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Rhetoric-Remembrance-Race-Region: Contemporary Stories of Abolition and the Making of Race in the Upper Midwest

Kristin Wagel
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

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RHETORIC-REMEMBRANCE-RACE-REGION: CONTEMPORARY STORIES OF
ABOLITION AND THE MAKING OF RACE IN THE UPPERMIDWEST

by

Kristin Elizabeth Wagel

A Dissertation Submitted in
Partial Fulfillment of the
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ABSTRACT

RHETORIC-REMEMBRANCE-RACE-REGION: CONTEMPORARY STORIES OF ABOLITION AND THE MAKING OF RACE IN THE UPPERMIDWEST

by

Kristin Elizabeth Wagel

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2023
Under the Supervision of Doctor Sara C. VanderHaagen, Ph.D.

The project examines how contemporary stories of abolition are inventive resources for articulating race in the upper Midwest. Focusing on online fragments representative of abolition stories, these analyses illustrate the entanglement of rhetoric, remembrance, race, and region in a space distanced from race in the public imaginary. Through three case studies, I utilize the hermeneutic of public memory to advance a rhetorical reading of these narratives that construct the region through rhetorics of whiteness. In the first case study, rhetorics of purity are deployed in remembrances of Joshua Glover in Milwaukee, Wisconsin to absolve the state and its white residents from anti-Blackness across time. The second case study analyzes local and state remembrances of Sojourner Truth in Michigan. I find that these remembrances reflect back onto the Michigan an idealized image of itself, and dodges claims of anti-Blackness by representing Truth through the interrelated values of fortitude, moral superiority, and sanitized reform. The final case study demonstrates how rhetorics of heritage are utilized to portray Ripley, Ohio and its white residents as committed to freedom and morally superior. I theorize claims of heritage not as a companion to heritage but as a rhetorical maneuver to argue for the direct and inevitable passing of a substance on spatial lines. This project concludes with reviewing the common arguments across case studies and white comfort in stories of abolition in the upper Midwest.

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For Sara VanderHaagen
You are brilliant in every way.

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Chapter One:

Rhetoric, Remembrance, Race, and Region

On the eve of 2023, George F. Will of the *Washington Post* published an article urging readers to look to Midwestern values for hope and security in “a potentially ominous future.”¹ Will’s statement makes two significant claims. First, what is to come is uncertain and likely unpleasant. This is especially true after the COVID-19 pandemic that devastated the world in many facets, rising inflation with a seemingly inevitable recession to come, the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine, gun violence throughout the nation, and the subjection of many Black lives to racial violence by law enforcement officers. As Americans engage in these ongoing issues, Will suggests turning to what Midwest historian Jon K. Lauk describes as “the reassuring rhythm and rituals of civic affairs” that some mistake as the indistinctiveness of the region.² For Will and Lauk, remembering the Midwestern values of moral discipline, democracy, progress, and friendliness provide a reliable path forward in uncertain times and bolster the region’s ethos that has been neglected and disdained by scholars and the public.³ Second, Will pushes against the myth of Midwestern blandness to position the region as distinct and worth remembering. In times of uncertainty, the dull normalcy of the Midwest is desirable and finally “receiving recognition as the best portion of the nation.” As Americans face a reality that is, at least in part, ominous, Lauk suggests that we the region’s history and values “should never be dismissed or forgotten, lest we lost our bearings in the stream of time.”⁴

¹ George F. Will, “In Unsettled Times, Look to Midwestern Values,” *Washington Post*, December 31, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2022/12/30/praise-for-midwestern-values/> (Accessed January 21, 2023).

² Jon K. Lauk, *The Good Country: A History of the American Midwest, 1800-1900* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2022): 6.

³ See Andrew R. L. Cayton and Susan E. Gray, *The American Midwest: Essays on Regional History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001); Lauk, *The Good Country*.

⁴ Lauk, *The Good Country*, 6.

As a lifelong Midwesterner, Will and Lauk’s calls resonate with me on two registers. First, for much of my life I viewed the Midwest as a place lacking culture or identity. To me, the region was nothing but “normal” and “average,” and therefore, indescribable. Midwestern cultural artifacts are casseroles, summers spent “up north” by a lake, euchre, and, according to an analysis of Airbnb listings in the region, walleye (and fishing more generally).⁵ When I tell people from outside the region that I am a Midwesterner, responses typically point to Midwestern niceness.⁶ This compliment, typically addressing friendliness and agreeability, is fraught with complexity. Aaron Kinard claims that this brand of nicety is a regional trope used by Midwesterners to evade charges of racism by placing themselves, specifically as white Midwesterners, outside of racism while claiming that race is not an issue in the region. Of George Floyd’s murder in May of 2020, Kinard stated, “When White Midwesterners deny the histories of structural racism that shaped their region, they can see themselves as being outside of racism.”⁷ I agree with Kinard and argue that it is not only important to remember the region’s advances and shortcomings but also to critically engage with how one interprets and represents the Midwest’s histories and with what implications. The claims by Will, Lauk, and Kinard highlight the how the past is an important resource for articulating identity. That is, how public memories of historical events and people are strategically drawn upon to construct or bolster regional identity and shape how the public engages in sense-making. The negotiation of race and racial identities cannot be disentangled from sense-making through memory. Although some

⁵ Andrew Van Damn, “The Most Midwestern Things on Earth, According to Data,” *Washington Post*, July 29, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2022/07/29/airbnb-the-most-midwestern-things/> (Accessed January 13, 2023).

⁶ This as well as a nasally accent.

⁷ Aaron Kinard, “‘Midwest Nice’ Hides a History of Racial Terror and Segregation,” *Washington Post*, February 7, 2022, from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2022/02/07/midwest-nice-hides-history-racial-terror-segregation/> (Accessed January 13, 2023).

public memories may not appear to attend to race, they leave, as Edward S. Casey contends, “little in our lives... untouched,” including how race is rhetorically constructed.⁸

This project examines how memories of abolition in the upper Midwest are leveraged in the present to make arguments about race and racial identities on a regional scale. Broadly, I argue that these antebellum stories of abolition construct the upper Midwest on racial lines. I approach three case studies about commemoration of abolition stories from the mid-1800s through the hermeneutic of public memory to advance a rhetorical reading of these narratives construct the region through rhetorics of whiteness. Read through the critical lens of public memory, I demonstrate how abolition stories reveal the entanglement of rhetoric, remembrance, race, and region and function as inventional resources for (re)securing whiteness in the upper Midwest.

My analysis attends to a variety of contemporary texts about abolition in the upper Midwest in the mid-1800s which I assemble into three distinct case studies from the mid-1800s. I center historical representation about this period for two reasons. First, Midwestern territories entered statehood from 1803 through 1848, therefore the mid-1800s is a time period in which state identities are being solidified and the regional Midwest is more clearly emerging.⁹ Second, leading up to the Civil War, the antebellum Midwest was fraught with political, legal, and discursive battles over enslavement, freedom, and race. The Liberty and Free Soil parties emerged during this period and were founded on antislavery, while the Fugitive Slave Law (1850) required Northern assistance in returning freedom seekers to their enslavers and made those aiding freedom seekers subject to imprisonment and hefty fines. In the mid-1800s

⁸ Edward S. Casey, “Public Memory in Place and Time,” in *Framing Public Memory*, ed. Kendall R. Phillips (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004): 37.

⁹ Jeffrey Oslter, “‘Just and Lawful War’ as Genocidal War in the (United States) Northwest Ordinance and Northwest Territory, 1787-1832,” *Journal of Genocidal Research* 18, no. 1 (2016): 4.

northerners advocated for the abolition of slavery while southerners arduously fought for the practice that gave rise to the region's vitality. During this time, prominent Black abolitionists and activists including Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, and John Mercer Langston were addressing the nation through speeches, lectures, newspapers, and through work with anti-slavery organizations on local, regional, and national scales. These historical figures were instrumental in fighting for Black rights and influenced activists that came after them.

I characterize the collection of texts analyzed in this dissertation as contemporary stories of abolition because I center attention to memories *of* this time of abolition work. That is, I explore how stories of abolition in the upper Midwest from the mid-1800s are represented and circulated today. Specifically, I examine texts relating to the capture and “rescue” of Joshua Glover in Milwaukee, Wisconsin; commemorations of Sojourner Truth in Battle Creek, Michigan; and remembrances of prominent abolitionists in Ripley, Ohio. While these abolition stories span hundreds of miles and are not overtly connected, their linkages are grounded in how they draw from memories of abolition as a tool for articulating contemporary racial logics in the region. Drawing from the work of Karma Chávez, I define racial logics as structures of thinking about race that that thereby structure expressions by agents of the past and present.¹⁰ Racial logics can be expressed in many ways, by different agents, and with distinct impacts. Whiteness is a racial logic that, broadly, refers to a structure of thinking that insists white race-based superiority. As I will discuss, whiteness is the dominant racial logic in the United States even when over claims of white supremacy are no longer socially acceptable.

My assemblage and orientation to each group of texts stems from my utilization of public memory as the critical and generative framework from which I derive my tools of analysis for

¹⁰ Karma Chávez, *The Borders of AIDS: Race, Quarantine, and Resistance* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2021): 5.

this study. My decision to read remembrances of abolition as contemporary articulations of race in the Midwest rather than more recent issues is intentional. First, abolition remains a significant aspect of the region's identity despite the passing of almost two hundred years. Second, while these stories appear to be about race only in the past, I insist that texts about the past are potent devices for the making of race today. The notion that materials of race are omnipresent necessitates that "the racial present always needs to be studied and explained anew," and memory is a generative way of doing so.¹¹ Furthermore, I understand the use of these stories as regional responses to renewed reckonings with the racist acts and systems upon which this nation was built and continues to operate. More recent considerations have been prompted by a surge of racial violence throughout the nation and center on how white Midwesterners remember race, enslavement, freedom, and how these are connected to our identities and actions in the present.¹² In this dissertation, I demonstrate how historical remembrances can construct racial and regional identity in tandem. Specifically, I ask: How are these stories constructing race in regionally specific ways? How is race connected to local, regional, and national constructions of space? How is whiteness centered and made invisible in regionally specific ways?

This project's examination of contemporary stories of abolition in three upper Midwest locations illustrates the co-constitutive nature of remembrance, race, and region. I read these stories through the analytical framework of public memory to identify how public remembrances are formative in the co-construction of race and region. I argue that these narratives position Midwestern space and Midwesterners as pure, innocent, and morally superior, and that these

¹¹ Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2015): 1.

¹² This racial violence includes but is not limited to including the Charleston church shooting, the murder of Trayvon Martin, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and many more Black folks by the law enforcement officers, debates over and removals of Confederate statues throughout the nation, discussions of reparations, and controversies over teaching Critical Race Theory and curriculum in public schools.

characterizations are grounded in the bolstering of whiteness. I take seriously these seemingly race-neutral texts as circulating race in concealed and coded ways. While these stories are locally and regionally based, they circulate nationally as part of remembrances of America's past while contributing to the rhetorical production of race on regional lines. That is, these contemporary stories of abolition construct race in Midwest-specific ways which structure the region's distinct identity across time. Ultimately, remembrances are always racial and regional matters.

Rhetoric and Remembrance

Public memory offers a productive lens for revealing how contemporary stories of abolition construct race and region because of its critical attention to how the past is evoked, interpreted, and debated to respond to present needs. Rhetorical scholars and historians have taken up the task of theorizing and exploring memory as a distinct area of study. From the mid to late nineteenth century, humanities and social science scholars developed the field of "memory studies" and the range of critical perspectives and methodological approaches to its study. Sociologist Maurice Halbwachs' development of "collective memory" proved foundational to the development of various branches to studying memory as a social phenomenon that later emerged.¹³ The notion that memory is shared spawned modifiers to "memory," including collective memory, social memory, popular memory, cultural memory, and public memory, that are illustrative of the range of approaches to the study of memory.¹⁴ Rhetorical scholars gravitate(d) to the study of public memory because it directs attention to the public negotiations over remembering the past and situates actors and institutions in "some kind of relationship of

¹³ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1922).

¹⁴ See Carole Blair, Greg Dickinson, and Brian L. Ott, "Introduction: Rhetoric/Memory/Place," in *Places of Public Memory: The Rhetoric of Museums and Memorials*, ed. Greg Dickinson, Carole Blair, and Brian L. Ott (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010).

mutuality that implicates their common interests, investments, or destinies, with profound political implications.”¹⁵ As such, modifying memory with public identifies memory as an inherently rhetorical process.¹⁶

A significant exigence for the emergence and development of memory studies in the humanities and social sciences is the need to distinguish between history and memory. History long reigned as the preferred means of recalling the past as its scholars have “been concerned above all with the accuracy of a memory with how correctly it describes what actually occurred at some point in the past.”¹⁷ As such, the supposed objectivity and specialized standards of assessment gave historians and historical institutions authority over memory to remember the past. Despite the valuable stock history held and continues to hold, its authority is questioned by some scholars and in the public. Within the discipline of history, narrative, public history, and microhistories were theorized and developed as subareas. The public has turned to memory to carve out space for their interpretation and stake in remembering the past. Historians Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen’s national survey of how Americans understand and use the past reveals that “Americans take an active role in using and understanding the past – that they’re not just passive consumers of history constructed by others.”¹⁸ These survey results not only tell us that Americans want to tell and encounter shared stories of the past that are meaningful, but also reveal that accounts of the past are inflected by power.

Since the 1900s, rhetorical scholars have engaged in the project of studying memory with varying attention to how power operates. Understanding public memory as rhetorical draws

¹⁵ Blair, Dickinson, and Ott, “Introduction,” 6.

¹⁶ Kendall Phillips, “Introduction,” in *Framing Public Memory*, ed. Kendall Phillips (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2004): 2; Thomas R. Dunn, *Queerly Remembered: Rhetorics for Representing the GLBTQ Past* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2016): 9.

¹⁷ David Thelen, “Memory and American History,” *The Journal of American History* 75, no. 4 (1989): 1119.

¹⁸ Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998): 3.

scholarly attention to the symbolic and strategic construction of the past as a response to present needs that is contested and subject to revision. Some scholarly treatment considers public memory as a label for objects that are about the past. This treatment of public memory largely overlooks the critical dimensions of texts and can dismiss discourses that attend to the rhetorical dimensions of representations of the past that do not neatly fit within this category. Public memory is a critical posture toward the study of memory because it is not just about what and who is remembered but how they are remembered and “who gets to do the remembering.”¹⁹ John Bodnar contends that engaging in these memory practices focus “not so much on specific economic or moral problems but rather fundamental issues about the entire existence of society; its organization, structure of power, and the very meaning of its past and present.”²⁰ The inflection of power in evoking the past is acutely attuned to how public memory serves particular interests in the present. As Patricia Davis stated in 2016, “This connection between a group’s shared memories and the representation of those memories in the public sphere prompts the observation that stories about the past are really focused on the needs and power relations of the present.”²¹ Analyzing contemporary stories of abolition through the critical lens of public memory does just this by elucidating how these narratives are used to articulate race and region in response to urgent exigences.

While scholars from across disciplines have taken on the study of memory in a variety of capacities, this project utilizes public memory as a hermeneutic for reading contemporary stories of abolition. Rather than situating memory, history, and forgetting as oppositional or in tension,

¹⁹ Stephen H. Browne, “Remembering Crispus Attucks: Race, Rhetoric, and the Politics of Commemoration,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 85, no. 2(1999): 169.

²⁰ John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992): 14.

²¹ Patricia Davis, *Laying Claim: African American Cultural Memory and Southern Identity* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2016): 8.

employing public memory as a hermeneutic directs critical attention to how the past is symbolically constructed in contested ways that are shared by a community and respond to present exigences. As such, this project does not focus on the accuracy of the stories of abolition investigated, but rather, as Sara C. VanderHaagen highlights, “how history is constructed by human language, contested in public, addressed to and constitutive of certain audiences, and contingent upon contexts of production.”²² Moreover, utilizing public memory as a hermeneutic is productive for elucidating the rhetorical nature of race and region, and how these are constructed through memory work. Reading the case studies in this project through the lens of public memory reveals how people and institutions engaged in memory work in the upper Midwest activate the past to make arguments about race and racialized identities through the rhetorical construction of region.

Using public memory as a hermeneutic to analyze contemporary stories of abolition as VanderHaagen outlined draws critical attention to four key rhetorical elements that recognize the capacity for memory to serve as inventional resources for making arguments about race and how racial constructions are tied to regional understandings. First, public memory is processual, revisional, and contested. The malleability of public memory highlights its rhetorical nature as agents translate memories into texts—whether speeches, public debates over commemoration museums, memorials, monuments, books and more—and the past constructed by these texts transforms over time. The translation and transformation of public memories hinges on how various constructions are debated in public, which contributes to how remembrances are revised over time. Second, public memory is marked by “an affective investment and active involvement

²² Sara C. VanderHaagen, *Children’s Biographies of African American Women: Rhetoric, Public Memory, and Agency* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2018): 34.

in representations of the past.”²³ Rhetorical scholars have identified how memory is animated by affect in a variety of ways, including an inalienable part of aspect of memory, a response to trauma and crisis, and part of the “experiential landscape” of memory places.²⁴ Explorations of emotional investment in historical representation further distinguishes history from memory and draws critical attention to how identity, belonging, and power are negotiated. A more detailed discussion of history and memory is taken up below. Fourth, because memory is theoretically accessible to all, individual and collective agents construct and argue for their remembrances in the face of contesting interpretations of the past. The versions of the past constructed for present needs have affective potency as they are co-constitutive with aspects of the material and symbolic world such values, race, and region.

Importantly, identifying public memory as a tool allows critics to distinguish memory from history in productive ways. Drawing on Pierre Nora’s foundational work, many scholars establish a sharp distinction between history— an objective, authoritative, static, and discrete product— and memory— a contested, constitutive, affective, and rhetorical process- drawing from Pierre Nora’s foundational work. Nora argued

Memory is life, always embodied in living societies and as such in permanent evolution, subject to the dialect of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of the distortions to which it is subject, vulnerable in various ways to appropriation and manipulation, and capable of lying formant for long periods only to be suddenly reawakened. History, on the other hand, is the

²³ VanderHaagen, *Children’s Biographies of African American Women*, 13.

²⁴ See Blair, Dickinson, and Ott, “Introduction: Rhetoric/Memory/Place”; Matthew Houdek and Kendall R. Phillips, “Public Memory,” in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*, 2017; Greg Dickinson, Brian L. Ott, and Eric Aoki, “Spaces of Remembering and Forgetting: The Reverent Eye/I at the Plains Indian Museum,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 3, no. 1 (2006): 27-47; Patricia Davis, *Laying Claim*.

reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer.

Memory is always a phenomenon of the present, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past.²⁵

This distinction between history and memory delineates their territories both in academic scholarship and in the public imaginary. History's territory is that of dead, static representation of the past, objectivity, and the realm of elites with specialized knowledge, tools, and standards of assessment. Alternatively, memory's realm is that of the living, malleable, the public, and affective. This distinction has grounded the work of rhetorical scholars and historians alike; however, some argue for a less stark delineation. Marita Sturken suggests that the two concepts are best understood as entangled, as memory and history shift "from one realm to another, shifting meaning and context," as memory can be subsumed into history and aspects of memory animate historical narratives.²⁶ Similarly, Dave Tell collapses history and memory in *Remembering Emmett Till*, where he argues their distinction is arbitrary: "I use memory and history as interchangeable terms, for both are little more than the selective appropriation and recirculation of narratives of Till's death."²⁷ Sturken and Tell's theorizing identifies how memory and history are fluid, both in scholarly work and public work. In this project, history and memory are both understood as selective (re)interpretations of the past. In this project, stories of abolition cannot be understood outside of ongoing narrations of national memory, regional memory, and race. Public memories of abolition are influenced by history but memory that narrates spatial identity and race also influences history. Deployment of public memory as a

²⁵ Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Le Lieux de Mémoire*," *Representations* 26 (Special Issues: Memory and Counter-Memory; Spring 1989): 12.

²⁶ Maria Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997): 5-6.

²⁷ Dave Tell, *Remembering Emmett Till* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2019): 31.

critical lens foregrounds the rhetorical facets of the accounts of the past that may be otherwise obscured or overlooked. Further, it recognizes the capacity of memory to be utilized strategically as an inventional resource.

In this project I use capacity as a morally neutral term, referring to the capability of remembrances to address present exigences, such as responding to a recent racial reckoning. Framing public memory accordingly emphasizes how the past is accessed and/or created as an available resource through rhetorical processes theoretically accessible to all. The ways agents access and/or create the past is necessarily linked to accomplishing something in the present and can be done through complex forms with both positive and negative implications. For example, in part, this dissertation argues that contemporary stories of abolition in the Midwest construct race in ways that do not reflect the lived experiences of Black residents and bolster the region as a morally superior. However, abolition stories from this time period could also construct race anew in complex ways that challenge how white Midwesterners understand Blackness and whiteness across time. Understood this way, remembrance is usable for individuals and communities to create meaning-making structures and to constitute identity.²⁸

Rhetoric, Remembrance, and Race

Rhetorical scholarship has demonstrated the rhetorical nature of race albeit not in a consistent fashion. In 2016, Lisa Flores compellingly argued that attention to race is an imperative in rhetorical criticism, describing racial rhetorical criticism as a practice “that is reflective about and engages the persistence of racial oppression, logics, voices, and bodies and that theorizes the very production of race as rhetorical.”²⁹ J. David Cisneros argues that

²⁸ Barbie Zelizer outlines how collective memory is usable in Barbie Zelizer, “Reading the Past Against the Grain: The Shape of Memory Studies,” *Review and Criticism* (1995): 226-230.

²⁹ Lisa Flores, “Between Abundance and Marginalization: The Imperative of Racial Rhetorical Criticism,” *Review of Communication* 16, no. 1 (2016): 5.

identifying race as an imperative in criticism is powerful because, “Flores is highlighting a broader point that the subject of rhetoric (as field of inquiry and as the prototypical figure of address) is fundamentally, at its core, raced (and gendered, sexed, and embodied in many other ways).”³⁰ Understood this way, we can consider race as exhibiting the same function as memory, which Casey describes as “hovering, ready to be invoked or revised, acted upon or merely contemplated[.]”³¹ The materials of race and memory are always lurking, ready to be drawn upon when needed. Further, if discourses are inherently raced, then memory and how it used to serve agents in the present are always inflected with race. Further, if regions are constructed rhetorically and one method of doing so is memory, then regional matters are racial matters.

Scholars have taken on the project of racial rhetorical criticism in multifarious ways. The foundation of this research is that “race has become a taken-for granted social condition” in historical and contemporary discursive and material practices which should drive critics’ ethics, judgments, and evaluations of texts.³² Rhetorical scholars approach the study of race with the assumption that race is an ongoing rhetorical production and racism is a “discursive, residual, and material” aspect of reality in the nation throughout time that are made to appear “real” and static— making their rhetoricity.³³ Kelly Happe argued that race functions as an ideology: “race is constituted as a category of social difference that then explains the landscape of differently embodied social relations.”³⁴ Race is invented by symbols and lives on within symbols, it is “the

³⁰ Alexis McGee and J. David Cisneros, “Looking Back, Looking Forward: A Dialogue on ‘the Imperative of Racial Rhetorical Criticism,’” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 15, no. 4 (2018): 302.

³¹ Casey, “Public Memory in Place and Time,” 37.

³² Kelly Happe, “The Body of Race: Toward a Rhetorical Understanding of Racial Ideology,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 99, no. 2 (2013): 134; Flores, “Between Abundance and Marginalization,” 6.

³³ Michael G. Lacy and Kent A. Ono, “Introduction,” in *Critical Rhetorics of Race*, eds. Michael G. Lacy and Kent A. Ono (New York: New York University Press, 2011): 3; Lisa Flores, *Deportable and Disposable: Public Rhetoric and the Making of the “Illegal” Immigrant* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2020): 22

³⁴ Happe, “The Body of Race,” 149; See also Barbara J. Fields, “Ideology and Race in American History,” in *Region, Race, and Reconstruction* eds. J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson (New York: Oxford University

performative effect of discourse.”³⁵ Additionally, scholars engaging in racial rhetorical criticism theorize and analyze the discursive construction of race from the premise that it is, in a supposedly post-racial society, invisible but omnipresent.

Scholarship within the disciplinary project of racial rhetorical criticism traces how discourse produces meaning and difference and map them onto racialized bodies. As such, racial rhetorical criticism is dually concerned with the discursive and the material/corporal. Attending to these interrelated facets, scholars engaging in racial rhetorical criticism center the ways race is heard, seen, and bounded rhetorically. Flores identifies these three categories— hearing race, seeing race, and bounding race— as the three contemporary trajectories in racial rhetorical criticism. While she noted that these categories are “simultaneously useful and problematic, informative and restrictive,” I lean into their utility and explanatory benefits for characterizing this growing area of study and for highlighting my contribution to racial rhetorical criticism.³⁶ First, those analyzing vernacular rhetorics and voice attend to disparate discourses of individuals and communities of color by tracing the complex, “contradictorily coherent logics of local voices” that constitute their identities, speak, are spoken to, and act.³⁷ Theorizations and analyses on the hearing of race foreground the public and addressed nature of rhetoric by considering how individuals and communities draw attention to, intervene, interrupt, and transform racial logics. Together, this research demonstrates how dominant discourses are contested, how belonging is articulated, and how resistance is mobilized and enacted.³⁸ Public memory scholars have taken

Press, 1982): 143-177; Barbara J. Fields, “Slavery, Race, and Ideology in the United States,” *New Left Review* 181 (1990): 95-118; and Stuart Hall, “The Whites of Their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the Media,” in *The Media Reader* eds. Manuel Alvarado and John O. Thompson, ed. (British Film Institute, 1990): 7-23.

³⁵ Flores, *Deportable and Disposable*, 17.

³⁶ Flores, “Between Abundance and Marginalization,” 11.

³⁷ Flores, “Between Abundance and Marginalization,” 11.

