montgomery Builds tries to manage the reality of trauma and wounding is a vital moment to expand beyond an understanding of memory-work that locates it within the purview of activists and progressive politics, but to see the ways a range of social actors with varying interests and urban worldviews wrestle with, struggle through, and engage in memory-work. As a result, this paper contributes to understandings of memory-work to see the sometimes contradictory and conflicting roles that memory plays in the broader efforts at redevelopment. This perspective places the work of memory into a context that asks who is doing the work, for whom is the work being done, and what work or effect is the memory-work expected to produce? In the next section of the paper, we turn toward the Montgomery Builds redevelopment project specifically and locate it within the broader understanding of how and in what ways memory-work operates.

Interpreting the Kress experience

The heart of the Kress Building is the first floor, which incorporates retail space, a coffee shop, and three significant sites dedicated to memory-work. The current development is dedicated to a coffee shop, barbershop, and gallery space. The Kress Building has high-end apartments and lofts, and as of the writing of this manuscript, all of the residential space was rented or sold. As of the writing of this manuscript, the majority of Kress commercial space has yet to be rented, and some of the unoccupied space is dedicated to community events including voting rights workshops and the memory-work that is ongoing on the Kress site. The memory-work within the Kress site is a rich tableau of experiences including material experiences like the stone slabs and historic wood floors as well as a story booth room or studio, where visitors can tell and record stories about their experiences in Montgomery. These stories are then archived and available as a repository of memories. The other two memory-work sites include an art gallery, the marble from the segregation era water fountain, and an African American–owned business dedicated to memory tours in Montgomery and specifically the embattled Black experience and sense of place. The presence of these spaces immediately struck us as they represent contradictions within the site itself. It is not uncommon to find historical buildings and department stores developed and reused in America, but many of these projects make only reference to the past in superficial ways and seldom sacrifice valuable real estate square footage to create spaces in which the public can engage with a city's complicated history. However, within the Kress Building, much of the retail space is not currently rented out, and by filling the site with memory worksites, the building can and does attract crowds, has visibility, provokes public reflection and appears to be a center of the downtown community. In particular, the coffee shop is a site where regulars make appearances, business, and community persons meet to discuss events and topics. The name of the coffee shop, Prevail Union, also evokes themes of reconciliation and uplift and both fits within the broader contours of the buildings marketing themes and is also adds to the buildings appeal.

In a press release on the city's website that detailed the grand opening, a key feature of the marketing and selling of the Kress Experience focused on the fact that it was to be an "incubator" of entrepreneurial spirit and the co-operation with the city as the development project took off. Sarah Buller was quoted as saying, "It is exciting to be working with a city government that is forward thinking and flexible. We at Montgomery Builds continue to use everything in our toolbox to clear pathways for entrepreneurs" (quoted in City of Montgomery press release, December 7, 2017). Focusing on the entrepreneurial spirit and also connecting to a broader city development is critical to the way the project is unfolding and taking shape.

What is important to understand about the way memory-work in the building fits within this broader vision and economy of urban redevelopment is how memory situates the space in a particular kind of context. In explaining the overarching development vision for Kress, one of the developers indicated in our interview that there were two reasons for investing so much time and attention to place memory in the development. First, the changing nature of retail demands that

urban development delivers unique and geographically grounded experiences for consumers to compete with online retailers such as Amazon.com. Retail businesses are increasingly struggling to survive in the face of big online retailers that have changed the retail landscape. As online shopping has grown and as consumers are turning toward online shopping, traditional brick and mortar stores are working to create an experience economy around its products that cannot be found in online shopping experiences. As Sarah Buller explained to us:

> We wanted to create a unique shopping and retail district that you cannot get anywhere else. To do that we felt like we had to create a unique place and a unique connection to place. The key was creating an authentic experience *that you can only* get in Montgomery. To be competitive as a retail space, you have to have a unique experience you cannot find online, so we wanted to have people connect to the Kress experience. You know, there is only one Dexter Avenue, and you cannot find Dexter Avenue online anywhere.