³⁸ Eric King Watts, “‘Voice’ and ‘Voicelessness’ in Rhetorical Studies,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 87, no. 2 (2001) 179-196; Bernadette Marie Calafell and Fernando P. Delgado, “Reading Latino/a Images: Interrogating Americanos,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 21 (2004): 1-24; Teresita Garza, “The Rhetorical Legacy of

on the hearing of race in theory and in analysis. Theoretically, Houston Baker's critical memory orients scholars to the resistance of nostalgia and sustaining of the "embarrassing, macabre, and always bizarre" memories of race in American, while Ersula Ore and Matthew Houdek argue for a spatiotemporal logics of breathing that allow for breathing, healing, and struggle grounded in vernacular voices.³⁹ Analytically, the hearing of race grounds the work of Davis' *Laying Claim* where she argued how African American vernacular memory practice created a distinct identification and sense of belonging in the South and Sarah Florini's analysis of how the Malcom X Grassroots Movement challenges the notion that the United States is "post-racial."⁴⁰

Second, scholars contribute to racial rhetorical criticism by attending to how race is represented in dominant discourses. In this strand of work, rhetorical schools trace the shifting historical and contemporary racial figurations in dominant discourses for how bodies are

Coyolxauhqui: (Re)collecting and (Re)membering Voice," in *Latina/o Discourse in Vernacular Spaces: Somos de Una Voz?*, ed. Michelle A. Holling and Bernadette M. Calafell (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011): 34-45; Casey Ryan Kelly, "Blood-Speak: Ward Churchill and the Racialization of American Indian Identity," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 8, no. 3 (2011): 240-65; Karma Chávez, *Queer Migration Politics: Activist Rhetoric and Coalitional Possibilities* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2013); Claudia A. Anguiano and Karma R. Chávez, "DREAMers' Discourse: Young Latino/a Immigrants and the Naturalization of the American Dream," in *Latina/o Discourse in Vernacular Spaces*, ed. Michelle A. Holling and Bernadette M. Calafell (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011): 81-99; Lisa M. Corrigan and Amanda N. Edgar, "'Not Just the Levees Broke': Jazz Vernacular and the Rhetoric of the Dispossed in Spike Lee's When the Levees Broke," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 12, no. 1 (2015): 83-101; Josue David Cisneros, "Reclaiming the Rhetoric of Reies López Tijerina and Agency in 'The Land Grant Question,'" *Communication Quarterly* 60, no. 5 (2012): 561-87; Josue David Cisneros, "(Re)Bordering the Civic Imaginary: Rhetoric, Hybridity, and Citizenship in La Gran Marcha," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 97, no. 1 (2011): 26-49; Darrel Enck-Wanzer, "Race, Coloniality, and Geo-Body Politics: The Garden as Latin@ Vernacular Discourse," *Environmental Communication* 5 (2011): 363-371; Darrel Enck-Wanzer, "Gender Politics, Democratic Demand and Anti-Essentialism in the New York Young Lords," in *Latina/o Discourse in Vernacular Spaces*, ed. Michelle A. Holling and Bernadette M. Calafell (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011): 59-80; Jacqueline Bacon, "Declarations of Independence: African American Abolitionists and the Struggle for Racial and Rhetorical Self-Determination," in *Critical Rhetorics of Race*, ed. Michael G. Lacy and Kent A. Ono (New York: New York University Press, 2011): 139-158; John M. Sloop and Kent A. Ono, "Out-law Discourse: The Critical Politics of Material Judgement," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 30, no. 1 (1997): 50-69.

³⁹ Houston A. Baker, Jr., *Critical Memory: Public Spheres, African American Writing, and Black Fathers and Sons in America* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2001): 154; Ersula Ore and Matthew Houdek, "Lynching in Times of Suffocation: Toward a Spatiotemporal Politics of Breathing," *Women's Studies in Communication* 43, no. 4 (2020): 442-458.

⁴⁰ Davis, *Laying Claim*; Sarah Florini, "Recontextualizing the Racial Present: Intertextuality and the Politics of Online Remembering," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 31, no. 4 (October 2014): 438-454

discursively marked, circulated, and Othered.⁴¹ The significance of this area of racial rhetorical criticism lies in how legacies of racial logics are rhetorically written onto and circulate around particular bodies. Notably, Flores' *Deportable and Disposable: Public Rhetoric and the Making of the "Illegal" Immigrant* argues that rhetorics about Mexican migrants characterizing them as "temporary, cheap labor have, in effect, constructed in the cultural imaginary an image of Mexicans as deportable and disposable and racialized them into 'illegality.'"⁴² Scholars of public memory tracking the "representational politics of race" have demonstrated how racial figurations can be resistive.⁴³ Christopher A. House's analysis of the Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia illustrated how racist images and artifacts can be used to disrupt distorted public memories, and Jessy J. Ohl and Jennifer E. Potter argued that lynching images amassed in *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photographs in America* offer a counter-memory of lynching.⁴⁴ This work is not just concerned with how race/racialization is made visible, but also how it is made invisible through rhetorics of whiteness.

⁴¹ Jamie Moshin and Ronald L. Jackson, II, "Inscribing Racial Bodies and Relieving Responsibility: Examining Racial Politics in Crash," in *Critical Rhetorics of Race*, ed. Michael G. Lacy and Kent A. Ono (New York: New York University Press, 2011): 214–232; Roopali Mukherjee, "Bling Fling: Commodity Consumption and the Politics of the 'Post-Racial,'" in *Critical Rhetorics of Race*, ed. Michael G. Lacy and Kent A. Ono (New York: New York University Press, 2011): 178–193; Lisa A. Flores, "Choosing to Consume: Race, Education, and the School Voucher Debate," in *The Motherhood Business: Consumption, Communication, & Privilege*, ed. Anne Teresa Demo, Jennifer L. Borda, and Charlotte Kroløkke (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2015): 243–65; Darrel Enck-Wanzer, "Barack Obama, The Tea Party, and the Threat of Race: On Racial Neoliberalism and Born Again Racism," *Communication, Culture, & Critique* 4, no. 1 (2011): 23–30; Greg Dickinson and Karrin Vasby Anderson, "Fallen: O.J. Simpson, Hillary Rodham Clinton, and the Centering of White Patriarchy," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 1, no. 3 (2004): 271–296; Megan Foley, "Serializing Racial Subjects: The Stagnation and Suspense of the O.J Simpson Saga," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 96, no. 1 (2010): 69–88; Christine Harold and Kevin DeLuca, "Behold the Corpse: Violent Images and the Case of Emmett Till," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 8, no. 2 (2005): 263–86; Roseann Mandzuik, "Commemorating Sojourner Truth: Negotiating the Politics of Race and Gender in the Spaces of Public Memory," *Western Journal of Communication* 67, no. 3 (2003): 271–291.

⁴² Flores, *Deportable and Disposable*, 6.

⁴³ Flores, *Between Abundance and Marginalization*, 13.

⁴⁴ Christopher A. House, "Remembering Jim Crow in the Age of Trump: An Analysis of the Rhetorical Functions of the Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia," *Journal of Contemporary Rhetoric* 7, no. 1 (2017): 1–18; Jessy J. Ohl and Jennifer E. Potter, "United We Lynch: Post-Racism and the (Re)Membering of Racial Violence in *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*," *Southern Communication Journal* 78, no. 3 (August 2013): 185–201.

An important function of representations of race is to simultaneously legitimate racism while safeguarding the centrality, innocence, and invisibility of whiteness. Raka Shome defines whiteness as a “*process* constituted by an ensemble of social and material practices in which whites (and often non-whites for survival) are invested, by which they are socialized and through which they are produced” (emphasis original).⁴⁵ In agreement, Ruth Frankenberg argues that whiteness is a location of power and privilege, an orientation to the world, and a set of unmarked and unnamed cultural practices.⁴⁶ Importantly, scholars note that the discursive and material dimensions of whiteness are always intertwined. In the United States, whiteness has largely been uninterrogated but has been a stable identity in terms of its location on the racial hierarchy.⁴⁷ The “what” of theorizations of whiteness are tricky and slippery as there is no “‘true essence’ to ‘whiteness’; there are only historically contingent constructions of that social location.”⁴⁸ To get at this issue, Thomas K. Nakayama and Robert L. Krizek argued that whiteness is constituted through rhetorics of whiteness. Exposing these rhetorics is challenging due to the invisibility but centrality of whiteness— it is at once everything and nothing. Frankenberg put it this way, “There is a slipperiness to whiteness here: it shifts from ‘no culture’ to ‘normal culture’ to ‘bad culture’ and back again.”⁴⁹ To combat this slipperiness, Nakayama and Krizek identified six strategic rhetorics that guide the mapping of whiteness while also attending to how whiteness changes over time and space: 1. Whiteness is tied to naturalized dominance, 2. Whiteness is

⁴⁵ Raka Shome, “Outing Whiteness,” *Review and Criticism* 17, no. 3 (2000), 368.

⁴⁶ Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, 1993): 1. See also Godfried Agyeman Asante, “#RhetoricSoWhite and US Centered: Reflections of Challenges and Opportunities,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 105, no. 4 (2019): 485; Sara Ahmed, “A Phenomenology of Whiteness,” *Feminist Theory* 8, no. 2 (2007): 149-168.

⁴⁷ Thomas K. Nakayama and Robert L. Krizek, “Whiteness: A Strategic Rhetoric,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 81 (1995), 293; Thomas K. Nakayama, “Whiteness is Not Contained,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 17, no. 2 (2020): 200.

⁴⁸ Nakayama and Krizek, “Whiteness,” 294.

⁴⁹ Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters*, 202.

defined by the negative, 3. White is scientifically classified as natural and, therefore, drained of its history, 4. Whiteness is confused with nationality, 5. Whiteness is an invisible, non-label for identity, and 6. Whiteness is tied to European ancestry.⁵⁰ It is through these strategic rhetorics that whiteness, as a racial figuration, both evades power relations while securing its space and power as the invisible center.

Third, Flores points to the body of racial rhetorical criticism that tracks discursive and literal borders that racialize identities, space, and mobility. Much of this scholarship has focused on the representational politics of immigration and its alignment to brown bodies which are framed as problems needing to be managed and contained.⁵¹ Often scholars doing this work examine how race, identity, nation, citizenship, and belonging with some tracing how bordering rhetorics constitute immigrants as illegal, dangerous, threatening, and others exploring how vernacular discourses, voice, agency, and hybridity.⁵² The rhetorical construction of borders

⁵⁰ Nakayama and Krizek, "Whiteness," 298-303; Frankenburg, *White Women, Race Matters*, 236.

⁵¹ Flores, "Between Abundance and Marginalization," 15.

⁵² For representative scholarship examining how bordering rhetorics constitute immigrants as illegal, dangerous, threatening see Kent A. Ono and John M. Sloop, *Shifting Borders: Rhetoric, Immigration, and California's Proposition 187* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2002); Marouf A. Hasian, Jr. and Fernando Delgado, "The Trials and Tribulations of Racialized Critical Rhetorical Theory: Understanding the Rhetorical Ambiguities of Proposition 187," *Communication Theory* 8, no. 3 (1998): 245-270; Karma R. Chávez, "Border Interventions: The Need to Shift from a Rhetoric of Insecurity to a Rhetoric of Militarization," in *Border Rhetorics: Citizenship and Identity on the US-Mexico Frontier*, ed. D. Robert DeChaine (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2012): 48-62; Lisa A. Flores, "Constructing Rhetorical Borders: Peons, Illegal Aliens, and Competing Narratives of Immigration," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 20, no. 4 (2003): 362-387; J. David Cisneros, "Contaminated Communities: The Metaphor of 'Immigrant as Pollution' in Media Representations of Immigration," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 11, no. 4 (2008): 569-602; and D. Robert DeChaine, "Bordering the Civic Imaginary: Alienization, Fence Logic, and the Minuteman Civil Defense Corps," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 95, no. 1 (2009): 43-65. For scholarship examining vernacular discourses, voice, agency, and hybridity see Lisa A. Flores, "Creating Discursive Space Through a Rhetoric of Difference: Chicana Feminists Craft a Homeland," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 82, no. 2 (1996): 142-56; Sara L. McKinnon, "Unsettling Resettlement: Problematizing 'Lost Boys of Sudan' Resettlement and Identity," *Western Journal of Communication* 72, no. 4 (2008): 397-414; Michelle A. Holling, "A Dispensational Rhetoric in 'The Mexican Question in the Southwest,'" in *Border Rhetorics: Citizenship and Identity on the US-Mexico Frontier*, ed. D. Robert DeChaine (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2012): 65-85; Josue David Cisneros, "(Re)Bordering the Civic Imaginary: Rhetoric, Hybridity, and Citizenship in *La Gran Marcha*," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 97, no. 1 (2011): 26-49; and Vincent N. Pham, "Drive-BY Cinema's Drive-Outs and U-Turns: Materiality, Mobility, and Reconfiguring of Forgotten Space and Absurd Borders," *Women's Studies in Communication* 41, no. 4 (2018): 370-382.

shapes not just the boundaries of space, but the meanings of space. For example, Leslie J. Harris argued that white slavery literature depicted borders between the dangerous, evil city and the safe goodness of the country as a site of home in ways that limited women's mobility within the city.⁵³ Although a great deal of bordering scholarship attends to international borders, political geographer Henk Van Houtum contended that borders are artifacts of social creation and can apply to expansive spatial configurations including "(macro-)regions, cities, or neighbourhoods."⁵⁴ Van Houtum identified the operative question about borders as not if they are "natural" or human-made, but "*how* borders are made in terms of its symbols, signs, identifications, representations, performances, and stories" (emphasis original).⁵⁵ This dissertation adds to scholarship about seeing and bounding race by tracing how the upper Midwest is constructed through rhetorics of whiteness.

More specifically, this project contributes to both the seeing and bounding of race by analyzing contemporary stories of abolition in the upper Midwest as inventive resources for constructing the region's identity on racial lines. Discourses about remembering abolition in the upper Midwest invoke race, in this case whiteness, through racial logics that are particular to the region. Strategic rhetorics of whiteness are adapted to the historical happenings being recounted and the contemporary exigences to which they respond. A crucial aspect of this is how the upper Midwest is rhetorically bounded, separating it from the South and other regions with abolitionist activities in ways that infuse the space and how it is used across time. This dissertation also heeds Flores' call for historically grounded analyses of race. Flores insisted that without

⁵³ Leslie J. Harris, "Rhetorical Mobilities and the City: The White Slavery Controversy and Racialized Protection of Women in the U.S.," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 104, no. 1 (2018): 37.

⁵⁴ Henk Van Houtum, "The Geopolitics of Borders and Boundaries," *Geopolitics* 10, no 4 (2005): 674.

⁵⁵ Van Houtum, "The Geopolitics," 675.

historical interrogations of race, “we are ill-equipped to understand race *as* rhetorical.”⁵⁶ The tracing and unpacking of historical manifestations of race helps us understand “*how* race matters differently today” (emphasis original).⁵⁷ Flores’ imperative is well aligned with the hermeneutic of public memory which approaches texts as shared symbolic representations of the past that respond to present needs. That is, by tracking the long histories of race and racial logics, we can understand the (re)assertion of whiteness in the upper Midwest through contemporary stories of abolition.

In addition to Flores’ topical review of this body of work, rhetorical scholars have participated in racial rhetorical criticism by utilizing public memory as a critical tool. A survey of work in rhetorical studies reveal three prevailing ways public memory is used as a tool to reveal articulations of race and racial identities. First, scholars have traced temporal orientations and how the constructions of time are tied to race. Second, rhetorical scholars have examined how people of color exercise agency and resistance to (re)articulate race and racial identities. Third, scholars have revealed how places of memory are inflected with race in ways that are oppressive and/or resistive. Each theme demonstrates how analyzing texts through a framework of public memory reveals the capacity of memory to serve as an argumentative resource for making arguments about race.

The rhetorical study of texts through the hermeneutic of public memory is, in part, animated by how we construct and reinterpret the past to negotiate present concerns. The articulation of new temporal frameworks differs from this premise in that critics are interpreting public memory texts for how they fracture seemingly natural temporal understandings and often argue for new temporal structures through which to understand racial memories. Rhetorical

⁵⁶ Flores, “Between Abundance and Marginalization,” 17.

⁵⁷ Mukherjee, “Bling Fling,” 180.

scholars studying the connections between race and memory have compellingly argued that linear narratives of progress that delegate anti-Blackness to the past fail to recognize the relationship between the past and present. Embedded in this critique of temporality is the critique that time is a constructed and racialized apparatus that is materialized in temporal rhetorics. This temporal framework identifies distinct temporal markers of “progress” and closure to rhetorically signal the end of specific acts of anti-Blackness and anti-Blackness that indicates American society is postracial. Ersula Ore and Matthew Houdek provide the most explicit theorization of this temporal framework, which they term white “national time,” as they trace the temporal relationship between lynching of Black people in the past and present. More specifically, these scholars forward the term “white national time” as a particular racialized temporality that divorces that past from the present, “Discourses policing the continuities of lynching’s past and present manifest the ways racism mobilizes white national time to maintain the racial status quo and absolve the white nation of its (ongoing) racist sins.”⁵⁸ Similarly, Jessy J. Ohl and Jennifer E. Potter’s analysis of the collection of lynching images *Without Sanctuary* elucidates how the text fractures the temporal confines of the collection. These scholars argue that the text allocates accountability to contemporary audiences by positioning the viewer as an “extension of the original participants” and ask them to “consider their present role in the continuation of racial violence.”⁵⁹ A second way memory is used as a tool to demonstrate the construction of race through time are considerations of the starting point of Black people as beginning with bondage. Clint Smith points to the lack of discussion about the lives, communities, and nations of Black people before they were taken from their homes and forced into bondage. Smith explains that the main issue with this temporal framework is that “Black Americans understand our history as

⁵⁸ Ore and Houdek, “Lynching in Times of Suffocation,” 445.

⁵⁹ Ohl and Potter, “United We Lynch,” 194.

beginning in bondage rather than in the freedom of Africa that preceded it.”⁶⁰ These temporal orientations manifest in discourse and maintain racial hegemony.

Rhetorical scholars are actively utilizing public memory as a critical tool to establish alternative temporal frameworks that provide new constructions of race. Following their critique of white national time, Ore and Houdek forward a nonlinear temporal orientation to accounts of anti-Black violence that ruptures this conception of time and distills new conceptions of community, time, and space. This countertemporality constitutes a community of victims of racialized violence across space and time through “the weight of accumulation” that does not “isolate racism and Black life to the past.”⁶¹ Other scholars have drawn similar conclusions, including Davis’ work conceptualizing Black southern identity which “acknowledges the trans-historical nature of contemporary inequalities through encapsulation of slavery’s present-day legacy.”⁶² The work of Ore and Houdek, Davis, and other rhetorical scholars points to how public memory is contested and revised through temporal frameworks grounded in continuity and accumulation.⁶³

A second way public memory has been employed to (re)construct race is the illumination of agential and resistive acts of Black folks throughout time. Focusing on the rhetorical elements of remembrance, this body of scholarship points to the contested and multivocal nature of constructions of race. Rhetorical scholars have long theorized agency in rhetorical practice and analysis in a myriad of ways. Of significance for how public memory is used as a tool for making arguments about race, agency is a term used to characterize the capacity for an agent(s)

⁶⁰ Clint Smith, *How the Word is Passed* (New York: Little, Brown, and Co., 2021): 197.

⁶¹ Ore & Houdek, “Lynching in Times of Suffocation,” 448, 451.

⁶² Davis, *Laying Claim*, 14.

⁶³ See Smith, *How the Word is Passed*; Florini, “Recontextualizing the Racial Present”; Jacqueline Bacon, “Reading the Reparations Debate,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 89, no. 3 (August 2003): 171-195; Carole Blair and Neil Michel, “Reproducing Civil Rights Tactics: The Rhetorical Performances of the Civil Rights Memorial,” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (Spring 2000): 31-55.

to engage in symbolic and/or material action that impact their world and can be identified in a text.⁶⁴ Agency intersects with resistance in that, as VanderHaagen contends, resistance “is a directional agency often enacted out of one’s position of marginalization” in opposition to a hegemonic system.⁶⁵ Identifying agency and resistance as rhetorical enactments of power ties these concepts to public memory in two key ways. First, public memory is a productive lens through which to read a text because it reveals how use the past can be used as an inventional resource to make arguments that are agential and resistive. VanderHaagen’s analysis of six speeches at the World’s Congress of Representative women demonstrates how Black women collectively argued for “proper commemoration of Black women’s progress” and “recognition of Black women’s agency” through their memory practices.⁶⁶ While this research demonstrates Black agency in a positive light, the work of other scholars point to the diminishing of Black agency/resistance in the past which contribute to hegemonic memories and constructions of racial identities. Kristan Piroit and Shevaun Watson’s analysis of Charleston’s historical tourism industry illustrates the bolstering of white resolve and the futility of Black agency and resistance.⁶⁷ Deploying public memory as a hermeneutic, critics can identify and analyze how power through agential/resistive acts is enacted by Black agents in the past and present and are located in larger power structures in a particular time. Second, because public memory focuses

⁶⁴ This definition of agency draws from the scholarship of Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, “Agency: Promiscuous and Protean,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 2, no. 1 (2005): 3; VanderHaagen, *Children’s Biographies*, 13-14

⁶⁵ Sara C. VanderHaagen, “Practical Truths: Back Feminist Agency and Public Memory in Biographies for Children,” *Women’s Studies in Communication* 35, no. 1 (2012): 29.

⁶⁶ VanderHaagen, “‘A Grand Sisterhood’: Black American Women Speakers at the 1893 World’s Congress of Representative Women,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 107, no. 1 (2021): 2.

⁶⁷ Kristan Piroit and Shevaun Watson, “Memories and Freedom and White Resilience: Place, Tourism, and Urban Slavery,” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 45, no. 2 (2015): 91-116. A similar theme of crediting white agency and undermining Black agency/resistance emerges in Kristen Hoerl’s analysis of the film *Mississippi Burning*. See Kristen Hoerl, “Burning Mississippi into Memory? Cinematic Amnesia as a Resource for Remembering,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 26, no. 1 (March 2009): 54-79.

attention to the rhetorical elements of representation of the past, this critical tool illuminates historical agency. Historical agency is concerned with who and what are positioned as agential in representations of the past. Davis characterizes historical agency as

[T]he power attained through discourses that position individuals or groups as actors in, rather than passive witnesses to, significant events of the past. It is also located in the ability to act in the present to bring the past back to life. In the case of black southern identity, historical agency is produced both in the sense of representing African Americans as actors in one of the defining eras in US history and in the sense of constructing memory through the process of representation itself. In the first case, African Americans evolve from historical objects to historical subjects; in the second, they advance from historical consumers to historical producers.”⁶⁸

Historical agency is about both the content and process of producing representations of the past that are significant in constructing race in multivocal ways that resist hegemonic assertions. In separate work, Davis argues that Black women participating in Civil War reenactments challenge hegemonic constructions of Southern femininity and situates them as producers of history and meaning.⁶⁹

Third, rhetorical scholars using public memory as a critical tool have also demonstrated how memory places—including museums, memorials, monuments, housing, and tourism—are vehicles for making arguments about race. The physical location of the memory place, as well as how it is constructed serve as inventional resources for representing the past and constructing

⁶⁸ Davis, *Laying Claim*, 14.

⁶⁹ Patricia Davis, “The *Other* Southern Belles: Civil War Reenactment, African American Women, and the Performance of Idealized Femininity,” *Text and Performance Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (October 2012): 308-331.

race. Overarchingly, there are two ongoing discussions about how race is implicated in memory places that are elucidated through the study of public memory. First, memory places curate local, regional, and national stories tied to race. Shawn J. Parry-Giles and Trevor Parry-Giles assert that the president of the United States has incomparable authority and power to influence the nation's collective memory which serves as predominant lens through which Americans make sense of the past.⁷⁰ The significant role of presidents in making meaning of the past coupled with the (re)circulation of memories through tourism has prompted rhetorical scholars to explore tours of presidential estates as potent sites articulating race. Megan Fitzmaurice and Roger C. Aden's work reveals that presidential homes and estates tell narratives about individuals and the nation that are informed by race.⁷¹ The spatial and rhetorical configurations of memory places also inform our understanding of how constructions of race are inflected with other identity categories. Poirot's 2015 essay reveals just this revealing how the rhetorical geography of memory of the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute is a gendered landscape that "promotes masculine achievement and agency" and strategically forgets the gendered dynamics of Jim Crow contexts.⁷² This scholarship compelling demonstrates how memory places are inherently raced but also rhetorically and spatially makes arguments about race.

Public memory is used as a tool illuminate how memory places are built and curated to dissent, critique, and reconstruct the past in ways that are more accurate and/or meaningful for collectives. These memories practices are often referred to vernacular, counter, or oppositional,

⁷⁰ Shawn J. Parry-Giles and Trevor Parry-Giles, "Collective Memory, Political Nostalgia, and the Rhetorical Presidency: Bill Clinton's Commemoration of the March on Washington, August 28, 1998," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 85, no. 4 (November 2000): 419. See also Megan Fitzmaurice, "Recirculating Memories of the Presidents as Benevolent Slaveholders on Presidential Slavery Tours," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 22, no. 4 (2019): 497.

⁷¹ Fitzmaurice, "Recirculating Memories of the Presidents"; Roger C. Aden, *Upon the Ruins of Liberty: Slavery, the President's House at Independence National Historical Park, and Public Memory* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2017).

⁷² Kristan Poirot, "Gendered Geographies of Memory: Place, Violence, and Exigency at the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 18, no. 4 (2015): 642.

which are contrasted with what Bodnar terms “official” memory expresses “the concerns of cultural leaders or authorities” who “share a common interest in social unity, the continuity of existing institutions, and loyalty to the status quo.”⁷³ Davis defines vernacular as “the cultural expressions of ‘ordinary’ people,” which emerge from “communities that have been historically ignored and typically function as a response to dominant discourses.”⁷⁴ The exploration of vernacular rhetorical practices is a crucial component of Flores’ racial rhetorical criticism imperative because they are constitutive of identity and identify racial logics.⁷⁵ Vernacular expressions of memory do just this.⁷⁶ For example, House contends that the Jim Crow Museum at Ferris State University is a counter-museum that displays racist objects subversively in order to “seek to improve the human condition” for Black Americans.⁷⁷ Identifying memory places, and memory practices more generally, as vernacular draws attention to the rhetorical production of the past and race, and how agency is enacted through a variety of rhetorical practices. Moreover, explicating how vernacular memory practices function also reveals the dominance of whiteness in representations of the past.

The body of scholarship utilizing public memory to explicate how race is implicated in remembrance continues to grow and this project expands this literature by establishing the significance of understanding the rhetorical construction of region constitutes racialized identities in particular locations. While scholarship on the intersection of public memory and

⁷³ John Bodnar, *Remaking America*, 14.

⁷⁴ Davis, *Laying Claim*, 17.

⁷⁵ Flores, “Between Abundance and Marginalization,” 11-13.

⁷⁶ The usage of “vernacular” is largely used but not uncontested. Ekaterina V. Haskins argues that Bodnar’s dichotomy of vernacular and official memory “hyostatizes discourses, turning it into an ideologically and historically static category. Consequently, it posits ‘ordinary people’ as authentic bearers of such expressions rather than as subjects whose identities are continuously formed and reformed through a complex process of enculturation and rhetorical negotiation.” Ekaterina V. Haskins, “Introduction,” in *Popular Memories: Commemoration, Participatory Culture, and Democratic Citizenship* (Columbia, SC: The University of South Carolina Press, 2015): 6. Some rhetorical scholars use “counter” and “oppositional” to theorize similar rhetorical practices.

⁷⁷ House, “Remembering Jim Crow,” 7.

race is often situated in the South, few scholars have demonstrated the formative nature of region in constructing race and even fewer have looked to the upper Midwest as a generative site of race-making.

Rhetoric and Region

This project expands racial rhetorical criticism scholarship by doing two things. First, this dissertation argues that race and region are constructed in tandem and that public remembrances do this work. That is, regional matters are racial matters. Second, I argue that the Midwest is a space where race logics are pervasive yet invisible. Rhetorical scholars have implicitly and explicitly identified the American South as a significant region for the interanimating work of memory and race. Davis's book *Laying Claim: African American Cultural Memory and Southern Identity* and some of the contributions in *Reconstructing Southern Rhetoric* provide the most sustained consideration of the intersection of rhetoric-remembrance-race-region. The South is often centered in these considerations.⁷⁸ Tell also argues for this intersection with a narrower scope on the Mississippi Delta in *Remembering Emmett Till*. Each of these works identifies the rhetoricity of region and its co-constitutive function with memory and race. While the significance of the American South to Black Americans and Black memory practice cannot be overlooked, region's rhetorical force on memory and race needs to be explored throughout the nation.

This project attends to how the upper Midwest is constructed rhetorically through memory work and this memory work, which is also a potent resource for articulating race and

⁷⁸ Davis, *Laying Claim*; See Patricia Davis, "Our Stories in Steel: An Autoethnographic Journey to the National Memorial for Peace and Justice," Dave Tell, "Memory Making is Region Making: Emmett Till in Tallahatchie County," and Megan Fitzmaurice, "What Lies Beneath: Recovering an African Burial Ground and Black Nationalism's Cultural Influence in the Capital of the Confederacy: in Christina L. Moss and Brandon Inabinet, *Reconstructing Southern Rhetoric* (Jackson, MI: The University Press of Mississippi, 2021). The significance of the American South in connection with memory and race is often implicit because it is not a central aspect of the analysis, often serving as context.

racial identities. I turn to the upper Midwest as a significant site of race making because the region largely exists in the public imaginary as a site untouched by racism and racial violence and academic eyes have been focused on the southern portion of the nation. This dissertation project responds to the unrealized, but no less urgent need to attend to how race and racial identities are constructed in this region. Critical regionalism is a critical theoretical perspective in this project because it views regions as rhetorically constructed and provides a rationale for disrupting the upper Midwest's idyllic, post-racial reputation.

Scholars from various disciplines have convincingly argued that regions are not a bounded, static territory, but are instead rhetorical creations that constitute identity, articulate spatial interrelations, and operate strategically.⁷⁹ Static and bounded conceptualizations of region have animated scholarship and the public imaginary about region, forwarding understandings of the term as naturalized spatial units or objects that collect and represent data.⁸⁰ Understood this way, regions have been utilized for classification and comparison based on “physical components, such as topological features, and subjective elements, including identities and shared experiences.”⁸¹ Regional scholar Douglas Reichert Powell argues, “Regardless of the field, the scholarly practice of regionalism generally takes the existence of region as an a priori, more or less natural fact” which circulates in broader discourses about region. Defining region in this fashion is described by Katherine McKittrick as “terribly seductive” as it “calibrates and

⁷⁹ See Jenny Rice, “From Achitectonic to Tectonics: Introducing Regional Rhetorics,” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (2012): 201-213.

⁸⁰ See Terry G. Jordan, “The Concept and Method,” in *Regional Studies: The Interplay of Land and People*, ed. Glen E. Lich (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 1992): 8-22; Anssi Passi, *Territories, Boundaries, and Consciousness* (Chichester, West Sussex, UK: John Wiley and Sons, 1996); and John Tomaney and Neil Ward, “Locating the Region: An Introduction,” in *A Region in Transition: North East England and the Millennium*, eds. John Tomaney and Neil Ward (Philadelphia: Routledge, 2001).

⁸¹ Dong-min Lee and Jaemyong Ryu, “Mindful Learning in Geography: Cultivating Balanced Attitudes Toward Regions,” *Journal of Geography* 114, no. 5 (2015): 198.

normalizes where, and therefore who, we are.”⁸² Scholars and the public have fallen into this seduction by considering the upper Midwest as a space of moral superiority and racial equality from the time of its inception.

Critical regionalism is an interdisciplinary, interventionist method of inquiry that foregrounds the rhetorical nature of region and seeks to disrupt nostalgic narratives of regionalism in the pursuit of alternative relationships among space/place and their interrelations. Powell’s work is significant in the establishment of critical regionalism and reaches two interrelated conclusions about region. First, regions are relational, rather than discrete sites. Region, by the nature of this geographic scale, consists of larger networks that cannot be isolated through physical boundaries or demarcations on a map, as they are implicated in local, national, and global tensions. Jenny Rice offers another way of saying this: “regions are always saturated with relationships among people, places, and histories.” Rice echoes feminist geographer Doreen Massey’s argument that place is a specific constellation of social relations coming together at a particular locus (in this case, region).⁸³ Second, regions are strategic, rhetorical negotiations. Any evocation of region is an argument that makes claims about not only place, but about the interrelations of that place, including race. Like public memory, regions are contested with numerous versions existing and seeking to be legitimized.⁸⁴ Carly S. Woods, Joshua P. Ewalt, and Sarah J. Baker contend that regions “represent a particular vision of place emerging from the sum total of discursive contestations, material performances, and related rhetorics that seek to define the contours of the region and provide a particular perspective on its history and

⁸² Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006): xi.

⁸³ Rice, “From Achitectonic to Tectonics,” 206; Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

⁸⁴ Mahoney and Katz, “Introduction”; Cayton and Gray, *The American Midwest*, xi.

memory.”⁸⁵ Mobilizing region in this way recognizes that invoking region is processual, strategic, and interconnected with other social phenomena.

Because regions are the constellations of larger social relations, we should understand memory as a significant intentional resource for making arguments about the interconnected constructions of region and race. Tell compellingly states, “Memory making and region making are two sides of the same coin,” and “sometimes (if not always) the pure pursuit of commemoration is not a live option.”⁸⁶ The production and circulation of contemporary stories of abolition in the upper Midwest not only is a rhetorical act of remembrance, but also functions as regional rhetorics grounded in morality, values, and race. Some may argue that race does not play a role or a significant role in the rhetorical construction of the upper Midwest, yet critical regionalism refutes these logics by determining that characterizations of the region as ““the norm”” and a “nonexistent” region are rhetorically significant.⁸⁷ I argue that, at least in part, they are rhetorically significant for how they articulate race.

Although critical regionalism explicitly rejects understanding region as a bounded location, it is important to, at least initially, draw boundaries around the upper Midwest. As a starting point, I characterize the upper Midwest by the territories entering statehood through the Northwest Ordinance (1787). The 1787 Northwest Ordinance established the geographical boundaries of the land named the Northwest Territory, which consisted of the now states of Ohio (1803), Indiana (1816), Illinois (1818), Michigan (1837), and Wisconsin (1848).⁸⁸ This dissertation uses these territories as a grounding point for two key reasons. First, the territories

⁸⁵ Carly S. Woods, Joshua P. Ewalt, and Sara J. Baker, “A Matter of Regionalism: Remembering Brandon Teena and Willa Cather at the Nebraska History Museum,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 99, no. 3 (August 2013): 344.

⁸⁶ Tell, “Memory Making is Region Making,” 51, 61.

⁸⁷ Martin F. Manalansan IV, Chantal Nadeau, Richard T. Rodriguez, Siobhan, Somerville, “Introduction: Queering the Middle: Race, Region, and a Queer Midwest,” *A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 20 (2014): 1; Mahoney and Wendy J. Katz, “Introduction,” xxiii.

⁸⁸ Oslter, ““Just and Lawful War,””4.

entered statehood as free states, which is a defining characteristic of the region and connected to the Midwest's abolition history and memories. During this time enslavement was legal in the South and parts of the Northeast, marking the Midwest as seemingly "untouched" by the racialized terror. Further, this regional grounding allows for a clear distinction between the Midwest and the North. In various disciplines' scholarship as well as in the public imaginary, the North emerges before the Civil War as a region in opposition to the institution of slavery. The Midwest and Northeast fall under the historical region of the North but the Midwest can be distinguished by territories entering the Union as free states. Second, contemporary understandings of the Midwest vary.⁸⁹ A quick Internet search, browsing through regional scholarship, and conversations with friends reveal different configurations of the region with different (strategic) justifications. As of 2020, the United States Census Bureau identifies the Midwest as Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota.⁹⁰ Despite expansive definitions of the region, the territories of the Northwest Ordinance (1787) are almost always included in some capacity.⁹¹

Critical regionalism justifies exploration of the Midwest because of its existence in public and scholarly imaginations as a distinct/indistinct region whose reputation is democratic, moral, progressive, and friendly. While some dismiss the region for its lack of "identity," it is precisely this reason I turn to it for the complex ways it negotiates race.⁹² The "linear narrative of impeded progress" is tied to taming the land of the Old Northwest, equality and race, and accountability

⁸⁹ Ryan Craggs, "Which States Are in the Midwest? I Asked 20 Coworkers to Find Out," *Thrillist*, October 13, 2014, Retrieved from <https://www.thrillist.com/travel/nation/which-states-are-in-the-midwest> (Accessed November 1, 2022); Mahoney and Katz, "Introduction"; Andrew R. L. Cayton and Susan E. Gray, *The American Midwest: Essays on Regional History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001).

⁹⁰ "Census Regions and Divisions of the United States," *United States Census Bureau*, n.d., Retrieved from https://www2.census.gov/geo/pdfs/maps-data/maps/reference/us_regdiv.pdf

⁹¹ Oslter, "Just and Lawful War," 4.

⁹² Each of the contributing authors in Cayton and Gray, *The American Midwest* make reference to the Midwest's identity being tied to moral and material development and/or progress.

for moral discipline.⁹³ As the westward expansion unfolded, this narrative of the region remained but was expanded to reflect its new middleness. In some capacities, the middleness of the Midwest points to rhetorics that characterize the region as the core or Heartland of the nation, “a place where you can get direct access to what is ‘truly American.’”⁹⁴ Simultaneously, this middle nature also indicated moral and economic superiority.⁹⁵ It is important to recognize that these regional rhetorics are not describing the land but is the constitution of a community and corresponding attitudes and values in contested ways.

The concurrent defining and flattening of the Midwest through its middleness constructs nostalgic narratives of the region and obscures how regional matters are racial matters. Andrew R. L. Cayton and Susan E. Gray note “regional identity is a form of storytelling” which constitutes the past and identity across time.⁹⁶ Despite narrations of linear progress, equality, moral discipline, and Midwest niceties, racism and commitments to anti-Blackness have been significant forces in the region, regardless of how the region’s ethos influenced overlooking and dismissing these claims. Despite regional bounding of enslavement to the South, Black Midwesterners experienced the barbarities of slavery, although it was not often discussed at the time and contemporary historians have “failed to come to terms with its extent or the experience of enslaved [M]idwesterners.”⁹⁷ The emerging reputation of freedom and equality in the region

⁹³ Cayton and Gray, “Introduction,” 11.

⁹⁴ Manalansan IV, Nadeau, Rodriguez, Siobhan, Somerville, “Introduction,” 1. See also the discussion of the average nature of the Midwest in Jon Gjerde, “Middleness and the Middle West,” in Cayton and Gray, *The American Midwest: Essays on Regional History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001): 186 and the discussion of how the region is a metonymy for the nation in Stephen S. Nissenbaum, “New England as Region and Nation,” in *All Over the Map: Rethinking American Regions* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

⁹⁵ Gjerde, “Middleness and the Middle West,” 186.

⁹⁶ Cayton and Gray, “Introduction,” 4.

⁹⁷ Leslie A. Schwalm, *Emancipation’s Diaspora: Race and Reconstruction in the Upper Midwest* (Chapel Hill: NC, North Carolina Press, 2009): 8. Of slavery in the Midwest, Schwalm explains, “[M]idwestern slavery was a fluid institution, taking form in a variety of legal and extralegal practices, from open and legally sanctioned slave ownership, to term of life indentured servitude, adoptions that were intended to mask child slavery, visiting or temporary bondage protected by law, and, of course, explicitly illegal slave ownership.”

in the 1850s was accompanied by the racial (and gendered) exclusion of Black and Native American residents.⁹⁸ Regional scholar Nicole Etcheson explained that while the South's "racial etiquette is rigidly defined," the Midwest's was a "loose system of social controls" that were/are more flexible, further obscuring the regions racial matters.⁹⁹ In fact, despite the Midwest's abolitionist reputation, moral superiority, and notions of ongoing progress, historian V. Jacque Voegeli argued, "Except for the South, the Middle West... was the region most firmly committed to white supremacy."¹⁰⁰ The belieing of the regions' deep ties with race and racism reveal how region rhetorics and public memories collide to bolster whiteness.

The characterization of the Midwest as distinct/indistinct, featureless, empty, and the middle also indicates the inflection of whiteness in constructions of the region. While some scholars attending to region identify that the Midwest is generally marked by whiteness, this project interrogates its specific rhetorical manifestations in abolition stories. The "everydayness" of whiteness and the above descriptions of the Midwest make both challenging to map.¹⁰¹ Two significant strategic rhetorics of whiteness theorized by Nakayama and Krizek run alongside constructions of the region. First, white is defined negatively rather than in positive terms, indicating its invisibility. The Midwest is often defined in terms of its lack of distinctiveness and comparison to other regions in the nation. Second, whiteness often emerges as naturalized, "drained of its history and its social status; once again it becomes invisible."¹⁰² As demonstrated above with the discussion of the Midwest's racial history and constructed narratives, the region

⁹⁸ Cayton and Gray, "Introduction," 12.

⁹⁹ Nicole Etcheson, "Barbequed Kentuckians and Six-Foot Texas Rangers: The Construction of Midwestern Identity," in Cayton and Gray, *The American Midwest: Essays on Regional History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001): 85. See also St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1945): 99-128, 276.

¹⁰⁰ V. Jacque Voegeli, *Free But Not Equal: The Midwest and the Negro During the Civil War* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1967).

¹⁰¹ Nakayama and Krizek, "Whiteness: A Strategic Rhetoric," 296.

¹⁰² Nakayama and Robert L. Krizek, "Whiteness: A Strategic Rhetoric," 300.

is seemingly drained of its problematic past and social constructions of race. In the face of the rhetorical potency of the Midwest, the region has drawn less scholarly attention than the American South and West across disciplines, especially in connection with race.¹⁰³

Public memory is a productive tool for revealing how the narrations of the past serve as inventional resources for the interrelated activities of race-making and region-making. Deployed as a hermeneutic, public memory emphasizes the rhetorical features of race-making in contemporary abolition stories in the Midwest. More specifically, public memory centers affective weight and investment in representations of the past, markers of temporality, inscription of values, selectivity of memories, narration of a common identity, public engagement with constructions, and power dynamics of the memory work. Affect functions on three interrelated registers. First, public memories can hold affective weight and call for affective investment for addresses, rhetors, and critics. Second, affect can create a sense of shared identity and belonging. Finally, affect generates the meaningfulness of representations of the past which contributes to their durability in the public. While memories are dynamic and contested, their affective density can make them appear solidified, having significance beyond question, and “stick” across space

¹⁰³ For exemplary rhetorical studies on the American South see Davis, *Laying Claim*; Patricia Davis, Brandon Inabinet, Christina L. Moss, and Carolyn B. Walcott, “Decolonizing Regions,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 24, no. 1-2 (2021): 349-364; Moss and Inabinet, *Reconstructing Southern Rhetoric*; Brandon Inabinet and Christina Moss, “Complicit in Victimage: Imagined Marginality in Southern Communication Criticism,” *Rhetoric Review* 38, no. 2 (2019): 160-172; Antonio de Velasco, “‘I’m a Southerner, Too’: Confederate Monuments and Black Southern Counterpublics in Memphis, Tennessee,” *Southern Journal of Communication* 84, no. 4 (2018): 233-245. For exemplary rhetorical studies on the American West see Dickinson, Ott, and Aoki, “Spaces of Remembering”; Leah Ceccarelli, “The Frontier Metaphor in Public Speeches by American Scientists,” in *On the Frontier of Science: An American Rhetoric of Exploration and Exploitation* (Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2013); Tiffany Lewis, “Municipal Housekeeping in the American West: Bertha Knight Landes’s Entrance Into Politics,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 14, no. 3 (Fall 2011): 465-491; Tiffany Lewis, “Mapping Social Movements and Leveraging the U.S. West: The Rhetoric of the Woman Suffrage Map,” *Women’s Studies in Communication* 42, no. 4 (2019): 490-510; Tiffany Lewis, “The Mountaineering and Wilderness Rhetorics of Washington Woman Suffragists,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 21, no. 2 (2018), 279-316; Tiffany Lewis, *Uprising: How Women Used the U.S. West to Win the Right to Vote* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press Tiffany Lewis, 2021); and Cindy Koenig Richards, “Inventing Sacagawea: Public Women and the Transformative Potential of Epideictic Rhetoric,” *Western Journal of Communication* 73, no. 1 (2009): 1-22.

and time.¹⁰⁴ Reading these contemporary stories of abolition through the lens of public memory also directs critical attention to markers of temporality including how the past and present are related in terms of continuity and progress, and with what implications and how historical events and people are related. Memories also constitute identities as people in the present understand their identities and values through the past and as communities, groups, and institutions come together to argue for their version of historical representation. The narration of particular identities allows for the recognition of oneself and/or affirmation of one's values in the past which can in turn prompt affective investment and public engagement with memories. Finally, public memory is productive for its critical inflection. That is, this approach is attuned to power dynamics in representations of the past. That is, who/what is remembered and how, whose memories are legitimized, how is belonging constructed, and with what "political and ethical implications for the present"?¹⁰⁵ These rhetorical facets of public memory not only attend to the creative and dynamic ways memory workers draw from available means to represent the past, but also allows for the tracing of the interpretive lens and they construct to make sense of the present.

Approaching the three case studies in this project through the hermeneutic of public memory allows for the mapping of how these rhetorical materials (re)produce "the things of race" that lay within contemporary stories of abolition.¹⁰⁶ The critical nature of this interpretive lens also lends itself to exploring the upper Midwest by providing directional and evaluative analyses of texts from a region not typically connected with race and racism. Critical regionalism

¹⁰⁴ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 11; Blair, Dickinson, and Ott, "Introduction," 18; Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004): 99.

¹⁰⁵ VanderHaagen, *Children's Biographies of African American Women*, 11.

¹⁰⁶ Lisa Flores, "Stoppage and the Racialized Rhetorics of Mobility," *Western Journal of Communication* 84, no. 3 (2020): 251.

resists the very nostalgia and comfort of the Midwest that situates it as a space of moral superiority and equality to identify the how historical representation of the past in the region constructs race. I explicitly identify memory work about abolition from the mid-1800s as a means of constructing racial identities within the region.

Approaching Race and Region Through Public Memory

This dissertation draws from the critical tools of the hermeneutic of public memory to analyze a compilation of fragmentary texts that comprise three distinct contemporary stories of abolition. Memory is a means of constructing racial identities and racial logics within the upper Midwest and I derive my reading tools from the framework of public memory to trace how race is made legible in tandem with region. Utilizing the tools of public memory, I offer a textual analysis of the selected artifacts within each case study in which I have assembled to, in the words of Michael Calvin McGee, “invent a text suitable for criticism.”¹⁰⁷ I use McGee’s fragmentation approach to analyzing the texts of each case study — which include newspaper articles, commemorative markers, tourist materials, public records, and web pages — for three interrelated reasons. First, fragmentation suggests that critics suture together bits of discourse into a discourse that is seemingly coherent in response to a present exigence.¹⁰⁸ This approach to textual construction and analysis works with the conception of public memory as a hermeneutic because it recognizes the activation of memory/fragments in response to a present issue and that memory/fragments are partial, and therefore, selective. Fragmentation also functions in tandem with the rhetorical construction of race and region, which is made from everyday materials and

¹⁰⁷ Michael Calvin McGee, “Text, Context, and the Fragmentation of American Culture,” *Western Journal of Communication* 54, no. 1 (1990), 288.

¹⁰⁸ McGee, “Text.”; See also Matthew Houdek, “Racial Sedimentation and the Common Sense of Racialized Violence: The Case of Black Church Burnings,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 104, no. 3 (2018): 279-396.

experiences that are made to appear coherent, legitimate, and with what consequences.¹⁰⁹

Memory fragments about abolition from the mid-1800s mobilize narrative histories that are cited in response to how collectives engage with the past for present needs. As such, a fragmentary approach to text construction and interpretation allows for analysis of texts that attend to how memory fragments from a variety of sources collectively have the capacity to construct race and region drawing, independently and at their intersection, with local, regional, and national significance that have utility agents in the present.¹¹⁰

Second, this project utilizes public memory as a hermeneutic to engage in conceptually oriented criticism that invigorates theoretical concepts guiding analysis of the case studies. In 2001, James Jasinski forwarded conceptually oriented criticism to facilitate both theoretical and case study insights. This type of criticism engages in processes of “abduction which might be thought of as a back and forth taking movement between text and the concept or concepts that are being investigated simultaneously.”¹¹¹ This dissertation does just that, oscillating from theoretical concepts like public memory, time, race, region, purity, and heritage to the assemblage of texts in each case study to “thicken” and invigorate these concepts and illuminate the set of selected texts. As such, conceptual criticism highlights the inventive nature of remembrances of abolition to not only construct race and region in the public, but to also as an available resource to deepen theoretical insights about concepts employed.

Finally, a fragmented approach is adopted because it best allows for a critical reading of the texts across the three case studies in this project. VanderHaagen’s conceptualization of public

¹⁰⁹ Flores, “Stoppage,” Stuart Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, that State and Law and Order* (London: The MacMillan Press, 1978): 166 and Houdek, “Racial Sedimentation,” 282 echoes McGee, “Text,” 280 on this sentiment.

¹¹⁰ Utility is an important premise of McGee’s fragmentation theorizing, “Text,” 279.

¹¹¹ James Jasinski, “The Status of Theory and Method in Rhetorical Criticism,” *Western Journal of Communication* 65, no. 3 (2001): 256

memory as a hermeneutic used here explicitly attends to the role of power in how the past is interpreted and represented, assuming these discourses have present day political and ethical consequences. These consequences are from the “dense web” of “otherwise hidden or taken for granted social practices” that create meaning-making practices, construct power, and can be uncovered by bringing together fragments of discourse.¹¹² It is this complex of social practices and meanings that Flores calls on critics to attend to in her racial rhetorical criticism imperative. Scraps of discourses within and across the case studies in this dissertation are analyzed through the lens of public memory to reveal how public remembrances are social practices that construct race and region in complex ways on various registers. Furthermore, public memory’s malleability and contested nature reflects Houston Baker’s conception of “critical”: “To be critical is never to be safely housed or allegorically free of illness, transgression and contamination of the past.”¹¹³ Baker’s use of critical to modify memory, which “renders hard ethical evaluations of the past that it never defines as well-passed,” runs in the same vein as critical regionalism’s goal of resisting nostalgic constructions of place.¹¹⁴ The inherent critical bent of the public memory as a framework is enhanced by the supporting framework of critical regionalism and the fragmented method of assembling and approaching the texts in this study.

Organization of Study

The study of public memory is inevitably a nebulous task. In their work, public memory scholars are tasked with distinguishing memories *from* a time period from memories *of* a time period, and how memories across periods connect. As such, while this study at times draws from archival materials pertaining to the Midwest and abolition, its primary focus is on the content and

¹¹² Vincent Mosco, “Critical Research and the Role of Labor,” *Journal of Communication* 33 (1983), 239; Raymie McKerrow, “Critical Rhetoric: Theory and Praxis,” *Communication Monographs* 56 (1989): 101

¹¹³ Baker, “Critical Memory,” 3.

¹¹⁴ Baker, “Critical Memory,” 3.

circulation of *contemporary* narratives of Midwestern abolition in public discourse. More specifically, this dissertation explores the rhetoric of Midwestern abolition through three case studies and how these stories have been circulated since 2015. In doing so, stories of abolition emerge as a significant inventional resource for making arguments about race, region, and their co-construction.

Today, sympathizing with the abolitionist perspective is expected and so too is defining northern states by their commitment to this perspective. What takes a concerted, critical effort is to reveal how contemporary stories of abolition function as race-making resources. Yet, this work makes important contributions to the ongoing project of racial rhetorical criticism as a historically grounded study that seeks to connect antebellum abolition stories in the upper Midwest to other “racial moments” across space and time.¹¹⁵ Analyzing the rhetorical moves of these stories, their circulation, and their histories makes racial logics intelligible and supplies “thickened” understanding of the present.¹¹⁶ The selected case studies vary from the story of a man who escaped enslavement and was rescued by local abolitionists in a Midwest city, remembrances the Underground Railroad in a city that borders the South, and public debates over the commemoration of Sojourner Truth in a lesser-known location. My analysis of the case studies, individually and together, the co-construction of race and region in memory work in the present in the upper Midwest and their implications.

Chapter two focuses on contemporary discourses about the “rescue” of Joshua Glover in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. While Glover’s story may not ring familiar outside of southeast

¹¹⁵ Flores, “Between Abundance and Marginalization,” 16; Natalia Molina, *How Race is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

¹¹⁶ Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretative Theory of Culture,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, ed. Clifford Geertz (New York: Basic Books, 1973): 320.

Wisconsin, his story has propelled the (temporary) repeal of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act that sent reverberations on local, regional, and national levels. In 1852, Glover escaped enslavement from a plantation in St. Louis, fleeing to Racine, Wisconsin where he worked at a sawmill but was under constant threat of the federal law that could bring him back to slavery. In March 1854, Glover's enslaver captured him and took him to the nearby Milwaukee jail. Meanwhile, news spread of his capture and local abolitionists mobilized, gathering outside the jail in protest. When word spread that Glover would not receive an early hearing, thousands rushed the jail, freeing Glover and sending him on a leg of the Underground Railroad in a neighboring city and was later documented as arriving in Etobicoke, Canada by the owner of an inn.¹¹⁷ In this chapter I address how rhetorics of purity animate public commemorations of Glover's "rescue," and how they bolster whiteness. In particular, I ask: What is purity articulated? How are rhetorics of purity interanimating? How does purity construct whiteness and in regionally specific ways? My analysis of contemporary retellings of this story reveals how memories of Glover deploy rhetorics of purity spatially, temporally, and synecdochically to thwart contemporary claims of anti-Blackness and (re)center whiteness amidst contemporary racial reckonings.