Badrinarayanan and Becerra (2019) note that because of the changing nature of the retail environment and increased online shopping pressure it is imperative for traditional retailers to "battle for relevance by engendering customer engagement, emotional connections, and shared identity" (2019, p. 1). Importantly, as they also argue, a key way to do this is by creating an emotional attachment or bond to the retail space and that this deeper engagement with space can help traditional retailers compete. Central to the process of creating emotional attachments involves "store affect" the ability for retail space to trigger "a positive emotional response in consumers" (Badrinarayanan & Becerra, 2019, p. 3). Their study went on to document the way a store's affect positively influences consumer attachment, and the emotional response consumers derive from these spaces ability to create an affective and emotionally connected response to the retail space.

We argue that a critical piece of the affective response a space like the Kress Building can evoke from consumers is through memory-work and the incorporation of aspects of memory into the broader redevelopment vision. This can include a range of strategies for enhancing a customer's emotional attachment to and engagement with place. For many retailers, there is an effort to enhance the experience with feelings of nostalgia or facilitating a positive connection to the past. However, with the Kress development, feelings of nostalgia necessarily bump into realities of segregation and the long history of racism in the city, which are openly acknowledged within the spaces of the Kress Building. Thus a critical insight from the previous quote is the idea of a "Kress Experience" and exactly how that consumer experience is operationalized in and through the memory-work of publicly discussing and memorializing past racialized injustices. The Kress Building was not just the site of these injustices but played a central role in inflicting those racial wounds upon African Americans forced to endure segregated entrances, water fountains, and other public spaces. Memory-work, as deployed in the Kress Building, is put into service in specific ways that can draw attention to the historical connections that the building has to the past, including painful aspects of the city's history, while at the same time drawing people into the retail experience in ways conducive to consumerism. One of the ways that the Bullers sought to cultivate a meaningful nexus between capitalist retail development and the racial memory-work was by hiring a community relations person. This person, who was connected to the community, was in charge of coordinating a range of memory-related activities in the Kress Building and with the community, especially the remembering of historic Monroe Street.

Remembering Monroe

Because the ethnic makeup of the city has changed over the last half-century (in 1970 over 60% of the city's population was White while today that number is 37%), it was imperative—for economic, political, and moral reasons—for the Kress developers to engage with the city's African American population. The community coordinator, explained in our interview, that it became clear early on to the development company the necessity of reaching out to the African American community to gain buy-in or support for to the project, to (re)address (rather than ignore) the racialized history of past

Montgomery redevelopment, and to create the affective response for the space that is important to competing with online retail locations. The community coordinator explained that in the run-up to the opening of the Kress Building, they created the "Remembering Monroe Project." The Remembering Monroe Project was a series of six events over the first 5 days of the Kress's opening; the events focused on "understanding the significance of the street" for Montgomery and the African American community. Within the context of the Remembering, Monroe Project storytelling was a key piece of how the community coordinator wanted to engage the community. As she explained, "storytelling is a critical piece of understanding the significance of that street [Monroe Street] for the community." As a result, "we[developers] wanted to place faces, and places on Monroe Street, that telling peoples stories was the hook to get people to remember this space."

Of course, while storytelling is about connecting the Kress to a larger bodies of memories and meanings for the purpose of drumming up business, this same type of storytelling is critically important to the memory-work often carried out by activists, artists, and participatory planners. In this respect, memory-work is a process and politics not confined to a limited range of social groups or ideologies and it is entirely possible that memory-work can be put into the service of a broader range of overlapping interests and needs. A focus of the Monroe Street storytelling project was the installation of a large and prominently located story booth and studio in the Kress development space (Figure 4). As you walk up the steps from Monroe Street[2] and as you enter the building, and as you make your way through the space, one of the first main building spaces you notice is a large room with an old-fashioned telephone booth, microphones, and a desk. The story booth is made of oak and glass, and the microphones are vintage looking, dynamic microphones like you might have used during the 1940s or 1950s. As you enter the story studio space, you are invited to share your experiences about life in Montgomery and your perceptions of the development and downtown Montgomery in a historical context.