Chapter three investigates memory work dedicated to Sojourner Truth throughout Michigan. Truth, the name adopted by the woman born as Isabella Baumfree, spent many years enslaved in upstate New York before claiming her freedom in 1826. Exposure to abolitionists and a spiritual awakening prompted her to travel further east to engage in lectures of truth telling. Truth's abolitionist and women's rights activism began in her birth-state of New York but spanned what we now consider the Northeast and Midwest. Truth moved to Battle Creek, Michigan in 1856 and died there in her home in 1893. Truth's life and activism has been the

¹¹⁷ Walter T. McDonald and Ruby West Jackson, *Finding Freedom: The Untold Story of Joshua Glover, Runaway Slave* (State Historical Society of Milwaukee, 2007): 92

object of many memory projects and center of debates around who can commemorate her and how to remember her. In this chapter I read newspaper articles, commemorative discussions/debates, educational resources, and activism efforts and ask: How is Truth constructed in ways particular to Michigan? And how are these articulations grounded in whiteness? I argue that Truth's activism and tenacity is used to represent Michigan's values of fortitude, moral superiority, and function as a palatable symbol of resistance. Truth is articulated as having an ideal Midwest identity and one that contemporary white Michiganders can learn to adopt.

Chapter four explores abolition tourism in Ripley, Ohio. The Village of Ripley sits near the border and Kentucky claims to have a "proud and rich history" tied to local abolitionist movements in the nineteenth century.¹¹⁸ The state of Ohio has a long history with abolition characterized by the rescue of enslaved people (the Oberlin-Wellington rescue), anti-immigration legislation that prevented Black folks from migrating north from neighboring slave state Kentucky, and visits from prominent abolitionist Frederick Douglass. Sitting on the Ohio River on the border of Kentucky, Ripley entices tourists with promises of seeing and experiencing the commitments to freedom and moral superiority of local abolitionists. In this chapter, my chief concern is to discern what rhetorics of heritage are and how they function in Ripley's tourist discourses. I ask: How does heritage function as a "species" of rhetoric? What is promised in rhetorics of heritage in Ripley's tourist imagination? And how do rhetorics of heritage construct race in regionally specific ways? In this chapter, I show how rhetorics of heritage are deployed to create a direct and inevitable passing of abolitionist sentiment to contemporary Ripley residents and claims that tourists can directly experience it. Rather than utilizing heritage as a stagnant

¹¹⁸ "Visit Us," *Village of Ripley*, n.d., Retrieved from <https://villageofripley.com/visit-us/>

category of objects or activities, I conceptualize heritage a “species” of rhetoric that dynamically articulates a specific version of the past and connects it in tangible ways to the present.¹¹⁹

Understood this way, rhetorics of heritage are deterministic and respondent to present exigences in ways that can open nuanced opportunities of engagement and/or provide an authoritative voice on the past and present.

I conclude with a discussion of how these case studies come together through common Midwest regional rhetorics grounded in whiteness. I join the rumblings of conversations that are tracing how the Midwest is connected to whiteness and explicate the affordances of approaching this relationship through the hermeneutic of public memory. In particular, I discuss how public memory is especially apt for projects tracking constructions of race through a fragmented approach. I then identify arguments and themes that appear across all three case studies including temporal continuity, synergetic space-people relationships, and the coordination of local-regional-national scales of place. Finally, I consider how contemporary stories of abolition construct white comfort and how this legitimizes whiteness in the nation. Read together, these case studies reveal the matrix of discursive manifestations of memory, race, and region collide and their implications for how we understand racial moments across space and time.

¹¹⁹ E Cram, *Violent Inheritance* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2022).

Chapter Two:

Matters of Purity:

Tracing Rhetorics of Whiteness in Memories of Joshua Glover

At the end of 2021, the city of Racine, Wisconsin announced that nine new historical markers indicating significant sites of the Underground Railroad would be installed throughout Racine County in southeast Wisconsin. Of the new historical markers, executive director of the Racine Heritage Museum Chris Paulson stated, “You just can’t overstate the importance of this community in the most pivotal part of our nation’s history.”¹²⁰ For many in the community, the honoring of Racine’s role in the Underground Railroad prompted renewed attention to a defining historical event of the area—the capture of Joshua Glover justified by the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act and his “rescue” by local abolitionists.¹²¹ What is now called Glover’s “rescue” is described by local newspaper *OnMilwaukee* as “[o]ne of the young state’s earliest and biggest progressive victories.”¹²² Stories like Glover’s demonstrating resistance to the Fugitive Slave Act are celebrated throughout the Midwest and are emblematic of the region’s “progressive” identity as abolitionists who violated national law to combat slavery and aid freedom.¹²³ In contemporary Wisconsin, Glover’s story circulates as a critical component of southeastern Wisconsin’s memory landscape through memory vehicles including museum exhibits, a commemorative marker, a statue in Racine, a mural on the I-43 interchange, and its retelling in local news

¹²⁰ Rachel Kubik, “History Never to be Forgotten: 9 Markers Placed Around Racine Honoring City’s Role in Underground Railroad,” *The Journal Times*, December 10, 2021, Retrieved from https://journaltimes.com/news/local/history-never-to-be-forgotten-9-markers-placed-around-racine-honoring-citys-role-in-underground/article_6e5aa2f7-089d-55ec-a899-4ffa5f92477b.html (Accessed June 27, 2023).

¹²¹ I put rescue in quotes to indicate the narration of this event in memory practices.

¹²² “21 People, Moments and Ideas That Defined Milwaukee: Part 2,” *OnMilwaukee*, January 31, 2019, <https://onmilwaukee.com/articles/21historicmilwaueemomentspt2#?> (Access February 19, 2023).

¹²³ Historian Robert H. Churchill noted that resistance to the Fugitive Slave Act (1850) was especially strong and consistent in the Ohio Western Reserve, Chicago, Wisconsin, Massachusetts, and the Burned-Over District of New York. Robert H. Churchill, *The Underground Railroad and the Geography of Violence in Antebellum America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020): 10.

sources. In southeastern Wisconsin, Glover's rescue represents not only of how community members came together to resist a barbaric institution, but also the local and regional legacy of purity, innocence, and superior morals.

In this chapter I demonstrate how the retelling of Glover's story in Milwaukee constructs race in the upper Midwest through rhetorics of purity that regionally bound slavery, forge temporal continuity, and synecdochically writes morality onto Wisconsinites. More specifically, Wisconsin is a space that is geographically and morally pure from the contamination of enslavement. Temporal purity extends this geographical and moral purity from the entering of Wisconsin into statehood to contemporary times, creating an unbroken bracket of time of cleanliness from anti-Blackness. Building upon these constructions, abolitionists' motivations are characterized as virtuous and rolled on to all white abolitionists of Glover's time. Temporal continuity, then allows for virtue to explain the actions of contemporary white Wisconsinites, which, in combination with the former, represent the essence of Wisconsin—purity. I find that these rhetorics of purity are carriers and protectors of whiteness in Wisconsin, the upper Midwest, and the nation, positioned as commendable, inevitable, and normative. Together, these rhetorical moves allow for Glover's story to be a resource to elude claims of anti-Blackness in the region amid contemporary racial reckonings. As rhetorical scholar Thomas Farrell argued, "Rhetoric is the art, the fine and useful art, of making things matter," and I find that contemporary iterations of Glover's "rescue" makes whiteness matter through rhetorics of purity that deflect charges of anti-Blackness in the upper Midwest. Rhetorics of purity are embedded in these retellings as inventive resources bolster a particular "brand" of Midwestern whiteness that responds to racial reckonings that are not bounded by region.¹²⁴

¹²⁴ Thomas B. Farrell, "Sizing Things Up: Colloquial Reflection as Practical Wisdom," *Argumentation* 12 (1998): 1.

In what follows, I read fragments of contemporary retellings of Glover’s story in Milwaukee, fashioning them into a representative account of his public memory. The coherent text that emerges from the assemblage includes eighteen texts across eight years: nine local newspaper articles, four Wisconsin-based websites, two visual depictions located in Milwaukee, and a commemorative marker in Milwaukee. Some of the fragments selected focus exclusively on retelling Glover’s story, while others discuss the account in conjunction with Milwaukee history, Black history, and the Underground Railroad. Many of the voices represented in the accrued fragments are institutional, however the voices of local community members are also included. I read within and across these texts to trace how “racially inflected fragments” bolster whiteness through rhetorics of purity.¹²⁵ I ask the following questions to discern how whiteness is constructed on regional lines: How does purity emerge within and across fragments of Glover’s memory? How do rhetorics of purity serve whiteness? How is the articulation of whiteness through purity particular to Wisconsin and the upper Midwest? In this case study, I am concerned with gleaning how remembrances of Glover inscribe race and regional identity in the past and present. My interest in Glover’s story is motivated by experiencing the variety of retellings of history while living in Milwaukee and by the local, regional, and national significance that spawned from his escape and the subsequent court cases.

Glover’s Story

While rhetorical scholars have distinguished history and public memory, as well as their entanglements, it is important to identify a set of agreed upon facts from historical record from which remembrances stem from. In the spring of 1852, Joshua Glover fled from a plantation in St. Louis Missouri where he was enslaved by Benammi Garland. Glover traveled north, crossing

¹²⁵ Matthew Houdek, “Racial Sedimentation and the Common Sense of Racialized Violence: The Case of Black Church Burnings,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 104, no. 3 (2018): 280.

into Union territory, and settling in Racine, Wisconsin located about thirty miles south of Milwaukee. Glover settled for two years in the small community south of Milwaukee, finding employment at a sawmill. In 1854, Garland discovered Glover's whereabouts and "executed an affidavit attesting to his ownership of Glover" in St. Louis which was then presented before the federal judge in Milwaukee.¹²⁶ Arrest warrant in hand and accompanied by local law enforcement and a local farmer, Garland headed to Racine to reclaim what he understood as his property under the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act. The 1850 Fugitive Slave Law was a response to the losses claimed by Southern enslavers whose enslaved people had escaped and the diminishing authority of the 1793 Fugitive Slave Law. On March 10, 1864, Garland and local law enforcement showed up at Glover's cabin where he was playing cards with two friends and free Black men, Nelson Turner and William Alby.¹²⁷ Garland, pistol in hand, and local law enforcement approached the cabin, knocked on the door, and rushed in when Turner opened the door despite Glover's hesitation.¹²⁸ The men rushed in, and an altercation unfolded between Glover and Garland before Glover was issued a blow to the head and was handcuffed. While being escorted to the wagon waiting outside, Glover stated that he would return to St. Louis with Garland. This was not an uncommon tactic, "That slaves learned to say the things they knew their owners wanted hear, especially when it might mitigate their anticipated punishment."¹²⁹ The group of men decided to take Glover to a jail in Milwaukee rather than Racine to avoid abolitionists. The group traveled during the night, rather than staying in Racine, to avoid issues

¹²⁶ Walter T. McDonald and Ruby West Jackson, *Finding Freedom: The Untold Story of Joshua Glover, Runaway Slave* (Milwaukee, WI: State Historical Society of Milwaukee, 2007): 38.

¹²⁷ Baker, *The Rescue of Joshua Glover: A Fugitive Slave, the Constitution, and the Coming of the Civil War* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2006): 2

¹²⁸ Baker notes that this narrative is consistent with the March 12, 1854 *Racine Advocate* article "High Handed Outrage! Attempt to Kidnap a Citizen of Racine by Slave Catchers." See Baker, *The Rescue of Joshua Glover*, 243.

¹²⁹ McDonald and Jackson, *Finding Freedom*, 40.

with local abolitionists and concerns about the enforcement and protection of slavery under the Constitution throughout the nation.¹³⁰

While Glover was transported from Racine to Milwaukee, Racine abolitionists mobilized. The morning after Glover's capture, local abolitionists gathered and a committee developed three resolutions: the first condemned Glover's violent arrest, the second demanded that Glover receive a fair trial, and the third declared the Fugitive Slave Act "disgraceful, and *also repealed*" (emphasis original).¹³¹ News of Glover's capture and the resolutions were sent to "the most vocal of Wisconsin abolitionists" and editor of the *Milwaukee Free Democrat* Sherman Booth printed and distributed the following handbill to Milwaukeeans

MAN CAPTURED
OUR JAIL USED FOR THE SLAVE-CATCHERS!
Last night a colored man was arrested near
Racine, on a warrant of Judge Miller by
Deputy Sheriff Cotton and making some
resistance, was knocked down and brought
to this City, and incarcerated in the County
Jail. Marshal Cotton denied knowing anything
about it at 9 o'clock this morning. The object
evidently is to get him a secret trial without
giving him a chance to defend himself by counsel.
Citizens of Milwaukee! Shall we have Star
Chamber proceedings here? And shall a man
be dragged back to Slavery from our Free Soil,
Without an open trial of his right to Liberty?
Watch your jail, your District and U.S. Commissioners' Courts!
Milwaukee, March 11, 1854¹³²

Back in Racine, news of Glover's arrest and location in a Milwaukee jail spread quickly and over five thousand local abolitionists gathered in Haymarket Square to decide how to proceed.

¹³⁰ See Baker, *The Rescue of Joshua Glover*, 33; Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995): 154-160; and William E. Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987): 75-79.

¹³¹ See "High Handed Outrage."

¹³² The handbill was printed in the *Daily Free Democrat* and the *Milwaukee Sentinel* in March 13, 1854; The spacing of this quote reflects the spacing of the original FINSIH

Abolitionists would demand a fair jury trial for Glover, and, subsequently, his release. A warrant was also issued for Garland and Deputy Sherriff Cotton for the assault and battery Glover, which would bring them back to Racine to face charges.¹³³ The Racine abolitionists planned to travel to Milwaukee to join the efforts of Booth.

In Milwaukee, Booth spread the news of Glover's capture by foot and horseback, calling for free people to gather to address the heinous act.¹³⁴ Within half an hour a crowd had gathered in the square.¹³⁵ Anti-slavery leaders provided fiery rhetoric about Glover's situation coupled with urging the crowd to not violate the law.¹³⁶ When word spread through the crowd that Glover would not receive an early hearing (keeping him in jail over the sabbath, which many considered inhumane) and the report from Glover's lawyer that the U.S. marshals involved in the case "refused to obey any writ of habeas corpus issued from a state court," prompted in thousands rushed the jail.¹³⁷ The crowd attacked the outer door of the jail with their bodies and/or pickaxes.¹³⁸ Eventually, the crowd fashioned a makeshift battering ram, burst through the door, and moved to a local portion of the Underground Railroad.¹³⁹ Authors of the book *Find Freedom: The Untold Story of Joshua Glover, Runaway Slave Walter T. McDonald and Ruby West Jackson* describe Glover's exit from the city with his "rescue" party as "part flight and part

¹³³ See the "High Handed Outrage."

¹³⁴ "Great Meeting at Racine," *Daily Free Democrat*, March 13, 1854.

¹³⁵ There is a lack of consistent historical evidence to determine about how many people were gathered in Cathedral Square. McDonald and Jackson claim between three and five thousand people gathered but do not provide historical evidence to support this claim. Julia Pferdehirt explained one thousand people were gathered but also does not reference historical record to support this claim. See Julia Pferdehirt, *Freedom Train North: Stories of the Underground Railroad in Wisconsin* (Madison, WI: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2011): 36.

¹³⁶ "Resolutions of a Great Meeting in Courthouse Square," *Daily Free Democrat*, March 13, 1854; and "Examination of S. M. Booth, For Aiding in the Rescue of Joshua Glover, a Fugitive Slave from Missouri," *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*, March 22, 1854.

¹³⁷ Jeffery Schmitt, "Rethinking Ableman v. Booth and Stat' Rights in Wisconsin," *Virginia Law Review* 93, no. 5 (2007): 1325 and "The Rescue Case," *Daily Wisconsin*, March 13, 1854.

¹³⁸ See "Helped Save Glover," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, June 10, 1990; "Report of the Rycraft Trial," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, November 21, 1854. During the John Rycraft trial, in which these facts were noted, Sherman Booth and other witnesses testified to similar facts of Glover's "rescue" from the Milwaukee jail.

¹³⁹ "Helped Save Glover."

triumphal parade.”¹⁴⁰ Glover traveled by wagon to a leg of the Underground Railroad in a neighboring city and was later documented by an inn owner as having arrived in Etobicoke, Canada.¹⁴¹ Booth was later arrested for his role in Glover’s escape, which violated the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act and prompted a series of court cases against Booth and the constitutionality of the Fugitive Slave Act.¹⁴² Booth’s charge that the Fugitive Slave Act was unconstitutional “because it denied a trial by jury and vested judicial powers in court commissioners” would eventually move to the Wisconsin Supreme Court. The state challenged federal powers by ruling the law unconstitutional which provided evidence for Southerners of Northerners “infidelity of the Constitution, thus justifying succession.”¹⁴³ After many years of tumultuous legal battles, the Supreme Court ruled in *Ableman v. Booth* that it had jurisdiction over the Wisconsin Supreme Court and that the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law was constitutional.¹⁴⁴

While Glover was not the first enslaved person to escape to freedom through free states on the Underground Railroad to Canada, his story is both historically and rhetorically significant. Historically, Glover’s capture and subsequent “rescue” was the catalyst for repealing the federal 1850 Fugitive Slave Law. Article IV, Section 2 of the United States Constitution stipulated the

¹⁴⁰ McDonald and Jackson, *Finding Freedom*, 49. While not described as a parade, similar accounts of Glover’s exit from Milwaukee can be found in independent sources: *Daily Free Democrat*, March 13, 1854; *Daily Wisconsin*, March 14, 1854, the testimony of George S. Mallory during the Rycraft trial reported in the *Milwaukee Sentinel*, November 18, 1854; and the report of Vroman Mason that interviewed principals and witnesses, as well as reviewed written sources: Vroman Mason, “The Fugitive Slave Law in Wisconsin, with Reference to Nullification Sentiment,” *Proceedings of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin* 43 (1895): 125.

¹⁴¹ See “The Recue Case”; Chauncey C. Olin, “A History of the Early Anti-Slavery Excitement in the State of Wisconsin from 1842-1860,” microfilm reel 1 P82-5062, *Wisconsin Historical Society Library*; Baker, *The Rescue of Joshua Glover*, 101; and McDonald and Jackson, *Finding Freedom*, 92.

¹⁴² Schmitt, “Rethinking *Ableman v. Booth*,” 1328. Schmitt noted that while Booth was not the only one arrested, he was “likely singled out because he was instrumental in organizing the crowd and because his speech precipitated the rush to the jail.”

¹⁴³ Schmitt, “Rethinking *Ableman v. Booth*,” 1315; and “The Decision Against the Fugitive Slave Law,” *The Richmond Enquirer*, June 15, 1854; the statement of Robert Toombs during the Congressional Globe, 36th Congress, 1st Session appt. at 89 (1860); and Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, *The Life of Robert Toombs*, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1913): 181.

¹⁴⁴ *Ableman v. Booth*, 62 U.S. 514 (1859).

right for enslavers to “reclaim” an enslaved person who fled to another state. However, this clause lacked clear mechanisms for how this law would be enforced. Southern slaveholders relied on the good faith of free state residents to uphold this part of the Constitution. In fact, a report from the Virginia legislative committee stated

For it was to be expected that the enlightened and sagacious people of the North would see at a glance, that the violation of the compact would create, and continually recruit to their soil, a class of paupers like the Parias of Hindostain; of outcasts from society; of men who are neither slaves nor citizens; a wen on the body politic; an anomaly on their institutions, and a pestilent curse to them and their posterity.¹⁴⁵

Some residents of free states in the Midwest and Northeast did not comply with this Constitutional clause and often aided those fleeing enslavement.¹⁴⁶ Southern slave owners, frustrated by the loss of capital that resulted from flights to freedom, sought a legal remedy. This “issue” was addressed by the 1793 Fugitive Slave Act which expanded on the original Fugitive Slave Clause (Article IV Section 2) with a detailed description of how the law unfolds in practice. Under the expanded Fugitive Slave Act, Northern abolitionists risked harsh penalties for resisting the spread of legal enslavement into their lands.¹⁴⁷ The act also ensnared the federal government in the institution of slavery by making them responsible for locating, capturing, and trying freedom seekers.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ *Acts of the General Assembly of Virginia, 1849-1850*, 247.

¹⁴⁶ See Stanley W. Campbell, *Slave Catchers: Enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law, 1850-1854* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1970): 54-71; Schmitt, “Rethinking *Ableman v. Booth*,” 1319-1323.

¹⁴⁷ Campbell, *Slave Catchers*, 101-106; Schmitt, “Rethinking *Ableman v. Booth*,” 1319; and Baker, *The Rescue of Joshua Glover*, 85.

¹⁴⁸ Campbell, *Slave Catchers*, 101-106; Schmitt, “Rethinking *Ableman v. Booth*,” 1319; and Baker, *The Rescue of Joshua Glover*, 85.

This version of the Fugitive Slave Law received varying levels of cooperation throughout free states.¹⁴⁹ Additionally, the passing of personal liberty laws in the North which prohibited state officers' participation and state jails from being used in the progress of returning fugitive slaves weakened the enactment of the Fugitive Slave Law.¹⁵⁰ The frustration of slave owning Southerners resulted in the introduction of a bill by James Mason of Virginia to introducing a bill that ensured effective execution of this clause. The revitalized Fugitive Slave Law passed as part of the Compromise of 1850, a series of bills largely concerned with issues of slavery and land acquisition.¹⁵¹ The passing of the Compromise of 1850 was met with resistance and, in some cases, hostility in free states. Historian Stanley W. Campbell explains, "Much of the early opposition was manifested by large groups of concerned citizens who drew up resolutions denouncing the enactment as unconstitutional and an abomination upon the American people."¹⁵² The Fugitive Slave Act was "unpopular" in Wisconsin which entered statehood two years prior with pockets of abolition already inside its boundaries.¹⁵³ A heavy flow of European immigrants settled in Wisconsin where Chippewa, Ho-Chunk (Winnebago), Mohican/Munsee, Menominee, Oneida, Potawatomi and Sioux peoples had resided for many years.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁹ Baker, *The Rescue of Joshua Glover*, 74-88

¹⁵⁰ See Baker, *The Rescue of Joshua Glover*, 73, 76, 147-156; Schmitt, "Rethinking *Ableman v Booth*"; Campbell, *Slave Catchers*, 36-39; "Fugitive Slave Acts," *Equal Justice Initiative*, February 1, 2015, Retrieved from <https://eji.org/news/history-racial-injustice-fugitive-slave-acts/> (Accessed July 11, 2023).

¹⁵¹ Stanley W. Campbell, *Slave Catchers*, 18-33.

¹⁵² Stanley W. Campbell, *Slave Catchers*, 45.

¹⁵³ Schmitt, "Rethinking *Ableman v Booth*," 1322; Michael J. McManus, *Political Abolitionism in Wisconsin, 1840-1961* (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 1998): 1-17.

¹⁵⁴ "Significant Events in Wisconsin History," *Wisconsin State Legislature*, n.d., https://legis.wisconsin.gov/LRB/media/1217/150_historical_timeline.pdf (Accessed February 1, 2023).

Rhetorics of Purity

While notions of biological racial purity have been debunked and are not socially permissible, “our culture’s association between whiteness and purity is alive and well.”¹⁵⁵ Purity provides the guise of a value-free, innocent, and healthy ideal, while conjuring a constellation of hierarchal social relations. To invoke purity is to mobilize a historical lineage of racialized associations in the United States stemming from physical and moral uses of the term. This case study adds to this lineage of racialized associations by arguing that rhetorics of purity are utilized in contemporary stories of abolition to position Milwaukee and Wisconsin as outside of race while bolstering whiteness. That is, purity can function rhetorically to imply race and morality while explicitly implying neither. A review of research in rhetorical studies, sociology, and philosophy reveals four interrelated themes about purity ideals and their tether to whiteness. First, purity is a symbolic construction that is defined by the negative; second, purity is connected to a hierarchal social order; third, purity discourses respond to present exigences; and fourth, purity ideals are valorized in everyday discourses.

In its most basic sense, the term “purity” has two primary definitions, according to the Oxford English Dictionary. The first definition appears descriptive and value-free: the “state or quality of being physically pure or unmixed; freedom from impurities, contaminants, or foreign matter; cleanliness.”¹⁵⁶ In this definition, what is unmixed is valuable and what is foreign is aligned with dirt. The second definition of purity is the “state or quality of being morally or spiritually pure; sinless; freedom from ritual pollution; ceremonial cleanliness; innocence; chastity.”¹⁵⁷ This second definition draws out the virtuous nature of purity. In fact, to be pure is

¹⁵⁵ Dana Berthold, “Tidy Whiteness: A Genealogy of Race, Purity, and Hygiene,” *Ethics & The Environment* 15, no. 1 (2010): 3.

¹⁵⁶ Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “Purity,” accessed June 27, 2023, <https://www.oed.com/>

¹⁵⁷ Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “Pure,” accessed June 27, 2023, <https://www.oed.com/>

to be “conforming accurately to a standard of quality,” “faultless,” and “perfect.”¹⁵⁸ Dana Berthold argued that while the first definition masquerades as merely descriptive, the etymology of purity indicates that second definition that confers value came first— meaning the descriptive use of purity was born out of the term’s hierarchal use.¹⁵⁹ Rhetorics of purity, regardless of what definition is invoked, are derived from value-laden and often hostile constructions of self and other.

Purity is explicitly connected to whiteness in a denotation of white. The Oxford English Dictionary defines purity figuratively and notes that is typically positively valanced: “Morally or spiritually pure, stainless, spotless, or innocent,” and, “Free from malignity or evil intent, beneficent, innocent, harmless, esp. as opposed to something characterized as *black*” (emphasis original).¹⁶⁰ This line of thinking that innocence and goodness are associated with white, and evil and stained characteristics associated with blackness is evident in archetypal metaphors of light and dark. Michael Osborn explains that for centuries lightness has been associated with survival, sight, warmth, and safety, whereas darkness is inflected with fear, danger, and vulnerability. Metaphors of lightness and darkness, Osborn argues, “express intense value judgments” that positively associate with lightness.¹⁶¹ An example of this association comes from Tiffany Lewis’ scholarship on suffragist maps, which demonstrates how “coloring visually identified the West

¹⁵⁸ Oxford English Dictionary, “Pure.”

¹⁵⁹ Berthold, “Tidy Whiteness,” 11.

¹⁶⁰ Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “White,” accessed June 27, 2023, <https://www.oed.com/>; Frantz Fanon makes a similar argument: “In Europe... Satan is black, one talks of the shadow, when one is dirty one is black— whether one is thinking of physical dirtiness or moral dirtiness... blackness, darkness, shadow, shades, night, and the labyrinths of the earths, abysmal, depths, blacken someone’s reputation; and on the other side, the bright look of innocence, the white dove of peace, magical, heavenly light.” Frantz Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1991), 141.

¹⁶¹ Michael Osborn, “Archetypal Metaphor In Rhetoric: The Light-Dark Family,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 53, no. 2 (1967): 117

with progress, whiteness, and social order” while challenging dominant meanings of the West during the early twentieth century.¹⁶²

Considering these interrelated definitions, the first trait of purity is that it is almost always defined by the negative. Rather than defining the term by what it is, it is constituted by what it is not. Kenneth Burke explained that negatives do not exist in nature and are a “function peculiar to symbol-systems.”¹⁶³ Further, Burke contended, the negative is moralizing, guiding us to what we should think/do and what we should not think/do. What is pure and morally good, is constituted by what impurity is— direct, pollution, infection, contamination, germs. But what is impure is a social construction. Sociologist Mary Douglas insisted, “There is no such thing as absolute dirt; it exists in the eye of the beholder.”¹⁶⁴ For example, sexual purity typically indicates a person staying sexually chaste until marriage which marks sexual activity as an impure act and bodies engaging in sexual activities (especially women), as impure.¹⁶⁵ Sexual purity elucidates both the physical and moral nature of purity as the bodies of girls/women’s who have sex before marriage and are deemed physically “dirty,” and their moral/ethical abilities are defined as contaminated. Together, the dual nature of sexual purity reveals its ties to femininity, particularly white femininity. Thomas Nakayama and Krizek recognized a similar pattern of

¹⁶² Tiffany Lewis, “Mapping Social Movements and Leveraging the U.S. West: The Rhetoric of the Woman Suffrage Map,” *Women’s Studies in Communication* 42, no. 4 (2019): 490-510.

¹⁶³ Kenneth Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method* (Berkeley: University of California Press., 1966): 9.

¹⁶⁴ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (Hammondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1970): 12.

¹⁶⁵ See Jimmie Manning, “Paradoxes of (Im)Purity: Affirming Heterosexuality and Queering Heterosexuality in Family Discourses of Purity Pledges,” *Women’s Studies in Communication* 38, no. 1 (2015): 99-117; Heather Brooks Adams, “Rhetorics of Unwed Motherhood Shame,” *Women’s Studies in Communication* 40, no. 1 (2017): 91-110; Jessica Valenti, *The Purity Myth: How America’s Obsession with Virginity is Hurting Young Women* (Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, 2009); Emily D. Ryalls, “Ambivalent Aspirationalism in Millennial Postfeminist Culture on *Gossip Girl*,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 13, no. 2 (2016): 198-213; and Casey Ryan Kelly, *Abstinence Cinema: Virginity and the Rhetoric of Sexual Purity in Contemporary Film* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2016).

defining whiteness through the negative and argued it is a trait of domination through invisibility.¹⁶⁶

Second, what is dirty, contaminating, or impure disrupts the existing social order. What we come to know as “dirt” is a byproduct of the (re)creation of a social order.¹⁶⁷ The real or perceived threat of contaminants are often understood as dangerous or “sites of vulnerability” that realize the pattern of the existing order and need to be removed to maintain order.¹⁶⁸ Maria Lugones explained that what is impure is “anomalous and ambiguous because of it is out of place,” which is often marks those with marginalized identities and bolsters dominant identities.¹⁶⁹ The real or imagined threat of “dirt,” often tied to discursive and material bodies, is the impetus for a variety of symbolic practices that seek to (re)organize the order. Attempts to impose order involve purification, separation, demarcation, and punishment of that and those associated with “dirt” and are perceived as transgressing the boundary between pure and impure.¹⁷⁰

Tracing purity genealogically, Berthold argued that early in the nation’s history, good hygiene (a mark of physical purity through the lack of contamination) was tied to civility, socioeconomic status, and whiteness through physical purity ideals. The term “white trash,” often used as an insult for poor whites, points to the how cleanliness and whiteness align by identifying people who seemingly fail to uphold those ideals. Further, it reasserts whiteness as pure by distinguishing those who uphold physical and moral purity ideals from those who do not.

¹⁶⁶ Thomas K. Nakayama and Robert L. Krizek, “Whiteness: A Strategic Rhetoric,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 81, no. 3 (1995): 299. See also Leslie J. Harris, *The Rhetoric of White Slavery and the Making of National Identity* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2023).

¹⁶⁷ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 36.

¹⁶⁸ Christine Harold, “The Green Virus: Purity and Contamination in Ralph Nader’s 2000 Presidential Campaign,” *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 4, no. 4 (2001): 584; Douglas, *Purity and Danger*.

¹⁶⁹ Maria Lugones, “Purity, Impurity, and Separation,” *Signs* 19, no. 2 (1994): 468.

¹⁷⁰ Rima L. Vesely-Flad, *Racial Purity and Dangerous Bodies: Moral Pollution, Black Lives, and the Struggle for Justice* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 2017): xix.

Preoccupations with racialized cleanliness, both symbolic and material, have manifested in practices including the one-drop rule, segregation, and anti-miscegenation laws. These legal and social practices sought to maintain ancestral lines and physical/social spaces as pure(ly white).¹⁷¹

Third, purity appears static, masking its discursive construction and that of race. Douglas argued, “Purity is the enemy of change, of ambiguity and compromise.”¹⁷² Discourses of purity have been used to (re)articulate a group’s location in the social order— racially, economically, sexually, and intersectionally— and exercise power over non-dominant groups. Purity ideals amplify symbolic boundaries and construct rigid categories of what/who is in, out, higher, or lower. Douglas identified that humans all have a yearning for rigidity, “It is part of our human condition to long for hard lines and clear concepts.”¹⁷³ This is especially evident in the one-drop rule, wherein a single drop of non-white blood disqualified one from white status. Purity necessitates absolute division between what is pure (whiteness) and what is “pollution” (Blackness) and any amount of pollution taints or dilutes what was once pure.¹⁷⁴ While the racial terrain of the nation has shifted from overt racism to supposedly post-racial ideological commitments that (re)affirm the social order, racial difference is (re)institutionalized though a focus on race rather than racism. Kelly Happe’s analysis of breast cancer genomics illuminated

¹⁷¹ See Vesely-Flad, *Racial Purity*; Greg Goodale and Jeremy Engels, “Black and White: Vestiges of Biracialism in American Discourse,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 7, no. 1 (2010): 70-89; Michael L. Butterworth, *Baseball and Rhetorics of Purity: The National Pastime and American Identity During the War on Terror* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2010); Michael Butterworth, “Purifying the Body Politic: Steroids, Rafael Palmeiro, and the Rhetorical Cleansing of Major League Baseball,” *Western Journal of Communication* 72, no. 2 (2008): 145-161; Sage Mikkelson and Sarah Kornfield, “Girls Gone Fundamental: Feminist Appeals of White Christian Nationalism,” *Women’s Studies in Communication* 44, no. 4 (2021): 563-585; Phil Chidester, “May the Circle Stay Unbroken: Friends, the Presence of Absence, and the Rhetorical Reinforcement of Whiteness,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 25, no. 2 (2008): 157-174; and Nadine Ehlers, “Hidden in Plain Site: Defying Juridical Racialization in *Rhinelander v. Rhinelander*,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 1, no. 4 (2004): 313-334.

¹⁷² Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 163.

¹⁷³ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 163.

¹⁷⁴ See Leonard Higginbotham and Barbara Kopytoff, “Racial Purity and Interracial Sex in the Law of Colonial and Antebellum Virginia,” *Georgetown Law Review* 77, no. 6 (1989): 1983.

how notions of ancestral purity and sexual purity are connected to differential treatment of Black women and white women that results in different disease outcomes in service of anti-racism and anti-sexism agendas like fighting breast cancer.¹⁷⁵ Rhetorics of purity are respondent to present exigences while (re)enforcing the same white dominance that has long been part of the nation's identity, mirroring whiteness' dynamic nature.

Fourth, Americans valorize purity in our everyday discourses. Much like whiteness, purity inflects the fabric of our lives but evades scrutiny because of our preoccupation with health and extreme hygiene, and the ability of purity ideals to “masquerade as the most healthy and innocent of ideals[.]”¹⁷⁶ The everyday is often dismissed, or as Maurice Blanchot put it, “It escapes. It belongs to insignificance, and the significant is without truth, without reality, without secret, but perhaps also the site of all possible signification. The everyday escapes.”¹⁷⁷ The everydayness of purity makes it challenging to trace its racist heritage. Berthold's genealogical approach demonstrated how Americans consume and reproduce purity ideals through common interactions and cultural practices, such as bottled water and antibacterial soap. Such practices presuppose a value-free, descriptive sense of the term. By tracking rhetorics of purity in contemporary stories of abolition, I address the everydayness of these discourses and how beliefs in purity function to bolster whiteness on regional lines.

More specifically, the analysis in this chapter illustrates how rhetorics of purity are mobilized under the guise of descriptive, value-free terms that bolster upper Midwestern spaces and white residents as morally good, innocent, and free across time. Purity discourses emerge as a resource that binds race and region in the upper Midwest by smothering claims of the

¹⁷⁵ Kelly E. Happe, “The Body of Race: Toward a Rhetorical Understanding of Racial Ideology,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 99, no. 2 (2013): 131-155.

¹⁷⁶ Berthold, “Tidy Whiteness,” 3.

¹⁷⁷ Maurice Blanchot, “Everyday Speech,” trans. Susan Hanson, *Yale French Studies* 73 (1987): 14.

significance of race while (re)articulating white dominance. Rather than identifying Black folks as the “dirt,” these stories of abolition point to enslavement as the pollution. As I will demonstrate, this move marks Midwest space as a site beyond race and its people as pure of motivations, intentions, and actions. This account “thickens” our understanding of how discourses of purity are in service of whiteness spatially, temporally, and synecdochically.¹⁷⁸ Ultimately, as I will illustrate, rhetorics of purity absolve white Wisconsinites of the past and present of culpability in the ongoing anti-Black racial regime.

In what follows, I read the assemblage of fragments that form Glover’s remembrance utilizing the critical tools of public memory, with a particular attention to rhetorics of purity and their service to whiteness. I find three strands of purity in these remembrances: spatial purity, temporal purity, and synecdochical transfer of moral purity from Wisconsin to white Wisconsinites. Rather than consider these three strands as distinct, I emphasize how they build upon each other. Thus, the organization of this analysis is strategic. Spatial purity enables a temporal orientation of purity, and spatial and temporal purity facilitate Wisconsin’s physical and moral purity to stand in for the virtue of its residents across time. Reading fragments of Glover’s memory through the hermeneutic of public memory reveals the centrality of purity, and, therefore whiteness to the state’s identity and the upper Midwest’s identity as similar stories are heralded across the region. Thus, this analysis contributes to rhetorical understandings of whiteness through the consideration of interanimating rhetorics of purity that respond to a contemporary exigence.

¹⁷⁸ Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretative Theory of Culture,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, ed. Clifford Geertz (New York: Basic Books, 1973): 320.

Wisconsin's Spatial Purity

In retellings of Glover's story, Wisconsin is articulated as a space physically and morally uncontaminated by slavery. In this spatial articulation of purity, dirt or contamination is the institution of slavery and its web of interrelations. A rigid boundary of pure-impure is constructed on regional lines, with the South existing as physically and morally depraved and the Midwest as virtuous. The geographic border of purity is further expressed on regional lines with the upper Midwest distinguished from the Northeast by its "Free Soil" identity. Thus, while the Northeast had growing abolitionist movements at the time, the region had already by been tainted by the practice of slavery within its bounds. Wisconsin's entering statehood as free is a frequently cited origin point of the state's purity and thus its virtue.

Remembrances of Glover identify enslavement as a physical and moral marker between the South and Midwest. Geographically, these accounts explicitly bind enslavement to the South and depict Wisconsin as an impermeable boundary between bondage and freedom. The boundary was only permeable for those seeking freedom in the state, such as Glover who, according to a local news article, fled enslavement "for freedom in Wisconsin."¹⁷⁹ Wisconsin is frequently characterized by a local newspaper article celebrating Black history month as having "a unique abolitionist attitude," further carving out physical boundaries of freedom-bondage. One webpage described Racine, where Glover resided and was captured, as an "abolitionist stronghold" asserting that the city guarded against the infiltration of enslavement into the state.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ Paul Sloth, "Joshua Glover's Story— One Worth Retelling," *The Journal Times*, February 11, 2007, Retrieved from https://journaltimes.com/news/local/joshua-glovers-story-one-worth-retelling/article_edb4b0a7-316b-5236-b1bc-ad6c1aa9cfb7.html (Accessed February 13, 2023).

¹⁸⁰ Teran Powell, "Milwaukee Black History: How Joshua Glover's Rescue Contributed to the Repeal of the Fugitive Slave Act," *WUWM* 89.7, February 3, 2021, <https://www.wuwm.com/race-ethnicity/2021-02-03/milwaukee-black-history-how-joshua-glovers-rescue-contributed-to-the-repeal-of-fugitive-slave-act> (Accessed February 14, 2023); Jim Lundstrom, "Wisconsin's Most Famous Runaway Slave Story," *Door County Pulse*, February 10, 2017, Retrieved from <https://doorcountypulse.com/wisconsins-famous-runaway-slave-story/> (Accessed February 14, 2023).

The bounding of impurity regionally facilitates a related rhetorical move: positioning Wisconsin as a destination of pure freedom. This construction bolsters the boundary distinguishing between freedom/enslavement by positing the inevitability of freedom in the state. Glover is frequently described as a freedom seeker and his residence in Racine suggests freedom was found, at least temporarily. On the Racine Heritage Museum's website, Glover's life is commemorated within the Underground Railroad collection "This Train is Bound for Glory," which identifies Wisconsin as a freedom location once the geographic boundary is penetrated. Similarly, a *PBS Wisconsin Education* video uses the image of a key to represent the unlocking of freedom once across the Wisconsin state line.¹⁸¹ In the video the key represents the drinking gourd constellation that is said to have guided Black folks north to freedom. In the video, Glover steals a key from his enslaver, uses it to escape the plantation, and later the key floats into the sky and transforms into the drinking gourd constellation. The transformation of key into the constellation situates Glover's entrance into Wisconsin as the symbolic key or tool to unlock his freedom.

Geographic purity is also evident in the metaphorical embedding of the concept into the landscape of Wisconsin as immutable part of the state's identity. The courthouse that was the site of abolitionists protesting Glover's arrest, now Courthouse Square where Glover's commemorative marker is sits, is described by a local journalist as helping "sow the seed of the end of slavery."¹⁸² The actions of the abolitionists, particularly the jailbreak, are "frequently held up as a sign of Wisconsin's progressive roots."¹⁸³ By characterizing anti-slavery and anti-racism

¹⁸¹ "Joshua Glover and the End of Slavery," *PBS Wisconsin Education*, n.d., Retrieved from <https://pbswisconsineducation.org/bio/joshua-glover/> (Accessed February 14, 2023).

¹⁸² Steve Chamraz, "How the Rescue of Joshua Glover in Wisconsin Helped Speed up the End of Slavery," *WTMJ Milwaukee*, February 2, 2021, <https://www.tmj4.com/lifestyle/black-history-month/how-the-rescue-of-joshua-glover-in-wisconsin-helped-speed-up-the-end-of-slavery> (Accessed February 12, 2023).

¹⁸³ Sadowski and Lieffring, "The True Story."

through seeds and roots, these discourses indicate that these sentiments were a natural part of the state's landscape and that these seeds and roots were able to grow because they were protected from contamination. These "seeds" and "roots" then are seemingly an unstoppable force as Glover's case is argued on local newspaper articles to have "galvanize the abolitionist movement in Wisconsin," "speed up the end of slavery," and "hurry the Civil War."¹⁸⁴

The 1850 Fugitive Slave Act threatened the spatial purity of Wisconsin by allowing slave catchers and those deputized by them to enter the region to search for suspected freedom seekers. While enslavement remained outside of Wisconsin borders, this law protected slavery and should be understood as a part of the expansive web of the institution. Thus, the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act risked contaminating the state. The National Park Service notes that the law legally enabled the dirt of enslavement to enter the state: "Yet just because Glover had settled North of the Mason Dixon Line did not mean that his freedom was secure."¹⁸⁵ Wisconsin's free, clean soil was infected by enslavement because freedom could not be promised for all under the revised Fugitive Slave Act. The threat to spatial purity was also recognized at the time by Judge Smith who declared the law unconstitutional when he stated that the overriding of state authority by the Fugitive Slave Act would "become the degradation of Wisconsin," according to an excerpt of Henry Legler's 1898 book *Leading Events of Wisconsin History* posted on the Wisconsin Electronic Reader website.¹⁸⁶ But Glover's capture by Garland was a penetration of Wisconsin's pure space and abolitionist actions are described as scrubbing that stain to restore purity.

¹⁸⁴ "Rescue of Joshua Glover Helped Galvanize the Abolitionist Movement in Wisconsin," *WISN 12*, February 2, 2020, <https://www.wisn.com/article/rescue-of-joshua-glover-helped-galvanize-the-abolitionist-movement-in-wisconsin/30770319> (Accessed February 14, 2023); Chamraz, "How the Rescue of Joshua Glover"; Powell, "Milwaukee Black History."

¹⁸⁵ "Joshua Glover," *The National Park Service*, n.d., Retrieved from <https://www.nps.gov/people/joshua-glover.htm#:~:text=Yet%20just%20because%20Glover%20had,return%20them%20to%20their%20enslavers> (Accessed June 29, 2023).

¹⁸⁶ Henry E. Legler, "Rescue of Joshua Glover, a Runaway Slave," *Wisconsin Electronic Reader*, n.d., <https://digioll.library.wisc.edu/WIREader/WER1124.html> (Accessed February 12, 2023).

Executive director of the Wisconsin Black Historical Society Clayborn Benson described Booth's efforts as notifying locals that Glover was in jail on "our [abolitionist] turf, and we must make every effort to rescind this, to break him out of jail."¹⁸⁷ Abolitionist freeing Glover from jail and fighting the constitutionality of the Fugitive Slave Act demonstrated not just the response to the infiltration of filth, but how they eradicated dirt to reestablish the system. Wisconsin's pure freedom was restored, and the state's reputation purified by the repealing of the Fugitive Slave Act (albeit temporarily).

The construction of geographically pure spaces is inflected by moral arguments. Space are not typically thought of as having moral character, but the morality of Wisconsin serves to position the state as innocent of engaging in enslavement and white supremacy. Glover's story is commonly referred to as a "rescue," indicating not just that he was broken out of jail, but that he was saved from the moral dangers of slavery. Characterizing Glover's story as a "rescue" redraws a moral geographic border between innocent/dangerous, pure/impure. Moral language is also evident in descriptions of Glover's residence. According local historical and contemporary accounts Glover sought "asylum" in Racine and found "sanctuary in Wisconsin," which positioned these spaces as safe from enslavement and protected from the contamination of slavery bleeding through state boundaries.¹⁸⁸ And remembrances of Glover fortify Wisconsin's morality through discussions of how this case led to the repeal of the Fugitive Slave Act and the impetus of the Civil War. Founder and director of the Wisconsin Black Historical Society Clayborn Benson stated that Northern states refused to "follow the rules that the [S]outh put on

¹⁸⁷ Jonathon Sadowski and Christina Lieftring, "The True Story Behind Abolitionists Who Helped Joshua Glover Escape," *UpNorthNews*, February 12, 2021, <https://upnorthnewswi.com/2021/02/12/the-true-story-behind-abolitionists-who-helped-joshua-glover-escape/> (Accessed February 8, 2023).

¹⁸⁸ Legler, "Rescue of Joshua Glover"; Jordan Davis and Maria Cunningham, "How Does a City Choose to Remember Its Past," *America's Black Holocaust Museum*, n.d., <https://www.abhmuseum.org/remembrance/> (Accessed February 15, 2023).

the table” and the abolitionist movement was “strong,” it was only Wisconsin that declared the Fugitive Slave Act unconstitutional. Wisconsin met the moral standards of today through their staunch resistance to the slavery authorized national by the law.

A *PBS Wisconsin* video best illustrates the convergence of geographic and moral purity. The video depicts Glover escaping from the dark landscape of Missouri, chased by black wolves, into the lightness of Wisconsin. The light/dark representations illustrate the pureness of Wisconsin, the filth that is slavery, and the moral condemnation of enslavement. As Glover crosses the border into Wisconsin, the wolves were unable to penetrate the boundary into the light to follow Glover. That is, until the Fugitive Slave Act enabled them to enter, which is shown as a black cloud infecting Wisconsin as Garland seeks to return to Missouri. The cloud threatens to overtake Glover as he is broken out of jail and boards a steamboat, but he is ultimately able to outrun its darkness. The cloud then disappears having been defeated by the abolitionists and outrun by Glover. The concrete evil of the Fugitive Slave Act points to the power of racial state sanctioned violence that threatened to contaminate Wisconsin but was ultimately fought off and cleansed to restore its pureness. As I will demonstrate next, this spatial purity extends beyond Glover’s case into the present to support claims that Wisconsin is innocent of contemporary anti-Blackness that has replaced the slavery that animated Glover’s life.

One exception to broader discourses of spatial purity in stories of Glover’s “rescue” is how the 1861 lynching of George Marshall Clark figures into this spatial bounding. One local journalist argues that Clark’s murder stained the state’s space and cannot be removed. Seven years after Glover escaped to Canada, 22-year-old Clark was murdered after being accused bothering two white women on the street. Clark is the only known lynching recorded in Wisconsin. America’s Black Holocaust Museum’s head griot Reggie Jackson describes Clark’s

lynching as “a stain on Milwaukee’s history that isn’t widely known.”¹⁸⁹ Clark’s lynching defies claims of the state’s innocent identity, untouched by ideological commitments to anti-Blackness beyond enslavement. Douglas argues that a paradox of purity is that “it is an attempt to force experience into logical categories of non-contradiction. But experience is not amendable and those who make the attempt find themselves in into contradiction.”¹⁹⁰ Clark’s murder and more recent scholarship revealing slavery and other forms of anti-Blackness in Wisconsin and other Midwestern states are not amenable to this constructed spatial purity. Thus, the contemporary articulation of dirt are these very contradictions that violate the social order Wisconsin’s innocence. Contemporary retellings of Glover’s story that deflect anomalous and out of place memory fragments to reorganize the environment to thwart charges of racism in the state and region. Ultimately, Wisconsin is absolved of anti-Black commitments and actions.

Wisconsin’s Temporal Purity

Ruth Frankenburg argued that whiteness is an orientation to oneself, others, and society and varies across space and time that (re)asserts power and privileges. Whiteness is rhetorically articulated and the forwarding and investment in particular temporalities is one way in which this is accomplished. Scholars have theorized race and time in a multitude of ways, and I add to this ongoing conversation by arguing that purity is a temporal orientation of whiteness. In this case study, public remembrances of Glover’s stories utilize temporal continuity that marks Wisconsin geographically and morally pure since its inception in 1848. This stabilized conception of time orients the public to conflate anti-slavery/abolitionists sentiment in the state and the upper

¹⁸⁹ Audrey Nowakowski, “‘It’s Tangible’”: “George Marshall Clark, Milwaukee’s Only Known Lynching victim, Now Memorialized with Headstone,” *WUWM*, September 15, 2021, <https://www.wuwm.com/2021-09-15/its-tangible-george-marshall-clark-milwaukes-only-known-lynching-victim-now-memorialized-with-headstone> (Accessed February 9, 2023).

¹⁹⁰ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 163.

Midwest where similar stories are told with the eradication of anti-Blackness by positing that Glover's case did not stain (or leave a lasting stain) and there are no other cases that have, leaving the state in a state of perfect and ongoing cleanliness.

Temporality is a significant marker of the rhetoricity of public memory and highlights how the relationship between the past and present are constructed. Barbie Zelizer argued that time's strategic rearrangements shape how individuals and groups understand themselves and provide frameworks for interacting with the world.¹⁹¹ Arguments about the relationship between the past and present are also a critical consideration in analysis of the rhetoricity place/space and region. Doreen Massey contended that we should imagine cultures and societies, such as Wisconsin and the upper Midwest as "constellations of social relations configured as forming a time-space," which are "open, porous, invented and particularized as a product of interaction."¹⁹² Spatio-temporal relations advances an understanding of people at a particular time and provides the materials to position some as spatially or temporally aligned or dislocated.¹⁹³ Massey also explained that the construction of spatial boundaries constitutes "envelopes of space-time" can be an attempt to fix or domesticate space-time, also she insisted this is a truly impossible task.¹⁹⁴

Adopting a particular (spatio-)temporal orientation toward people and places is always inflected with race. For example, Ersula Ore and Matthew Houdek explain that white national time is a white temporal orientation of closure, linear progress, and white atonement and redemption.¹⁹⁵ As such adopting public memory as a hermeneutic to texts reveals how

¹⁹¹ Barbie Zelizer, "Reading the Past Against the Grain: The Shape of Memory Studies," *Review and Criticism* 12, no. 2 (1995): 222.

¹⁹² Doreen Massey, "Imagining Globalization: Power-Geometries of Time-Space," in *Global-Futures: Migration, Environment, and Globalization*, ed. Avtar Bruh, Mary J. Hickman, and Máirtín Mac an Ghail (London: MacMillan, Press, 1999): 41.

¹⁹³ See Leslie Harris, "Rhetorical Mobilities and the City: The White Slavery Controversy and Racialized Protection of Women in the U.S.," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 104, no. 1 (2018): 22-46.

¹⁹⁴ Massey, "Imagining Globalization," 42.

¹⁹⁵ Ore and Houdek, "Lynching in Times," 447.

representations of the past and present are tied to constructions of region and race. Whereas Ore and Houdeks theorize temporal continuity and accumulation as an alternative to linear and closed temporal orientations that enables a “space and time to breath and rearticulate questions of justice, memory, and healing,” in this analysis it functions quite differently. In fact, it is more similar to that of white national time which “manifests itself as closure, White atonement for the past, color-blind liberal personhood, and white sense of redemption and justice achieved,” temporal purity declares white innocence and moral superiority through continuity on regional that declares the upper Midwest as innocent of systemic racial logics.¹⁹⁶ Put another way, a temporal orientation of purity creates a single, unbroken bracket of time in which the region has remained unpolluted by race and racism that is evidenced by stories like Glover’s. The past, present, and future collapse into what Catherine Palczewski called a “timeless present” that accommodates the needs of white Midwesterners.¹⁹⁷ In remembrances of Glover, the “past into the present and enables us to see the past in the present” such that Wisconsin is constructed as always been and will always be pure.¹⁹⁸ The past is scrubbed clean to appear spotless permitting Midwestern whites to appear as having always been and always will be beyond race, innocent from the nation’s ongoing racist sins, and absolve themselves of claims of participation in anti-Blackness. Further, temporal purity silences a plurality of voices that risk contaminating Wisconsin’s clean past.