In explaining the rationale behind the story booth and studio, the community development coordinator explained, "everyone knows who [Martin Luther] King and [Rosa] Parks are, we wanted to give space to let everyday people tell their stories of the civil rights movement, of the people who were behind the scene, but who were important to the everyday struggle." The developers of the

Figure 4. Storybooth Space at the Kress Building. Photo by authors.

Kress space note, when interviewed, that any development company could have "dumped money into this space and leave" but their development vision is about "protecting historically significant space and people." The community coordinator built upon this theme when she explained that the story studio space is, "about bringing history back to life, [the story booth] is a legacy project for kids, for the community, that the history of the South is their history and helping people to understand our shared history."[3]

Perhaps more importantly, at least from the standpoint of development, the story booth and its connection to memory-work fits into a broader memory moment in Montgomery and the role that memory is playing in the city's efforts to rebrand itself and attract capital to the city along with acknowledging and preserving histories and memories that traditional marketing and development efforts would white-wash over and dismiss. The story booth and larger studio are also crucial to memory-work by virtue of the fact that the place-based stories shared by visitors to the Kress development are collected and archived within the studio. While one can certainly tell their story, one can also listen to and internalize the stories of others. In doing so, the working of coming to terms with how people related to and remember Kress, Monroe Street, and Montgomery is realized through the process of listening. Listening is not a passive process but actively involved in the construction of meaning about places and people (Kanngieser, 2012).

Recall that central to the arguments in this paper is the question for how memory is put to work? An aspect of the Kress experience is putting memory to work in service of a broader economic redevelopment vision. The Kress experience is partially built in and through a set of physical and connected artifacts that are central to understanding the place of the Kress Building at the crossroads of Montgomery history. Thus the wood floors and segregated marble slab, as well as the story booth, create an affective materiality (Carter, 2019) that people can connect to and through. The way in which memory becomes wrapped up in the materiality of wood, stone, and metal and the way those objects can be deployed strategically is an important aspect of how memory-work actually takes place. It connects to an ephemeral ethos in which aspects of memory seem timeless and connects people to a past in ways that are not possible in online retail platforms. As we argue in this paper, these objects and the way they come together to help produce space and place is the foundation on which memory can be deployed in a strategic way that facilitates specific redevelopment visions as well as more critical framings of urban memory and race relations typically not associated with urban development. But, because the Kress site is a "lieux de memorie," a site that reflects the complex and sometimes contradictory stories that are situated within a contested and collective history, the way the Kress developers operationalized this space as well as fit it within the broader city is as important to the work of memory as the actual space itself.

Conclusion: Toward hard and soft memory-work

Within Montgomery, the development-memory-work nexus connects with the Equal Jusitce Initiative (EJI) and the National Memorial for Peace and Justice. The EJI memorial opened in April 2018 and is a site dedicated to documenting and remembering "enslaved Black people, people terrorized by lynching, African Americans humiliated by racial segregation and Jim Crow, and people of color burdened with contemporary presumptions of guilt and police violence" (Equal Justice Initiative website, n.d.). Since its opening, EJI's memorial has drawn international attention to the memorial grounds. Several business owners in the Kress Building noted in interviews that they were well aware of the opening of the EJI memorial and have been working to incorporate aspects of memory-work and connections to Montgomery's past into their business models. EJI has made highly affective space of memory-work by combining graphically honest discussions of racism, historical and contemporary, with a keen marketing approach that recognizes the public desire for authentic engagements with the past that engage with the messy and complicated realities of U.S. society.

Critical to the arguments of this paper is the way the Kress developers position their broad redevelopment visions within the memory-work being led by EJI. Sarah Buller explained that while

she and her husband were not tailoring their Kress development to EJI, they actively wanted to incorporate spaces for remembering racism into the building. This acknowledgment of racism complicates what we expect from a neoliberal, market driven ethic that has tended to see and remove symbols of a racist past as a barrier to capital investment (McFarland, Bowden, & Bosman, 2019). Revealingly, Ms. Buller distinguishes the memory-work at Kress from EJI explaining, "EJI is a hard place" that carries out the difficult work of dealing with histories of racism, in very raw and unflinching ways that force visitors to confront the history of lynching and slavery. EJI deals with the arguably the "most horrific time in U.S. history" and that space necessarily creates space for "honest conversations around those events." The memorial at EJI unfolds in a particular kind of way and incorporates space for quiet reflection and less space for conversations or the collection of stories.