Temporal purity functions in two ways in historical representations of Glover. The first is a double move. Temporal purity is constructed by positioning Wisconsin as “progressive” for its anti-slavery legal stance and resistance of the Fugitive Slave Act. This begins with settlers who,

¹⁹⁶ Ore & Houdek, “Lynching in Times,” 447.

¹⁹⁷ Catherine Palczewski, “When Times Collide: War Churchill’s Use of an Epideictic Moment to Ground Forensic Argument,” *Argumentation and Advocacy* 41, no. 3 (Winter 2005): 133.

¹⁹⁸ Palczewski, “When Times Collide,” 133.

according to Benson, came from Europe “where they or their families had been serfs. They arrived in the United States deeply opposed to servitude.”¹⁹⁹ From this point, “The abolitionist spirit became ingrained in the state’s culture.”²⁰⁰ Entering the nation as a free state is the “zero point” of purity for Wisconsin and purity is then fostered by the arrival of white settlers.²⁰¹ And Wisconsin’s progressive nature is recognizable on a national scale as one local news article explains, “A decade before the end of slavery Wisconsin was leading the way for equal rights in America.”²⁰² This first move inflects temporal continuity with whiteness by locating purity in the history of white European settlers; Wisconsin was naturally free and the actions of these white Wisconsinites helped it remain that way. Scrubbed from this remembrance is the Native tribes living in Wisconsin far before European settlers arrived and the Black and Native peoples that were enslaved in the territory by French fur traders. Further white abolitionist sentiment became the culture of the state, disregarding the crucial role Native peoples played in resisting enslavement.²⁰³ Wisconsin appears pure—white and void of slavery—and progressive since its inception.

In addition to firm anti-slavery commitments, Wisconsin abolitionists are also depicted as progressive for interracial cooperation. From the time of Glover’s escape from Milwaukee, it would take eleven years for the legal institutions of slavery to end, one hundred and ten years for race-based discrimination and segregation to be outlawed, and one hundred and eleven years for

¹⁹⁹ Aisha Turner, “Searching for a Fuller Picture of Wisconsin’s Abolitionist History,” *WUWM* 89.7, December 1, 2017, <https://www.wuwm.com/post/searching-fuller-picture-wisconsins-abolitionist-history#stream/0> (Accessed February 12, 2023).

²⁰⁰ Turner, “Searching.”

²⁰¹ VanderHaagen uses the phrase “zero point” in her analysis to indicate how the beginning of progress was marked by the six Black women speakers during the proceedings of the 1893 World’s Congress of Representative Women.

²⁰² Chamraz, “How the Rescue.”

²⁰³ Julia Fello, “How Native Americans Played a Crucial Role in Wisconsin’s Underground Railroad,” *TMJ 4*, February 3, 2021, Retrieved from <https://www.tmj4.com/lifestyle/black-history-month/how-native-americans-played-a-crucial-role-in-wisconsins-underground-railroad> (Accessed February 16, 2023),

Black Americans to gain the right to vote. While the rest of the country lagged behind on legally prohibiting racial violence and providing Black Americans with human rights, it is claimed Wisconsin had been doing this for years, demonstrating their social, legal, and moral progressiveness. One local journalist explains that abolitionists were “allies who helped set the nation on the road to abolishing slavery,” while Milwaukee historian George Gonis stated, “They were pro franchise for African-Americans, they were pro equal justice for African-Americans and most of them were highly critical of racial names and epithets.”²⁰⁴ These statements suggest that the rights and protections Black Americans have now, were always granted to Black Wisconsinites and it would take over a century for the rest of the nation to catch up.

The second part of this temporal construction builds upon Wisconsin’s spatial purity by positioning slave owning states and those who did not outwardly resist the Fugitive Slave Act as morally backwards. While the risks associated with violating the Fugitive Slave Act prompted many abolitionists to conceal their resistance, but, according to Benson, “Wisconsin wanted to make a statement, and it was clearly an abolitionist statement, that the federal government wasn’t going to tell them what to do.”²⁰⁵ Wisconsin is heralded not just for their outward resistance, but for their virtuous stand against the South and federal law. A throughline between the superior morality of white abolitionists of Glover’s time is clearly drawn by co-author of *Finding Freedom* McDonald in an interview: “We also hoped our book would inform readers that abolitionists, as much creatures of their time as we are of ours, were still able 150 years ago to rise above some of their feelings to do ‘the right thing’ even though they were violating a law

²⁰⁴ Chamraz, “How the Rescue.”

²⁰⁵ Lorin Cox, “Seeking Freedom: Wisconsin’s Role in the Underground Railroad and Abolitionist Movement,” *Wisconsin Public Radio*, July 6, 2022, Retrieved from <https://www.wpr.org/seeking-freedom-wisconsins-role-underground-railroad-and-abolitionist-movement> (Accessed February 14, 2023).

that could jail them and fine them a year's income or more."²⁰⁶ This continuity suggests that moral purity was a natural part and learnable part of Wisconsin that was nurtured and protected by abolitionist/white settlers, becoming an unchanging part of the state's culture.

The second rhetorical move establishing purity as temporal orientation in remembrances of Glover prevents the spread of contamination of alternative temporalities. In this case, claims of anti-Blackness and recognizable manifestations of anti-Blackness pollute constructions of Wisconsin's purity, threatening the social order of the unquestioned centrality of whiteness. More recent discussions of the role of Clark's lynching have contaminated this identity of unimpeded progress. America's Black Holocaust Museum is a memory institution in Milwaukee that reopened the doors of their physical location in 2022 but has been building public awareness about the ongoing atrocities against Black Americans since its inception in 1988. An article on the museum's website identifies that Glover's "rescue" and Clark's lynching impacted Milwaukee and specifically growing Black communities, but the city and state only remember Glover. In a disruption of temporal purity, America's Black Holocaust Museum asks, "Should we only remember stories that support our sense of interracial cooperation or progressive values, or should we also commemorate the horrific events of racial trauma that complicate our uplifting stories of the past?"²⁰⁷ Until 2021, Clark's gravesite was unmarked, physically scrubbing him from history. Local artist and activist Tyrone Randle, Jr. recognized this, "It's easy to act like something doesn't exist if you can't see it. So the fact that it's tangible... that actually happened."²⁰⁸ At the ceremony unveiling Clark's headstone, Interfaith Conference of Greater

²⁰⁶ Bobby Tanzilo, "'Finding Freedom' Trails Joshua Glover, Who Escaped Enslavement," *OnMilwaukee*, November 3, 2007, Retrieved from <https://onmilwaukee.com/articles/jglover> (Accessed February 14, 2023).

²⁰⁷ Jordan Davis and Maria Cunningham, "How Does a City Choose to Remember Its Past," *America's Black Holocaust Museum*, n.d., <https://www.abhmuseum.org/remembrance/> (Accessed February 15, 2023).

²⁰⁸ Nowakowski, "'It's Tangible.'"

Milwaukee executive director Pardeep Singh Kaleka stated, “It is well understood that our country has its roots in racialized religious and ethnic violence. Our foundational dirt is so soiled in bloodshed that it’s a wonder that grass still grows, and trees still blossom.”²⁰⁹ In this statement, Kaleka articulates an alternative linear spatio-temporality: the entire nation is not just stained by anti-Blackness, but this stain bleeds into every part of our past, present, and future. While we can remember the work of the abolitionists who organized to break Glover out of jail and their commitment to fighting the Fugitive Slave Act, Wisconsin is not innocent of anti-Blackness nor absolved of supporting this system in the past or present.

Wisconsin’s Synecdochical Purity

In contemporary remembrances of Glover, rhetorics of purity are used to characterize the motivations and actions of abolitionists involved in his escape to affirm the spatial purity Wisconsin. Entangled in this representation is the attribution of superior morality to contemporary white Wisconsinites as an index of the temporal purity within the state. Together, white Wisconsin residents are depicted as innocent of anti-Blackness and actively resisting this system. The retroactive explanations of white Wisconsinites function as a sign of the state and its purity. The moral purity of white Wisconsin residents across time gives material form to the constructed spatial purity and evidence of temporal continuity. As a synecdoche, white Wisconsin residents stand for the ongoing spatial purity of their home and a critical representative resource to forestall claims of contemporary anti-Blackness and articulating an

²⁰⁹ Nowakowski, “‘It’s Tangible.’” Kaleka is familiar with race-based violence as his father was murdered in the “worst race-based attack in the U.S. since the KKK bombed the 16th Street Baptist Church in 1963 in Montgomery, Alabama.” Kaleka’s father was killed during a mass shooting at a Sikh temple in Oak Creek, Wisconsin in 2012 where seven people were killed and others were wounded. The perpetrator had ties to white supremacist and Neo-Nazi groups. See Jaspreet Kaleka, “Pardeep Kaleka,” The Forgiveness Project, n.d. Retrieved from <https://www.theforgivenessproject.com/stories-library/pardeep-kaleka/> (Accessed August 13, 2023) and Steven Yaccino, Michael Schwirtz, and Marc Santora, “Gunman Kills 6 at a Sikh Temple Near Milwaukee,” New York Times, August 5, 2012, Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/06/us/shooting-reported-at-temple-in-wisconsin.html> (Accessed August 13, 2023).

alternative reality where this is simply not possible. The essence of purity in white Wisconsinites across time serves as a barometer of where the state stands in the national racial landscape.

One of Kenneth Burke's four master tropes, synecdoche deals with representation and "stresses a relationship or connectedness between two sides of an equation."²¹⁰ One side of the equation becomes an abbreviation, sign, or essence of the other, which can take the form of "part for the whole, whole for the part, container for the contained, sign for the thing signified, material for the thing made."²¹¹ Diane Rubenstein explained that synecdoche is a "figure of integration suggestive of a qualitative relation. The example 'He was all heart does not designate a part of the body (literally) as much as it designates a *quality* (empathy, compassion)" [emphasis my own].²¹² Synecdoche also stresses the relationship between both sides of the equation, between "act of perception" and "things perceived."²¹³ Thus, synecdoche is not a surface level linguistic representation, but a waying of seeing/knowing and also a way of not seeing/knowing, the transformation of the part into a political instrument.²¹⁴ Put another way, synecdoche is a transformation of object *and* thought, making it a powerful political tool.²¹⁵

Retellings of Glover's story create a synecdochical relationship between the contained—white Wisconsinites across time—and the container—Wisconsin. This relationship positions Wisconsin as not simply a place to reside, but as having the inextricable connection to its residents throughout time through purity, one that is almost biological. This can be understood as an extension of the how purity is embedded into Wisconsin's rhetorical landscape through

²¹⁰ Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 1969): 509.

²¹¹ Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar*, 507-508

²¹² Diane Rubenstein, *This Is Not a President: Sense, Nonsense, and the American Political Imaginary* (New York: NYU Press, 2008): 19-21.

²¹³ Burke, *A Grammar*, 507.

²¹⁴ Burke, *A Grammar*, 1970; Mark P. Moore, "Constructing Irreconcilable Conflict: The Function of Synecdoche in the Spotted Owl Controversy," *Communication Monographs* 60, no. 3 (1993): 261.

²¹⁵ See Moore, "Constructing Irreconcilable Conflict"; and Mark P. Moore, "Life, Liberty, and the Handgun: The Function of Synecdoche in the Brady Bill Debate," *Communication Quarterly* 42, no. 4 (1994), 434-447.

linguistic choices including “seeds” and “roots” that have been protected and grown over time. In this synecdoche, “seeds” and “roots” are Wisconsinites that have continued the practice of equality and justice, sprouting, and thriving because of the purity of the place they were planted. As I will demonstrate, there is a sense of inevitability— that all white Wisconsinites carry the essence of purity that is representative of the state’s innocence and location in the contemporary racial landscape.

The synecdochal role of Wisconsinites begins with the explanation of abolitionist motivations as pure. That is, they are represented as having been inclined to help Glover and resist the Fugitive Slave Act because they were fiercely resistant to anti-Blackness. White settlers are described by Benson in local newspaper articles commemorating Glover as feeling “the sting of slavery” from their ancestors’ servitude in Europe and were “against the practice,” creating identification between them and Black Americans that were enslaved.²¹⁶ Aligning white settlers and free and enslaved Black folks during this time created the impression of an alliance, or in Burke’s terminology, unity, against a system of subjugation.²¹⁷ Further, Benson stated that these white abolitionists were willing to take “matters into their own hands” in resisting while “[o]ther states snuck and did, did it at night time, did it out the back door. Wisconsin is the only one that stood out front.”²¹⁸ Here, Wisconsin is personified by the actions and intentions of white abolitionists and constitute the superior morality and historical innocence of the state.

Those who are imbued with pure motivations are not limited to the abolitionists who directly helped Glover but include all white Wisconsinites at the time. This is primarily done through the relaying of an inaccurate number of people participating in Glover’s “rescue.” Local

²¹⁶ Chamraz, “How the Rescue”; Powell, “Milwaukee Black History.”

²¹⁷ See Burke, *A Grammar*, 22-23.

²¹⁸ Chamraz, “How the Rescue.”

newspaper accounts of what took place outside the Milwaukee jail in 1854 range from claiming a few hundred to a “mass” and “a mob 5,000” (what was a quarter of Milwaukee’s population at the time) protested Glover’s arrest.²¹⁹ The crowd is not specified as abolitionists by local journalists and the Milwaukee County Historical Society, but as “protestors” and “men of all creeds” who were “enthusiastically” and fervently outraged.²²⁰ This crowd is connected by their common resistance to enslavement as they are described as “like-minded people, including participants in the Underground Railroad [who] helped Glover make his way to freedom.”²²¹ The synecdochal representation is doubled in this statement: the people of Wisconsin with the same resistance to slavery stand in for Wisconsin and the Underground Railroad represents the virtue of abolition. The state’s purity is doubly bolstered by the actions of the crowd and the story’s connection to the Underground Railroad. However, the exaggerated claim of the number of people at the jail noted by journalists Johnathon Sadowski and Chirstina Lieftring— which is more realistically estimated to be a few hundred, although accounts still vary— functions as a sign that “the state was more progressive than it truly was.”²²² Moreover, there were a variety of reasons why locals protested Glover’s arrest including their political, economic, and religious

²¹⁹ Sadowski and Lieftring, “The True Story.”

²²⁰ Sadowski and Lieftring, “The True Story”; “Experience History: The Underground Railroad in Wisconsin,” *Travel Wisconsin*, n.d., Retrieved from <https://www.travelwisconsin.com/article/museums-history/experience-history-the-underground-railroad-in-wisconsin> (Accessed February 18, 2023); “Escape of Joshua Glover,” *Milwaukee County Historical Society*, n.d., Retrieved from <https://milwaukeehistory.net/research/artifact-collections/paintings-collection/paintings-collection-history/escape-of-joshua-glover/> (Accessed February 14, 2023).

²²¹ Sloth, “Joshua Glover’s Story.”

²²² Sadowski and Lieftring, “The True Story.” A somewhat similar synecdochal relationship between the number of enslaved people passing through Gorée Island’s “Door to No Return.” Clint Smith’s *How the Word is Passed* identifies that claims of millions of enslaved people traveling through the threshold is “pure fiction” but is a “symbol of the slave trade” [emphasis original]. The Door to No Return functions as a part to the Atlantic slave trade’s whole. The key difference is that scope the two synecdoches construct. Curator and site manager of the Door to No Return Eloi Coly argued, “The number of slaves is not important when you talk about memory. When we talk about memory, we have to stand in the principles. One slave is too many.” In remembrances of Glover, overestimations of protestors at the jailhouse, in combination with the constructed spatial and temporal purity, absolves past and present Wisconsinites of participation in anti-Blackness. Clint Smith, *How the Word is Passed: A Reckoning with the History of Slavery Across America* (New York: Little, Brown, and Co., 2021), 250-254.

beliefs.²²³ The synecdochal transformation of the pure motivation to abolitionists that represent the essence of Wisconsin flattens the multitude of reasons abolitionists participated in Glover's "rescue" while rhetorically spreading this essence to all white residents. The selective expansion of this essence to exclusively white people is evident in visual depictions of Glover's story wherein those who aided him, with the exception of one, are white.²²⁴

The construction of temporal purity carries the representative nature of Wisconsinites to those in the present. More specifically, the motivations and actions of contemporary Wisconsin residents are endowed with the same essence of the abolitionists in Glover's story which serves as evidence of the state's unwavering purity. Co-author of *Finding Freedom* West Jackson stated that she believes "it is important for everybody to know their history," and found "how people had come together to do what they thought was the right thing" powerful.²²⁵ Continuing, West Jackson explained, "If we look at our history now, we can learn from that. It tells us what kind of people live in Wisconsin."²²⁶ There is no temporal bracket in these statements. For West Jackson, contemporary Wisconsinites are the same as the abolitionists, who are assumed to be white, of Glover's story through their common essence—purity. Spatial and temporal purity are also synecdochically written onto contemporary Wisconsin residents protesting anti-Blackness. One local newspaper account of Glover's story opened with a discussion of protestors in Racine following George Floyd's murder in the summer of 2020: "'This is what democracy looks like!' That chant has been heard at protests in Racine, Milwaukee, and nearly every major American city. While some of these chants are new, Racine's history of seeking change and justice goes

²²³ See Benson's statement in Sadowski and Lieffring, "The True Story."

²²⁴ "A Journey from Slavery to Freedom: A Brief Biography of Joshua Glover," *Wisconsin Historical Society*, n.d., Retrieved from <https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS4368> (Accessed February 15, 2023).

²²⁵ Sloth, "Joshua Glover's Story."

²²⁶ Sloth, "Joshua Glover's Story."

back even before the Emancipation Proclamation was issued.”²²⁷ Racine’s history of fighting for equality and justice is directly connected to Glover’s escape and written onto protestors like a genetic code that is passed down from generation to generation, constituting them as moral and innocent.

In contemporary retellings of Glover’s story, synecdoche functions as a linguistic carrier of whiteness. Rhetorics of purity characterize abolitionists and white Wisconsinites’ motivations throughout time, which are used to stand in for the essence of Wisconsin. The characterizations of motivations in these accounts largely deflect explanations that are not grounded in morality, virtue, and innocence, connecting white Wisconsin residents through purity, and this essence constructs a logic in which Wisconsin is pure from the ongoing anti-Blackness the nation is reckoning with. A few comments demonstrate that pure motivations of white Wisconsinites are not “truly representative” of the whole. That is, their motivations were not pure and indicate the actual essence of Wisconsin. Executive director of the Wisconsin Black Historical Society Benson’s recognition of the political, economic, and religious motivations for their part in “rescuing” Glover point to this, yet even he argues for the representative nature of abolitionist for Wisconsin. Complex, and frankly, more accurate, explanations of abolitionist motivations are flattened, rendering past Wisconsin residents as morally superior and contemporary residents as innocent of anti-Blackness claims. Further, the temporal continuity embedded in this representative relationship functions to create inevitable purity for future Wisconsinites and, therefore, Wisconsin in times to come. These residents will be another contained in the container.

²²⁷ Rogan, “The Story.”

A Story “Worth Remembering”

A final synecdochal relationship is worth discussing to illustrate how purity functions as a regional rhetoric for the upper Midwest. The upper Midwest often functions as a synecdoche for the nation through characterizations of the region as the “norm,” “what is truly American,” and a “microcosm for the nation.” While the nation evolves, the Midwest represents what the nation is *truly* about, its values. Understood this way, Glover’s story, as representative of similar stories of abolition in the upper Midwest, centers white purity in the nation. A rigid boundary between bad and good whites is constructed, and easy to identify through overt acts of racism. This is true in the past and present. The upper Midwest represents what the nation always should have been, was striving for. The spreading of purity from abolitionists directly involved in Glover’s escape to all (white) Wisconsinites (re)secures whiteness as the unmarked norm in the region and nation, while abolitionists are drained of the history that drove their participation and the anti-Blackness that shaped the state. Thus, the power relations of white and Black Wisconsinites and those escaping in/through Wisconsin in the past and present are elided. Ultimately, whiteness is centered as the unquestioned norm of the state, region, and nation, and sucked of its hierarchal power relations.

In this analysis, I demonstrated how rhetorics of purity in contemporary remembrances of Glover construct Wisconsin as spatially and temporally clean of slavery and other forms of anti-Blackness. Spatially, the practice of slavery is bound to the South and extensions of the institution, such as the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, were prevented from entering the state. Wisconsin is constructed as geographically pure of anti-Blackness, naturally pure, and morally good. Building off this spatial purity, the articulation of temporal continuity claims that

Wisconsinites across time were morally pure in their commitments to anti-Blackness and progressive social, legal, and political actions. From the state's entrance into statehood to contemporary times, Wisconsinites are understood as occupying one unbroken bracket of time that is void of stains of dirt— spatial penetrations of slavery and other forms of anti-Blackness.

Spatial and temporal purity enable a synecdochical relationship between Wisconsinites' actions and motivations (the contained) to stand in for Wisconsin's purity. Virtuous motivations for breaking Glover out of jail and resisting the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act are transferred to all antebellum Wisconsin residents and temporal continuity writes this on to current residents. This representation mobilizes purity as a characteristic of white Wisconsinites across time and establishes whiteness as the norm of the state, region, and nation throughout time. Together, these rhetorics of purity serve as an authoritative response to claims of anti-Blackness in the upper Midwest: the region has been pure since its inception, it could not possibly be.

Chapter Three:

“Her Name Was Her Legacy”: Sojourner Truth’s Midwest Persona

Sojourner Truth is perhaps one of the most recognizable women in American history. Truth’s memory is often evoked through her material image and her doubled critique of racism and sexism through the question “Ain’t I a woman?” Truth is frequently remembered on a national scale for her abolition and women’s rights activism, such as her spot as one of the “greatest African Americans” in history, bell hooks’ book first major book titled *Ain’t I a Woman?* and Truth’s induction in the National Women’s Hall of Fame in 1981.²²⁸ There have also been many local monuments, memorials, and dedications throughout the nation where she lectured on a variety of causes including abolition, women’s rights, land ownership, evangelicalism, and their intersections. Each local commemoration of Truth engages in the discursive practices that constructed her life and legacy in ways that “extend, collapse, or transcend her actual life and works.”²²⁹ One such location is Battle Creek, Michigan, where Truth resided for over fifteen years and died. How does the chosen home of Truth remember her? How do these selective remembrances construct race? And how are these constructions of race specific to Michigan? I explore these questions in this case study.

In this chapter, I argue that Truth’s memory on local and state registers in Michigan is constructed through three interrelated state values: fortitude, moral superiority, and platable reform. More specifically, Truth’s courage and determination serve as inspiration for overcoming everyday obstacles and inequality, while her superior morality is analogous to that

²²⁸ See Molefi Kete Asante, *100 Greatest African Americans: A Biographical Encyclopedia* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2003); bell hooks, *Ain’t I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (New York: Routledge, 1987); and “Sojourner Truth,” *National Women’s Hall of Fame*, n.d., Retrieved from <https://www.womenofthehall.org/inductee/sojourner-truth/> (Accessed July 1, 2023).

²²⁹ Roseann Mandzuik, “Commemorating Sojourner Truth: Negotiating the Politics of Race and Gender in the Spaces of Public Memory,” *Western Journal of Communication* 67: 3 (2003): 276.

of Michigan's residents. Additionally, selective remembrances of Truth circumscribe her activism to support her as a palatable symbol of reform. My analysis reveals how these three themes articulate a persona of Truth that strategically draws from historical fact and other public remembrances to situate her as the personification of Midwest identity. Truth's life and legacy is an example of what the ideal Midwesterner is or can do. This distinctly Midwestern version of Truth belies an experiential and intersectional grounds for her activism, instead positioning her as working toward equality without critical attention to the systematic obstacles preventing its realization. Ultimately, this Midwestern Truth is "beloved for what we need to her have said" and done: she reflects back onto the region an idealized image of itself and dodges claims of anti-Blackness across time.²³⁰ Telling Truth's story in local and state levels constitutes Midwestern identity across time.²³¹

This analysis examines thirty local and state texts that represent Truth's memory in Michigan and as a Michigander. In particular, I analyze twenty-one local newspaper articles, five local websites, three packets of educational materials, two short speeches, and two YouTube videos remembering Truth. Utilizing the critical tools of public memory, I conduct a textual analysis of these memory fragments from 2015 to 2023 that reads within individual texts and across the texts for patterns of how Truth's identity is selectively linked to the construction and bolstering of a distinct Michigan and Midwestern identity. I paid particular attention to how these texts pulled out and transformed distinct traits from Truth and how these were connected to Michigan and its residents across time. Most of the selected texts are local to Truth's home in

²³⁰ Painter, Nell Irvin Painter, "Representing Truth: Sojourner Truth's Knowing and Becoming Known," *The Journal of American History* 81, no. 2 (1994): 480.

²³¹ This harkens back to Andrew R. L. Cayton and Susan E. Gray's statement, "regional identity is a form of storytelling." Andrew R. L. Cayton and Susan E. Gray, *The American Midwest: Essays on Regional History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001): 4.

Battle Creek, a city within Calhoun County. These newspaper articles and webpages revealed how local pride, state values, and a national historical figure collide. The wide net I cast deploying public memory as a hermeneutic also enabled me to include textual fragments including discussions of Truth's first Battle Creek home, renaming the county in her name, the monument in her honor, and articles covering her descendants who still live in the area. Additionally, my local texts are comprised of local newspapers from Detroit and Saginaw where Truth visited while lecturing. I also analyzed texts that commemorate Truth on a state level as they provide a different lens on how the local, state, and national collide to make distinct identity claims.

In what follows, I first provide a brief history of the state of Michigan to contextualize its place in the Midwest to ground my analysis of remembrances of Truth. Second, I trace the life and legacy of Truth in the public imaginary and rhetorical scholarship. Third, I provide an analysis of three interrelated Michigan values articulated and personified by Truth including fortitude, moral superiority, and sanitized reform. Finally, I concluded with a discussion of how this third, distinctly Michigan persona, fits into rhetorical scholarship and public commemoration of Truth.

Truth's "Chosen" Home: A Brief History of Michigan

The narration of Michigan's past is largely characterized as a series of great accomplishments and devastating missteps. Prior to the arrival of European settlers, a variety of Native American tribes resided in what is now Michigan, attracted to the rich natural resources the land and surrounding lakes offered.²³² The territory shifted from French rule throughout the

²³² Bruce A. Rubenstein and Lawrence E. Ziewacz identify that the "most numerous and influential" native tribes were the Ottawa, Chippewa, and Potawatomi were "originally united [but] split sometime before the sixteenth century" and continued to live in harmony without defined territories. Bruce A. Rubenstein and Lawrence E. Ziewacz, *Michigan: A History of the Great Lakes State*, 5th ed. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2014): 3. For a description of

1600s, to British rule in the 1770s, and finally was stipulated as within the boundary of the United States by the 1783 Treaty of Paris that signified the end of the American Revolution. The first years of Michigan's status as a territory were "beset by hardship."²³³ In July 1805, the "frontier town" of Detroit nearly burned to the ground and was surrendered early in the War of 1812, the territory was "overrun with disloyal British fur traders," and newly developed cities were isolated from typical paths of westward expansion.²³⁴ Following the War of 1812 and the appropriation of land from native tribes, the tides changed for European settlers in Michigan.

In the years before Michigan became a state, the economy and culture shifted from fur trading and isolation to agriculture and transportation. The area's "pioneer era" saw the import of livestock and agricultural tools, an influx in mining and lumbering, and expanded access to the territory through steam transportation and newly constructed internal roads.²³⁵ These transformations both prompted and facilitated the 1830 "Michigan Fever" that brought a boom in Michigan's population.²³⁶ In 1837, Michigan entered statehood, welcoming farmer from New York and New England, as well as Dutch and German immigrants.²³⁷ The new state government embarked on a variety of ambitious projects, prioritizing construction of roads and railways, education, and river travel. Amidst these internal improvements, the "the second great

Michigan's lush physical environment see Willis F. Dunbar and George S. May, *Michigan: A History of the Wolverine State*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995): 1-7. See also Charles E. Cleland, *Rites of Conquest: The History and Culture of Michigan's Native Americans* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1992): 1-38; W. Vernon Kinietz, *The Indians of the Western Great Lakes* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1969); Charles Moler Davis, *Readings in the Geography of Michigan* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1964); and Roger L. Rosentreter, *Michigan: A History of Explorers Entrepreneurs, and Everyday People* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2014): 1-9

²³³ "A Brief History of Michigan," *Michigan Legislature*, n.d., Retrieved from <https://www.legislature.mi.gov/documents/publications/manual/2001-2002/2001-mm-0003-0026-History.pdf> (Accessed July 2, 2023).

²³⁴ Rubenstein and Ziewacz, *Michigan*; Dunbar and May, *Michigan*.

²³⁵ "A Brief History," 7; Rubenstein and Ziewacz, *Michigan*; Dunbar and May, *Michigan*.

²³⁶ See Dunbar and May, *Michigan*, 163-181; Rubenstein and Ziewacz, *Michigan*, 70-84; "A Brief History," 8-11; and Bruce Catton, *Michigan: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1984): 75-93.

²³⁷ Dunbar and May, *Michigan*, X, 231-303; Rubenstein and Ziewacz, *Michigan*, 30-41, 131-134; Rosentreter, *Michigan*, 200-203.

awakening” Protestant religious revival swept through the nation and, in Michigan, resulted in the social reforms in education, women’s suffrage, slavery, prisons, and care for people with physical and cognitive disabilities.²³⁸ Abolition and expanded religious practices were part of the social reforms of the “second great awakening.” Michigan supported the Union during the Civil War, while their agricultural successes (primarily lumbering) accumulated profits that would be the beginnings of the automotive industry in the state.²³⁹

During the latter half of the 1800s, Michigan’s established economy and culture began to shake. While Michigan and its people suffered, these challenges also created the conditions for a triumphant rebound. Michigan’s population growth stalled as the Civil War directed efforts away from attracting new settlers and poor harvests resulted in the exodus of three million German immigrants. However, historian Roger L. Rosentreter explained that the war was largely had a positive impact on the state’s economy.²⁴⁰ Resource exploitation, including aggressive hunting and fishing, spread without regulations, and dependency on lumbering, industrialization, and increased state population forced Michigan residents to alter their socioeconomic practices, giving rise to the Progressive movement.²⁴¹ At the turn of the century, Michigan adopted new kinds of social reforms including anti-trust laws, child labor laws, and prohibition. At the same time, the state became increasingly industrialized and revolutionized the nation with the invention of the automobile.²⁴² The automotive industry provided positive social and economic change in Michigan lasting nearly three decades before the Great Depression and World War II devastated the state.²⁴³

²³⁸ “A Brief History.”

²³⁹ Dunbar and May, *Michigan*, 338-380; Rubenstein and Ziewacz, *Michigan*, 142-209.

²⁴⁰ Rubenstein and Ziewacz, *Michigan*, 133; Dunbar and May, *Michigan*, 330-331; Rosentreter, *Michigan*, 150-152.

²⁴¹ Rosentreter, *Michigan*, 194-213; Rubenstein and Ziewacz, *Michigan*, 115-129, 157-175, 195-209;

²⁴² Rubenstein and Ziewacz, *Michigan*, 142-156.

²⁴³ The Michigan state government identifies that the lumber industry in the state prompted the expansion of the carriage and wagon industry. The carriage and wagon industry, internal roads, plus “some of the most innovative

The Great Depression and World War II burdened both Michigan industries and the state's residents, creating another storm for Michiganders to weather. The Upper Peninsula's mining and agricultural industries and the Lower Peninsula's industrial sectors were hit hard.²⁴⁴ Many Michiganders were unemployed, the tax system faltered, and in 1933 Governor William A. Comstock ordered the state's banks to close.²⁴⁵ But glimmers of hope were not far away and Michiganders rose to overcome these challenges. The automotive industry bounced back from the economic depression and loss of workers to the war, and Detroit had a series of national wins before automotive production sites were converted to the development of wartime materials.²⁴⁶ Michigan's post-war period saw the development of a two-party political system where the Republican party previously dominated. The state witnessed confrontations over civil rights and labor unions.²⁴⁷ Notably, in the summer of 1967 the city of Detroit erupted into days of uprisings over racial inequities and police brutality.²⁴⁸

These ebbs and flows of progress and deterioration in Michigan continued throughout the remainder of the twentieth century and into the new millennium. While these waves are influenced by a variety of local, state, and national factors, many attribute Michigan's ability to rise again to its people and their tenacity to overcome and improve their conditions. In a 2017 campaign speech, now Governor Gretchen Whitmer stated, "Together we can build the Michigan we believe in, because we still have what we need most—the strength, the talent, the vision and

technical minds of the world" prompted the automotive industry in Michigan. By 1940, 60% of automobiles were made in Michigan, creating a variety of employment opportunities and an economic boost. See "A Brief History," 17-19.

²⁴⁴ "A Brief History"; Rubenstein and Ziewacz, *Michigan*.

²⁴⁵ "A Brief History"; Rubenstein and Ziewacz, *Michigan*.

²⁴⁶ "A Brief History," 19-22. Specifically, Detroit sports teams won national titles and Michigan was named the "Arsenal of Democracy" for its "unparalleled role in fighting tyranny abroad during World War II."

²⁴⁷ "A Brief History," 19-22; Dunbar and May, *Michigan*, 565-593; Dunbar and May, *Michigan*, 381-392.

²⁴⁸ "A Brief History," 22-24; Rubenstein and Ziewacz, *Michigan*, 249-260; Dunbar and May, *Michigan*, 565-593.

the grit of the incredible people of this state.”²⁴⁹ For Whitmer and others, there is something distinctly “Michigan” about navigating through troubling times to come out on top.

Sojourner Truth: Life and Legacy

Due to a variety of factors, there are limited historical records on the life of Sojourner Truth. Additionally, historians and rhetorical scholars of Truth have documented that much of what Americans think they know about Truth is “invented” or rhetorically constructed.²⁵⁰ As such, it is important to distinguish between how Truth exists in public memory and what are agreed upon historical facts. The woman known to the American public as Sojourner Truth was born into enslavement around 1797 with the name Isabella Baumfree in Ulster County, New York. At the age of nine, Isabella was sold away from her parents and by the age of thirty had been enslaved by five owners in an area primarily populated by Dutch farmers and landowners. The Dutch culture of those in the area influenced her language skills, although she never learned to read or write. During this time, she gave birth to five children.²⁵¹ Isabella spent the first 30 years of her life in enslavement until she claimed her freedom in 1826 from John Dumont. Her emancipation came one year prior to an 1817 New York law which stated that all enslaved people born before 1799 were to be set free on July 4, 1827. Dumont claimed he would let

²⁴⁹ Johnathan Oosting, “Democrat Gretchen Whitmer Running for Michigan Governor,” *The Detroit News*, January 3, 2017, Retrieved from <https://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/politics/2017/01/03/gretchen-whitmer/96118884/> (Accessed July 2, 2023).

²⁵⁰ See Painter, “Representing Truth,”; Mandziuk, “Commemorating Sojourner Truth”: 271-277; Nell Irvin Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, a Symbol* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996); Michael Phillips-Anderson, “Sojourner Truth, ‘Address at the Women’s Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio,’” *Voices of Democracy* 7 (2012): 21-46; Kristan Poirot, “Recognizing Sex: Sojourner Truth and Multicultural Anxiety,” in *A Question of Sex: Feminism, Rhetoric, and Differences That Matter* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2014): 22-42; Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, “Agency: Promiscuous and Protean,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 2, no. 1 (March 2005): 8-14; Rosann Mandziuk, “‘Grotesque and Ludicrous, but Yet Inspiring’: Depictions of Sojourner Truth and Rhetorics of Domination,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 100, no. 4 (2014): 467-487; Roseann M. Mandziuk and Suanne Pullon Fitch, “The Rhetorical Construction of Sojourner Truth,” *Southern Journal of Communication* 66, no. 2 (2001): 120-138.

²⁵¹ Painter draws from historical evidence to claim that Truth had five children (Diana, Peter, Elizabeth, Sophia, and a fifth child who is suspected to have died in infancy or childhood). Nell Irvin Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, a Symbol* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996): 19.

Isabella free one year early but broke this promise, resulting in her taking her youngest child to the home of a nearby family who paid for Isabella and her daughter's freedom.²⁵²

If the first third of Isabella's life was characterized by enslavement and emancipation, then the remainder of her life was marked by oration and activism. Following her emancipation Isabella continued to develop the religious beliefs instilled in her by her mother, which would profoundly shape her identity and career.²⁵³ While the form of her religious practices varied, Isabella was insistent that "she had a direct connection with the Holy Spirit."²⁵⁴ In fact, in 1843 Isabella claimed that God had called on her to go east to lecture, "'testifying of the hope that was in her'—exhorting the people to embrace Jesus, and refrain from sin."²⁵⁵ In this "spiritual turning point," Isabella adopted the name Sojourner Truth which reflected the new life she was taking on.²⁵⁶ Michael Phillips-Anderson explains, "Sojourner was a wanderer, spending time in different places, but not making any of them her home. Her choice of 'Truth' as a surname, on the other hand, reflected her total faith in God and the Holy Spirit who spoke to her."²⁵⁷ With a new name and a mission, Sojourner Truth began the life that she is now known for, traveling throughout the nation lecturing on religion, women's rights, and abolition.²⁵⁸ Truth is perhaps most well known for her 1851 speech in Akron, Ohio, popularly known as "Ain't I A Woman."

²⁵² Sojourner Truth and Olive Gilbert, *Narrative of Sojourner Truth: A Northern Slave Emancipated by Bodily Servitude by the State of New York, in 1828: With a Portrait* (Boston, MA: Printed for the author, 1850): 39-43. The first edition of the Narrative was published in 1850 and edited by Olive Gilbert. A second edition was edited by Frances Titus and republished in 1875. Sojourner Truth, Olive Gilbert, and Frances W. Titus, *Narrative of Sojourner Truth; a Bondswoman of Olden Time, Emancipated by the New York Legislature in the Early Part of the Present Century; With a History of Her Labors and Correspondence, Drawn from Her "Book of Life"* (Boston, MA: Published for the author, 1875).

²⁵³ Truth and Gilbert, *Narrative*, 17-18.

²⁵⁴ Margaret Washington, *Sojourner Truth's America* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009): 69-80.

²⁵⁵ Truth and Gilbert, *Narrative*, 101.

²⁵⁶ Here I draw from VanderHaagen's language to describe this event in Truth's life. See VanderHaagen, "Practical Truths," 19.

²⁵⁷ Phillips-Anderson, "Sojourner Truth," 23.

²⁵⁸ Sojourner Truth with Francis W. Titus, "The Narrative of Sojourner Truth, with 'Book of Life' and 'A Memorial Chapter,'" ed. Imani Perry, *Narrative and "The Bok of Life" (1876); "A Memorial Chapter" (1884)* (New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2005): 74.

Her public career gained the attention of Abraham Lincoln, and she worked with other activists of her time including Frederick Douglass and Susan B. Anthony.²⁵⁹

In 1857, Truth moved to Harmonia, Michigan to live with the Progressive Friends spiritual community, where she maintained her activist efforts. Truth continued to fight for abolition, women's rights, and voting rights. During the Civil War, she became an advocate for the Union, "even before the abolition of slavery was clearly stated as a goal of the war."²⁶⁰ In 1867, Truth moved from Harmonia to Battle Creek, Michigan where she continued to campaign for the civil rights of all people. Following the end of the war, Truth traveled within Michigan to speak about temperance, against capital punishment, and argue for the federal government to provide formerly enslaved people with land in what was then the "new West."²⁶¹ She died in her Battle Creek home near her family in 1883.

These limited facts about Truth from historical records are taken up in public memory, transforming and sometimes distorting Truth's life in the process. The significance of Truth's political and legal work is noted by historians and the public alike, yet public remembrances of her vary and serve a variety of purposes. Roseann M. Mandzuik argued that two depictions of Truth have dominated the public imaginary. The first is an image of Truth as a religious pilgrim. In this construction, she "sings hymns, tells the story of her religious conversion" and "has her eyes turned more toward heaven than toward earthly concerns of rights and personhood; hence, she contains little substance of radicalism and change."²⁶² Truth's persona as a religious pilgrim, which was bolstered by Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1863 *Atlantic Monthly* profile "Sojourner

²⁵⁹ Phillips-Anderson, "Sojourner Truth," 24; VanderHaagen, "Practical Truths," 19-20

²⁶⁰ Phillips-Anderson, "Sojourner Truth," 24.

²⁶¹ Truth with Titus, 148; "The Narrative Phillips-Anderson, "Sojourner Truth," 24

²⁶² Mandzuik, "Commemorating Sojourner Truth," 276.

Truth, the Libyan Sibyl,” can be observed in contemporary local commemorations.²⁶³ From 1993 to 1999, discourses in Battle Creek about the forthcoming Truth statue depict her as a “devout servant of both her God and her community,” while the visual choices for the bronze statue erected in 2002 in Northampton, Massachusetts articulate a version of Truth grounded in her “spiritual inspirational symbolism.”²⁶⁴ Both public commemorations circumscribe more radical elements of Truth’s life and position her as a symbol of abstract values.

The second depiction of Truth is that of a fiery orator of strength and resolve whose hallmark was being a “defiant questioner of rights and white supremacy.”²⁶⁵ Often this image is explicitly linked to Truth’s supposed quote “Ain’t I A Woman?” which scholars have compellingly argued is inaccurately attributed but which also drives “the prevailing image of Sojourner Truth.”²⁶⁶ Truth’s defiant persona is evident in the National Political Congress of Black Women’s demands for her inclusion in the “Portrait Monument” in Washington, D.C. In her analysis of these arguments, Mandziuk claimed that the comments of this organization reflect the “contemporary conflict over the composition of national memory and the place of African American women in those recollections.”²⁶⁷ This construction can also be traced in the positioning of the Sojourner Truth African Heritage Museum in Sacramento as a memory institution dedicated to carrying on its namesake’s legacy as a “forceful and passionate advocate for the dispossessed.”²⁶⁸ More recently, the Sojourner Truth Project Committee was approved to

²⁶³ Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kristan Poirot both argue that Stowe’s depiction of Truth in “Libyan Sibyl” contribute to an understanding of Truth using a southern dialect and serving a comic or entertainment purpose for white audiences. See Campbell, “Agency,” 17 and Poirot, “Recognizing,” 26-27.

²⁶⁴ Mandziuk, “Commemorating Sojourner Truth,” 283, 286.

²⁶⁵ Mandziuk, “Commemorating Sojourner Truth,” 276.

²⁶⁶ Phillips-Anderson, “Sojourner Truth,” 34.

²⁶⁷ Donna Haraway, “Ecce Homo, Ain’t (Ar’n’t) I a Woman, and Inappropriate/d Others: The Human in a Post-Humanist Landscape,” in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, Judith Butler and Joan Wallach Scott (eds.) (New York: Routledge, 1992): 86-100.

²⁶⁸ “Learn,” *Sojourner Truth African Heritage Museum*, n.d. Retrieved from <https://www.sojoartsmuseum.org/learn> (Accessed May 23, 2023).

build a plaza in Akron to welcome visitors. Designer of the plaza Dion Harris emphasized a defiant construction of Truth when they stated, “Truth is such a big word. It’s so bold and so concrete. What it stands for is unwavering.”²⁶⁹ Despite the seemingly widespread use of “Ain’t I a woman?” and its grounding for Truth’s defiant persona in memory work, some suggest that this mobilization of Truth’s memory enables only superficial attention to the intersectional oppressions of Black women and Black feminisms.²⁷⁰ At times, this radical persona elides into the angry Black woman trope which some turn away from, while others utilize anger as a mode of resistance.²⁷¹

A thread often underlying the commemoration of Truth is how her memory serves as a symbol of unity. While the National Political Congress of Black Women draws on the question “Ain’t I a woman?” to highlight Black women’s exclusion from history and feminist activities, Donna Haraway interpreted the question as an articulation of “a collective humanity.”²⁷² Specifically, Haraway understands Truth’s supposed question as declaring one’s human subjectivity without settling on a universal construction of what this identity entails. Mandziuk found that commemorations of Truth in Battle Creek and Northampton rendered her a symbol of

²⁶⁹ Jennifer Conn, “Sojourner Truth Project Committee Reveals Preliminary Designs for National Monument in Akron,” *Spectrum News 1*, May 14, 2022, Retrieved from <https://spectrumnews1.com/oh/columbus/news/2022/05/13/sojourner-truth-project-committee-national-monument-in-akron-> (Accessed May 23, 2023). This quote also suggests that Truth is aligned with what is true, in accordance with objective facts. This suggests that this defiant persona is more solidified and desirable than other versions of Truth.

²⁷⁰ See Teresa C. Zackodnik, “I Don’t Know How You Will Feel When I Get Through’: Racial Difference, Women’s Rights, and Sojourner Truth,” *Feminist Studies* 30, no. 1 (2004): 40 and Poirot, “Recognizing Sex.”

²⁷¹ For indications of Truth’s anger see Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, 129, 134; Suzanne Pullon Fitch and Roseann M. Mandziuk, *Sojourner Truth as Orator: Wit, Story, and Song* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, Inc., 1997): 20, 68, 78, 113; For representative discussions of anger as a mode of resistance see Rachel Alicia Griffin, “I AM an Angry Black Woman: Black Feminist Autoethnography, Voice, and Resistance,” *Women’s Studies in Communication* 35, no. 2 (2012), 138-157; D. Sonyini Madison, “Crazy Patriotism and Angry (Post)Black Women,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 6, no. 3 (2009): 321-326; and Audre Lorde, “The Uses of Anger,” in *Sister Outsider* (Berkeley, CA: The Crossing Press, 1984): 124.

²⁷² Haraway, “Ecce Homo,” 82.

unity and tolerance on gender and racial lines.²⁷³ These divergent remembrances of Truth reveal how rhetorical fragments are utilized in the present to serve a variety of purposes.

Rhetorical scholarship on Truth explores the ways her memory and rhetoric are deployed in the present. Public memory scholarship examining Truth has explored her rhetorical construction through public remembrances, visual depictions, children's biographies, and her "Ain't I a Woman" speech.²⁷⁴ This body of literature takes on the rhetorical fragments of Truth's life and their historical inaccuracies to address Truth's contemporary power and interpretations. While some instances of memory work are argued to "potentially equip readers to challenge injustice, change oppressive systems, and embrace their own identities," others are read as attempts to diminish and silence those who challenge power relations.²⁷⁵ Regardless of Truth's multitude of meanings, she largely exists as an abolitionist and women's right icon.

While Truth exists in the public imaginary as an icon, scholars have also noted that how we remember Truth is "invented." Nell Irvin Painter argued that Truth is an "invented great," which are those "known through the agency of others, who have constructed and maintained their legends."²⁷⁶ These figures, including Jesus, Joan of Arc, and Betsy Ross, are more about what they signify rather than their lived existence. Explains Painter: "Truth is consumed as a signifier and beloved for what we need to her to have said."²⁷⁷ Roseann M. Mandziuk and Suzanne Pullon Fitch similarly argued for the "rhetorical construction of Sojourner Truth" to discuss how accounts of Truth transformed her and her life in ways that responded to the

²⁷³ Mandziuk, "Commemorating Sojourner Truth," 281-289.

²⁷⁴ Mandziuk, "Commemorating Sojourner Truth"; Mandziuk, "'Grotesque and Ludicrous,'" 467-487; Sara VanderHaagen, "Practical Truths: Black Feminist Agency and Public Memory in Biographies for Children," *Women's Studies in Communication* 35, no. 1 (2012): 18-41; Phillips-Anderson, "Sojourner Truth"; Campbell, "Agency."

²⁷⁵ VanderHaagen, "Practical Truths," 34; Mandziuk, "'Grotesque and Ludicrous,'" 482.

²⁷⁶ Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, 284.

²⁷⁷ Nell Irvin Painter, "Representing Truth," 480. See also Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, 184-185.

author's goals and the rhetorical context they emerged from.²⁷⁸ These scholars explained that emotional enhancements and the imposition of more brutal experiences by amanuenses transformed her into a mythical figure.²⁷⁹ Poirot further elucidated this point in her statement about accounts of Truth's enslavement saying, "Truth's story, in other words, is forced to fit a predetermined narrative about slavery."²⁸⁰ The invented or constructed nature of Truth in the twenty-first century is significant for two interrelated reasons. First, because of her illiteracy, Truth had limited agency in how she would be remembered in life and death. Accounts of Truth are mediated by editors, "collaborators," and story tellers. Truth's inability to consent to the language used or the accounts of her life made intervening for accuracy challenging if not impossible.²⁸¹ Second, a constructed/invented Truth coincides with public memory's partial and strategic nature. Those remembering Truth in the past and present draw from what can be historically verified, mythical accounts, and historical inaccuracies to accomplish various goals in the present, such as constructing race and region.

While much of Truth's oratorical and activist work was done outside of Michigan, the state remains a significant site of her commemoration. Truth resided in the greater Battle Creek area for 26 years and is buried there in Oak Hill Cemetery alongside family members. During her residence in Michigan, she traveled to cities including Detroit and Saginaw to lecture.

Commemoration of Truth in the state is expansive and ranges from local to statewide memory work. Battle Creek, where Truth resided and died, is a hub for local municipal commemorations

²⁷⁸ Roseann M. Mandziuk and Suanne Pullon Fitch, "The Rhetorical Construction of Sojourner Truth," *Southern Journal of Communication* 66, no. 2 (2001): 120-138.

²⁷⁹ "The Rhetorical Construction," 125-128.

²⁸⁰ Poirot, "Recognizing Sex," 27.

²⁸¹ Phillips-Anderson also notes this in their discussion of the publishing of Truth's Narrative: "While Truth did agree to its publication and sold it as her primary means of support, her very illiteracy made it impossible for her to give a fully informed consent to the language used in the book or any other account of her words." "Sojourner Truth," 29.

in Michigan. One can find a bronze statue of Truth standing on an elevated stage within Monument Park, a mural of Truth that is part of the public art project Color the Creek, Truth's gravesite, a collection at the Battle Creek Regional History Museum, and Truth's footsteps near the meeting house for the Society of Friends (also known as the Quakers) that were preserved in metal.²⁸² Truth's namesake is used for affordable housing neighborhoods in Detroit and was used for a community theater in Saginaw.²⁸³ On a state level, Truth is remembered through a memorial highway dedicated in 2001, recognition of Sojourner Truth Day (November 26), and Truth's representation in Michigan state history curricula. I engage with these local and state-wide remembrances of Truth as an abolitionist to trace how region is rhetorically constructed on racial lines.

Truth the Fortitudinous

Contemporary remembrances of Truth construct her as mirroring the fortitudinous nature of Michigan. I use fortitude as a term to encapsulate how Truth is constructed as courageous and exhibiting mental and moral strength while encountering ongoing systemic oppression and adversity. The Oxford English Dictionary's denotations of fortitude are grounded in strength, including "physical or structural strength," "moral strength or courage."²⁸⁴ Time is an important aspect of fortitude as the second denotation continues, "Unyielding courage in the endurance of

²⁸² Lisa Green, "Living Her Truth: Five Michigan Locations to Trace Sojourner Truth's Legacy," *The Gander*, February 25, 2022, Retrieved from <https://gandernewsroom.com/2022/02/25/5-michigan-locations-to-trace-sojourner-truths-legacy/> (Accessed March 1, 2023).

²⁸³ The Sojourner Truth Housing Projects sought to create affordable housing for an influx of new Black residents escaping the racial violence and inequality of the South and drawn to the economic activity of Detroit. Residential segregation prevented Black families from obtaining public housing and restricted their living to over-crowded areas with higher rent and lower quality homes. White residents protested to building of the Sojourner Truth Homes and harassed Black families awaiting move in. The Equal Justice Initiative reports: "Some were struck with rocks. Police responded by halting the moves and arresting more than 200 Black people and only three white individuals. The new residents were displaced until April, when six Black families moved in under the protection of 2,000 city and state officials." "White Mobs riot Against Racial Integration in Detroit," *Equal Justice Initiative*, n.d., Retrieved from <https://calendar.eji.org/racial-injustice/feb/28> (Accessed May 24, 2023).