In contrast, Kress according to Sarah Buller, is a "soft space" that deals with race and racism in a different kind of way. This soft memory-work, in this case, is about narrating a particular kind of story that ostensibly brings people together for sharing story space, but also opens up new spaces for urban capital to return its investment. Perhaps most revealing is because the Kress space is "soft memory" space. Critically soft memory, by its definition, can be more easily shaped and molded into a narrative arc that facilitates continued urban development visions that continue longer standing practices of capital and race. In other words, it is the very malleability of the memory space that gives the Kress developers the room they need to create a vision that works within the context of their development, allowing them to extract value and create a seemingly authentic connection to place that facilitates their return on their investment. This raises questions about if this kind of development practice and the role it may or may not play in broader understandings of race in America. By being able to shape and mold their story to create authenticity the Kress developers are not only able to distinguish themselves from online retail space or to market themselves in a majority African American city. Instead the development allows consumers to experience diversity, but within a controlled narrative that focuses attention on only certain aspects of Montgomery's history. Thus, the focus on segregation as opposed to the erasure of Monroe Street creates a development context in which you are able to experience diversity without recognizing the continued structural impediments that continue White supremacist and racist practices and which are firmly rooted in understandings of race and capital within the 21st century. As a result, a nuanced story emerges about how memory works and for whom it works depending on the geographic context and goals of those who wish to employ it to come to terms with painful legacies of the past.

Thus the role of soft memory at the Kress connects to overarching themes of creating retail space in which consumers have a visceral connection to the place, one that is unique and which creates conditions for development to take place and have place within the context of painful legacies of race and racism within Montgomery. One of the underlying strategies for the Kress development is to create a unique experience that can only be found on Dexter Avenue and Monroe Street—returning to the literature on memory and memorials Tyner et al. note (2014, p. 904) that the study of memory and memorials is necessarily a study in politics. Increasingly, and as we argue in this piece, the study of memory in a broader set of urban redevelopment visions and projects that seek to create "authentic" and unique space that is attractive to and for consumers is an important avenue for future research. The search for a material connection to space that can attract consumers is wrapped up in a nostalgia, a way for consumers to engage in and with space and place and a way to tell stories, although we don't yet know what, if any, racial reconciliation plans the Bullers may have for the Kress story booth.

What is interesting and revealing about the Kress development is the way the developers are taking some of the darkest and most painful periods of U.S. history through a "soft place" making that part of their redevelopment vision. This is not necessarily about shying away from the past but is about packaging the past in ways that establish a set of parameters that become marketable in a broader urban redevelopment vision. At the same time, however, the softness of the Kress memory-work, unlike EJI, tends to perpetuate a neoliberal urban discourse that locates racism only within the past (McFarland et al., 2019). Indeed, this style of remembering runs the risk,

even with community buy-in and progressive entrepreneurs, of closing down discussions of contemporary inequalities of gentrification and how Black communities continue to have limited access to certain urban social and economic spaces. As a result, Montgomery Builds represents a site in which we can explore and come to understand more deeply the way memory is put into service of urban capital, revealing the contested landscape of urban redevelopment and the tensions that always accompany working through painful, unresolved histories.

Notes

1. We have spelled this word out at request of the journal. We recognize that for some readers the use of this word —in any context—is problematic. We apologize for any offense or injury caused through the use of this language.
2. Monroe Street sits several feet lower than Dexter Avenue the main White business thoroughfare in the city during segregation. As African American customers entered the segregated entrance into the building, they walked up to the Kress Building a potentially subtle, but no less prescient reminder of the racial hierarchy in the city.
3. At the time of the writing of this manuscript, the Bullers had indicated having plans to place story booths in several other cities, although we don't know what specific role they will play in those locations or who will control the narrative collecting process. An obvious and still unresolved tension potentially runs through story booths in Montgomery and elsewhere in light of the danger of appropriating memories of marginalization for capital gain.

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