²⁸⁴ Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "Fortitude," accessed July 2, 2023, <https://www.oed.com/>

pain or adversity.”²⁸⁵ There are two components of these definitions critical to this analysis. First, fortitude is deeply connected with time, and there is a positive moral evaluation of withstanding adversity or pain. In fact, the examples of fortitude provided in this dictionary suggest that fortitude is rewarded: “The Apostles fleeing God recalled them, and strengthened them with fortitude,” and “Fortitude is a peculiar Excellence of Man.”²⁸⁶ The former example highlights the Apostles’ fortitude to remain true to their promises that they will enter the kingdom of God, while the latter views fortitude as having utility and pay off for weathering a crisis. Second, fortitude does not differentiate between various scales or intensities of adversity, pain, or oppression. This is double-edged sword as it opens space for self or group definitions of these issues but also can flatten vastly different experiences of them. Thus, fortitude recognizes strength and endurance as morally good, promises a reward, and does not ascertain differences in experiences of pain or adversity.

Fortitude is an important value Truth is remembered for and is advanced as an integral part of Michigan’s identity. Public remembrances of Truth characterize her as an exemplar of hard work, determination in the face of oppression, and overcoming obstacles. Truth transformed herself from an enslaved person to a free woman, to influential orator and activist, and a symbol of abolition and women’s rights. Truth is frequently described through her accomplishments and the effectiveness of her activism, which are recognized on national and local registers. Truth is frequently described by Michigan residents as an “icon,” “legendary,” “notable,” heroic” and “famous,” emphasizing her national notoriety, influence of her work on activists of her time and her contemporaries, and her representative nature for abolition and women’s rights activism.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁵ “Fortitude.”

²⁸⁶ “Fortitude.”

²⁸⁷ Gretchen Whitmer, “November 26, 2022: Sojourner Truth Day,” *State of Michigan Office of the Governor*, November 26, 2022, Retrieved from <https://www.michigan.gov/whitmer/news/proclamations/2022/11/26/november->

According to these Michigan commemorations, Truth’s status as a “dynamic voice for abolition and suffrage,” “nationally known as the charismatic speaker for abolition and women’s rights,” and a “gifted orator.”²⁸⁸ Michigan residents identify that Truth’s accomplishments are especially significant because of her illiteracy. For instance, a YouTube video created by the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History in Detroit explains, “Truth’s accomplishments were doubly significant because she was not able to read or write. Her considerable fame rest almost entirely on her speeches, her preaching, and her singing.”²⁸⁹ Truth’s ability to succeed was premised on overcoming race and sex-based oppression that prevented her from learning to read and write, which make her legendary status all the more impressive.

26-2022-sojourner-truth-day (Accessed February 28, 2023); Dillon Davis, “Truth Descendants End Support of Proposed Museum,” *Battle Creek Enquirer*, January 4, 2017, Retrieved from <https://www.battlecreekenquirer.com/story/news/local/2017/01/04/truth-descendants-end-support-proposed-museum/96151176/> (Accessed February 28, 2023); “Home,” *Battle Creek Historical Society*, n.d., Retrieved from <https://hsbcmi.org> (Accessed April 5, 2023); “1883: Sojourner Truth Dies in Battle Creek,” *Michigan Day by Day*, November 26, 2018, Retrieved from <http://harris23.msu.domains/event/1883-sojourner-truth-dies-in-battle-creek/> (Accessed February 28, 2023); Brian McVicar, “Documentary to Feature Grand Rapids Man Who’s a Descendent of Abolitionist Sojourner Truth,” *MLive*, August 11, 2021, <https://www.mlive.com/news/grand-rapids/2021/08/documentary-to-feature-grand-rapids-man-whos-a-descendant-of-abolitionist-sojourner-truth.html> (Accessed February 28, 2023); Kalena Thomahave, “Trump Failed to revive America’s ‘Cereal Town’—Will it Vote for Him Come November?” *The Guardian*, July 14, 2020, Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/jul/14/trump-battle-creek-michigan-election-november> (Accessed March 1, 2023); “Sojourner Truth,” *Michigan Woman Forward*, n.d., <https://miwf.org/timeline/sojourner-truth/> (Accessed April 5, 2023); Nick Buckley, “The Rise and Fall of Harmonia, a Spiritualist Utopia and Home to Sojourner Truth,” *Battle Creek Enquirer*, January 16, 2019, <https://www.battlecreekenquirer.com/story/life/2019/01/16/rise-and-fall-harmonia-battle-creeks-spiritualist-utopia/2214809002/> (Accessed March 1, 2023); Green, “Living Her Truth”; Kevin M. Burton, “The Adventist Truth and Sojourner’s Legacy,” *Lake Union Herald*, December 30, 2022, <https://www.lakeunionherald.org/archive/articles/the-adventist-truth-and-sojourners-legacy> (Accessed March 1, 2023); Ken Haddad, “8 Michigan Women Who Changed History for the Better,” *Local 4+ : Click On Detroit*, March 8, 2022, <https://www.clickondetroit.com/all-about-michigan/2019/03/08/8-michigan-women-who-changed-history-for-the-better/> (Accessed March 2, 2023); Bill Broderick, “Site of First Battle Creek-Area Home of Sojourner Truth discovered at Denso Facility,” *Battle Creek Enquirer*, February 28, 2023, <https://www.battlecreekenquirer.com/story/news/2023/02/28/site-of-first-home-of-sojourner-truth-discovered-at-denso-facility/69937711007/> (Accessed March 2, 2023); “Sojourner Truth Inspires Civic Engagement in Battle Creek,” *WOOD TV8*, February 17, 2019, YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DBrSinMTx3U> (Accessed March 2, 2023).

²⁸⁸ “Meet Sojourner Truth: A Michigan Heroine,” *MLive*, February 2, 2022, https://www.mlive.com/sponsor-content/?scid=174802&prx_t=0UoHAZbZSAoBEPa&ntv_ht=DncIYgA&ntv_fr (March 2, 2023); “Black History Month: Take a Sojourner Truth Tour,” *Calhoun County Visitors Bureau*, February 26, 2020, <https://www.battlecreekvisitors.org/black-history-month-take-a-sojourner-truth-tour/> (Accessed March 1, 2023); “History,” *Battle Creek Michigan*, Accessed April 5, 2023, <https://www.battlecreekmi.gov/377/History> (March 1, 2023); Green, “Living Her Truth.”

²⁸⁹ “Voices of the Civil War.”

In Michigan remembrances, Truth's successes are also often marked by her bravery and perseverance in the face of oppression and danger. The formidable, interrelated obstacles she faced from racism, sexism, and being illiterate were overcome through her determination and courage. These qualities prove to be significant on national and local levels. According to one Battle Creek news article, Truth's fortitude made her a contender for being on the \$20 bill and is an important explanatory mechanism for notable events in her life.²⁹⁰ An online curriculum packet for Michigan educators on Truth notes, "Isabella found out that her son, Peter, had been sold South illegally, and she challenged this because she wanted her son very badly. Isabella was the first black woman to sue a white man and win. This is one of the many demonstrations of her courage and determination."²⁹¹ This account of Truth's feat concretely identifies how racism and illiteracy would seemingly prevent her from reuniting with her son, but she was able to achieve her goals by not giving up and facing intimidating tasks. Director of the Sojourner Truth Institute of Battle Creek Kimberley Holley reflects on Truth's life, "When you think about the time period and who she was, her background, without having any education, what she was able to accomplish just by sheer determination and courage and wit, it's really phenomenal."²⁹² Holley's remark pushes Truth's fortitude further by linking overcoming adversity with evaluating one's circumstances and making strategic choices, despite a lack of formal education. Truth is a "self-made woman."²⁹³ In a separate interview, Holley explained, "She assessed her life experiences,

²⁹⁰ The pool of contenders to be featured on the \$20 bill were evaluated according to two criteria: First, they were on the depth and breadth of their contributions. Second, the obstacles they had to overcome to achieve their goals were considered. See Chuck Carlson, "Imagine Sojourner Truth on a \$20 Bill," *Battle Creek Enquirer*, March 7, 2015, <https://www.battlecreekenquirer.com/story/news/local/2015/03/07/imagine-sojourner-truth-bill/24497623/> (Accessed May 25, 2023).

²⁹¹ Shelly Nielsen, "Sojourner Truth: Mini Unit," *Sojourner Truth Memorial Committee*, n.d., <https://sojournertruthmemorial.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Curricula-Package.pdf> (Accessed March 14, 2023).

²⁹² "Sojourner Truth Inspires."

²⁹³ Broderick, "Site of First." Victoria Ortiz's biography about Truth is even titled *Sojourner Truth: A Self-Made Woman*. See Victoria Ortiz, *Sojourner Truth: A Self-Made Woman* (Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, Inc., 1974).

beliefs, and gifts, and used that combination to advocate for the change she wanted to see in the world.”²⁹⁴ Not being limited by one’s circumstances is a significant aspect of Truth’s legacy and Michigan’s identity.

Telling Truth’s story is a vehicle for writing fortitude onto Michigan and its residents throughout time. Michigan is constructed as already being a locale of bravery and hard work, but Truth’s residence in the state enhanced its fortitude. In Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer’s comments proclaiming February as Black History Month in 2023 she stated, “This February, we celebrate the immeasurable role Black Americans have played in forging a stronger and more equitable future for both Michigan and our nation. From civil rights activist Sojourner Truth to Motown legend Aretha Franklin to our own Lieutenant Governor, Michigan is stronger because of the bravery and vision of Black Americans.”²⁹⁵ Further endowing past white Michiganders with fortitude and creating temporal continuity, Whitmer remarked in her second inaugural address

But what makes a Michigander? It’s not any of those things I just mentioned. It’s our underdog spirit and our championship swagger. We are tough and we never shy away from hard work. Michiganders are competitive. Even if you count us out, look down on us, or fly over us, I promise you: we will defy your expectations. Over the next 4 years we will dig deep and get things done. It’s what Michiganders do. We’ve got some famous ones you may know: A rapper from 8 mile who taught us to lose ourselves in the moment. Sojourner

²⁹⁴ Dan Salerno, “A Conversation With Kimberly Holley, Executive Director, Sojourner Truth Center for Liberation & Justice,” *LifeSomethings, Blogspot*, May 17, 2021, <https://lifesomethings.blogspot.com/2021/05/kimberly-hollysecond-wave-media.html> (Accessed March 23, 2023).

²⁹⁵ Adam Luchies, “Governor Whitmer Proclaims February as Black History Month in Michigan,” *Fox 17 West Michigan*, February 1, 2023, Retrieved from <https://www.fox17online.com/news/local-news/michigan/governor-whitmer-proclaims-february-as-black-history-month-in-michigan> (Accessed May 25, 2023).

from Battle Creek, born into slavery who fought for liberation and women's equality. Her name was legacy— Truth.²⁹⁶

Whitmer's statements create a throughline of fortitude for Michiganders, failing to distinguish the distinct systems of power and oppression that shape one's choices and how we understand them in the present. Truth's enslavement and illiteracy are constructed as the same, or at least similar, to Eminem's struggles to gain credibility in the predominately Black hip-hop music industry. Further, Truth's remarkable accomplishments despite her circumstances are comparable to Eminem's ascension in popularity and wealth. Similarly, Grand Rapids director and creator of the feature-length documentary, "Truth," Lateef Calloway, who lives with epilepsy, commented on Truth's fortitude, "if this woman could accomplish the things she did during them times, there's nothing you couldn't do as far as with epilepsy."²⁹⁷ Stripped from the joining of these two Michiganders are the deep-seated systems of racism and sexism that make their fortitude incomparable.

Whitmer's assertion also creates a temporal orientation of continuity, not just between Truth, a 19th century abolitionist, and Eminem a 21st century rapper, but from Truth's fortitude to that of Michigan's contemporary residents. Temporal continuity constitutes white Michiganders as fortitudinous throughout time and participating in the distinctly Midwestern inevitable march toward progress. In Whitmer's second inaugural address, she later articulated the widespread nature of fortitude in Michigan, "These folks you may know. But there are millions you don't."²⁹⁸ This seemingly universal Michigander trait is echoed in comments that characterize

²⁹⁶ Gretchen Whitmer, "Governor Whitmer's Second Inaugural Address as Prepared for Delivery," *State of Michigan Office of the Governor*, January 1, 2023, <https://www.michigan.gov/whitmer/news/press-releases/2023/01/01/governor-whitmers-second-inaugural-address-as-prepared-for-delivery> (Accessed March 25, 2023).

²⁹⁷ McVicar, "Documentary to Feature."

²⁹⁸ Whitmer, "Governor Whitmers Second Inaugural."

Truth as “human just like the rest of us” and “one of you” according to Michigan Lieutenant Govern Garlin Gilchrist and Holley of the Sojourner Truth Institute.²⁹⁹ Whether Truth is compared to Eminem, struggling with epilepsy, or the average Michigander, fortitude is a celebrated trait and source of local pride. Upon discovering evidence of Truth’s first Battle Creek home on the grounds of the Denso manufacturing facility, Denso manager said, “It’s a proud feeling to know someone of that magnitude once lived here.”³⁰⁰

The foregrounding of fortitude in local and state discourses remembering Truth makes two claims about Michigan’s identity. First, it suggests a temporal continuity of Truth’s life that is inflected with fortitude and how that is an integral part of white Michiganders’ identity as they live out her legacy. Second, it constructs Michigan as a space of meritocracy throughout time wherein hard work and courage will enable one to accomplish any goal. One’s quality of determination directly influences their successes, and no circumstance is insurmountable. This rhetorical move aligns with the colorblind frame of meritocracy, which elides a system of anti-Blackness that we all participate in and places sole responsibility for success/accomplishing goals within the hands of the individual.³⁰¹ This meritocratic way of thinking defends white privilege by denying privileged backgrounds, access to resources, and systematic discrimination. If Sojourner Truth could accomplish what she did, then why can’t you reach your goals?

Truth the Morally Superior

Remembrances of Truth depict Michigan as a progressive space of moral superiority and tolerance. I argue this happens in three ways. First, representations of Truth as virtuous,

²⁹⁹ Autumn Pitchure, “Lt. Gov. Gilchrist Visits Battle Creek to Celebrate Black History Month,” *WWMT News Channel 3*, February 7, 2023, Retrieved from <https://wwmt.com/news/local/lt-gov-gilchrist-visits-battle-creek-celebrate-black-history-month-sojourner-truth-kimball-house-museum> (Accessed March 3, 2023); “Sojourner Truth Inspires.”

³⁰⁰ Broderick, “Site of First.”

³⁰¹ See Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*, 6th ed. (Lanham, MA: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021).

altruistic, and empathic serve as a benchmark for evaluating the virtue of Michigan and its residents. This benchmark reduces morality to individual acts of kindness that evades acknowledging and addressing systemic anti-Blackness. Second, Truth's morality is reflected back onto Michigan residents and forwarded as the motivation for her to move there and as evidence of the state's morality across time. Similar to the synecdochal transfer of purity from Wisconsin (the container) to white Wisconsinites (the contained), Truth's moral superiority functions to define Michigan's identity. Third, Truth is associated with a well-known symbol of moral superiority, the Underground Railroad. By linking her to the Underground Railroad, Truth's morality is bolstered, despite a lack of historical evidence demonstrating a connection to that resistance effort.³⁰²

In local and state remembrances, Truth is distinctly marked by moral superiority that stemmed from her life experiences. As a woman who spent thirty years enslaved before emancipation, Truth was well aware of the barbarities of slavery and the sweetness of freedom. As such, she was not satisfied by her own emancipation. Numerous accounts of her life from Michigan sources note that Truth risked her life to help other escape slavery. The *Michigan Reader*, a book that teachers are recommended to use when teaching Michigan history as part of the state's fourth grade social studies curriculum, claimed, "Ms. Truth helped many people escape to freedom. She was born a slave, so understood the pain and suffering that all slaves felt."³⁰³ Truth's supposed participation as a conductor of the Underground Railroad is motivated by her empathy. The online curriculum packet defines abolitionists as historical agents risking their lives to "bring attention the cruelty of slavery or to help slaves escape to freedom" which

³⁰² See Carleton Mabee and Susan Mabee Newhouse, *Sojourner Truth: Slave, Prophet, Legend* (New York: New York University Press, 1993): 104-115 and Painter, *Sojourner Truth*.

³⁰³ Kathy-jo Wargin, *The Michigan Reader* (Ann Arbor, MI: Sleeping Bear Press, 2001): 63.

notes their courage to do what was right in the face of danger.³⁰⁴ And students are expected to be able to draw explicit connections between Truth, abolition, and morality by responding to the discussion question, “What do the actions of Sojourner Truth tell you about her morals and values?”³⁰⁵ Truth’s lecturing also demonstrates her morality as she faced physical danger when visiting various locations. Her lecture visit to Saginaw is described as brave because it was “an uncommon and potentially dangerous thing for a Black woman to do at the time” according to a local Saginaw journalist.³⁰⁶ In the face of danger, Truth sought to help others by aiding in their quest for freedom, attempting to convince others of the cruelties of enslavement and, as Governor Whitmer stated, “ensure all American benefit from liberty, dignity, and equality.”³⁰⁷ Bravery does not simply a component of her fortitude, but is evidence of her moral goodness as she endures adversity to help others.

Truth’s moral superiority is a salient aspect of her identity that white Michiganders are expected to learn and aspire to reach. This is especially apparent in school-aged children’s educational materials. In the online curriculum materials, teachers are instructed to have their students read “Sojourner’s Song” and “The Underground Railroad” in the *Michigan Reader* and three hypothetical situations, and respond to the question, “What would Sojourner say?” Students are expected to draw from what they learned about Truth’s abolitionist work and the noteworthy traits that guided her activism. The identifiable themes from the three situations are doing the

³⁰⁴ Nielsen, “Sojourner Truth.”

³⁰⁵ Nielsen, “Sojourner Truth.”

³⁰⁶ Heather Jordan, “Michigan Church Where Sojourner Truth Spoke 150 Years Ago is ‘Precious Piece of Saginaw History,’” *MLive*, September 27, 2021, Retrieved from <https://www.mlive.com/news/saginaw-bay-city/2021/03/michigan-church-where-sojourner-truth-spoke-150-years-ago-is-precious-piece-of-saginaw-history.html> (Accessed March 14, 2023).

³⁰⁷ “November 26, 2022.”

right thing even when it is challenging, courage, and empathy.³⁰⁸ A second online curriculum packet focused on Truth and abolition has students read biographical information then respond to open-ended questions including: “Why do you think Sojourner Truth spent all of that time and energy helping other people?” and “If Sojourner Truth was alive today, do you think she would be proud of the way black and white Americans treat each other?”³⁰⁹ These questions urge students to consider Truth’s work as guided by compassion, but they also ask students to consider racism as overt, individual, and easily identifiable acts as well as a two-way street. Further, racism is identified with the overt acts of the past, which Truth would recognize as largely not happening anymore. Elementary aged students are asked to adopt the subject position of an abolitionist who is distinguished by moral goodness: “If you knew you were going to be thrown in jail, would you have helped someone escape from a life of slavery? Explain why or why not?” Moral superiority serves as a mode of problem solving in these education materials as Truth’s moral superiority is a model for students to respond to age-appropriate dilemmas such as being able to “identify a problem in their school or community and take action, so they recognize that they can make a difference as an individual.”³¹⁰ This reduction of Truth to replicable morality brackets anti-Blackness to individual acts that are solvable through kindness, rather than complex systemic race-based superiority noted by the absence of questions prompting systematic thinking.

The second rhetorical maneuver that positions Michigan as a space of moral superiority is how Truth’s distinct morality is reflected back onto the state’s residents during the mid-1800s.

³⁰⁸ Disturbingly, empathy is also the thrust of the suggested activity “Be a ‘Slave for a Day,” in which teachers are prompted to “Somehow mark their cheek or clothing and have them sit on the floor in the back and do not give them any rights for the day.” Nielsen, “Sojourner Truth.”

³⁰⁹ Nielsen, “Sojourner Truth.”

³¹⁰ Nielsen, “Sojourner Truth.”; Kathy-jo Wargin, *The Michigan Reader*.

This is largely done by framing her decision to make Battle Creek her home as motivated by finding like-minded individuals who mirrored her values. The Historical Society of Battle Creek says their city was “known as a welcoming haven for freedom seekers, free thinkers and rebels” and “proud of its progressive past.”³¹¹ Most local accounts report that Truth made Battle Creek her “chosen” or “adopted home,” following her visit to the city.³¹² Characterized as the home she “chose” or “adopted,” it is suggested Truth resided there because she, according to the Battle Creek Historical Society and local journalists was “impressed with the people,” “found a welcoming, tolerant atmosphere in the west Michigan village,” and, simply, “she loved Battle Creek the most.”³¹³ It is also indicated that Truth’s religious values resonated in Battle Creek with the large presence of Quakers and their commitments in social justice causes like abolition. In one article about the village, a local newspaper turned to professor of American religious history Brian C. Wilson who stated, “It attracted people who were more open to kind of liberal ideas and the reform effort.”³¹⁴ Truth’s motivation to lecture in Saginaw is similarly characterized. Of these trips, historian Amy French remarked, “The fact that she’s coming here speak to Saginaw as a culturally rich city. It’s a place that is important... a place that she feels that she wants to deliver her message to. The fact that she comes to Saginaw not once, but twice, says something about Saginaw.”³¹⁵ French’s statement racially codes the city as integrated by indicating it was “culturally diverse,” and classifies it as mirroring Truth’s values of racial equality by describing Truth’s want to return to provide education and spiritual enrichment.³¹⁶

³¹¹ Butler and Neumeyer, “A Brief History.”

³¹² “Sojourner Truth to be Featured on Back of \$10 Bill,” *Battle Creek Enquirer*, April 21, 2016, Retrieved from <https://www.battlecreekenquirer.com/story/news/local/2016/04/21/sojourner-truth-featured-back-10-bill/83337062/> (Accessed March 25, 2023); Carlson, “Imagine Sojourner Truth; “Meet Sojourner Truth”; “Black History Month.”; Butler and Neumeyer, “A Brief History.”; Green, “Living Her Truth.”

³¹³ Butler and Neumeyer, “A Brief History.”; “Green, “Living Her Truth.”

³¹⁴ Buckley, “The Rise and Fall.”

³¹⁵ Jordan, “Michigan Church.”

³¹⁶ Jordan, “Michigan Church.”

Entering statehood free, Michigan maintained a reputation of morality that was bolstered by claims that Truth's chosen home reflected the state's freedom and progressive ideals. In fact, one local journalist described Truth as a "proud Michigander."³¹⁷

Michiganders continue to celebrate Truth's morality and claim that it is a distinct aspect of the state's contemporary identity. On Sojourner Truth Day, Governor Whitmer urges residents to celebrate Truth's life and legacy by "continuing to promote diversity, equality, and community in our state."³¹⁸ White Michiganders are encouraged to symbolically grab the baton of morality that Truth carried and to recognize a direct linkage between themselves, Truth, and racial equality. Whitmer reinforced these state rhetorics of Michigan's superior morality in her second inaugural speech: "That's what Michigan does best: A beacon for anyone who had been counted out or left behind. The embodiment of hope, defined by hard work."³¹⁹ Here Truth's legacy of fortitude and morality converge as the state is described as promising inclusion and success for all... who are willing to work for it (at least theoretically, as I have argued).

Locally, Calhoun County— where Battle Creek is located— residents have recently argued to change the county's name from the namesake of a slaveholding vice president. John C. Calhoun served as the nation's seventh vice president and staunch supporter of the institution of slavery. In 2020, residents vocalized concerns of the county's name and Battle Creek Commissioner Kate Flores argued, "Names matter. Names are symbolism for identity and sense of belonging and what we do value, as well as how we uplift history that aligns with what we value and being accountable for the history that doesn't."³²⁰ While renaming the county in

³¹⁷ Green, "Living Her Truth."

³¹⁸ "Sojourner Truth Day."

³¹⁹ "Governor Whitmer's Second Inaugural."

³²⁰ Samuel L. Robinson, "Controversial Place Names, Monuments Reflect Michigan's Racially Unjust Past," *MLive*, July 16, 2020, Retrieved from <https://www.mlive.com/news/kalamazoo/2020/07/controversial-place-names-monuments-reflect-michigans-racially-unjust-past.html> (Accessed May 25, 2023).

commemoration of Truth is not explicitly suggested, Flores stated, “Her story and her legacy is definitely something I teach my children, and the monument is definitely a point of pride in our community.”³²¹ Jacqueline Slaby of the Battle Creek Coalition for Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation more directly pointed to Truth as inspiration for a new name: “Could Calhoun County be renamed Truth County and what does that say for the people of Battle Creek, for the people of Marshall, Albion, all other communities in Calhoun County, and how would that represent all of us together?”³²² Arguments for renaming the county in Truth’s honor are grounded in how her activism and moral superiority are representative of the county’s residents across time.

Finally, Truth’s superior morality is accomplished by local and regional remembrances linking her to the Underground Railroad— a symbol of morality in the national public imaginary. As a virtuous symbol of abolition and freedom, the Underground Railroad reinforces simplistic conceptualizations of good and evil bounded by region. Black folks seeking freedom from Southern enslavement would travel by the guidance of conductors through the Midwest and Northeast. When providing historical information on Truth’s life, local newspapers frequently identify Truth as a conductor of the Underground Railroad, despite a lack of historical evidence to demonstrate her connection to the freedom network.³²³ One local newspaper explicitly identifies her as a “notable abolitionist and conductor[.]”³²⁴ While most of these accounts evade explicitly linking Truth to the Underground Railroad, they tether her to this national symbol of

³²¹ Robinson, “Controversial Place Names.”

³²² Kyle Mitchell, “Battle Creek Commission Calls for Removal of ‘Calhoun’ Name,” *WOODTV*, June 20, 2020, Retrieved from <https://www.woodtv.com/news/kzoo-and-bc/battle-creek-commissioner-calls-for-removal-of-calhoun-name/> (Accessed May 25, 2023).

³²³ See Mabee and Mabee, *Sojourner Truth*, 26, 104-109, 210.

³²⁴ Chris Jaehnig, “African American Michigan: The War For Freedom,” *The Daily Mining Gazette*, May 17, 2020, Retrieved from <https://www.mininggazette.com/news/features/2020/05/african-american-michigan-the-war-for-freedom/> (March 14, 2023).

moral goodness by talking about her abolitionism in conjunction with the Underground Railroad. Most of these instances note that Battle Creek was an active stop in Michigan and Truth helping former slave who used the network. Thus, Truth's kindness, bravery, and moral superiority converge as she supposedly helped others seeking freedom under the threat of punishment.

Truth the Sanitized

Local and state remembrances of Truth in Michigan depict her life and legacy through a sanitized lens that decontextualizes the conditions of her life and tempers her activism. Rather than what Painter calls a vessel of "timeless black womanhood," Truth's memory is a shell to be filled with the rhetoric of others.³²⁵ More specifically, remembrances of Truth in Michigan extract and abstract pieces of her life to offer a simplistic tale of her life and legacy that is palatable for contemporary Michiganders. The intersectional oppression Truth navigated throughout her life is subsumed by invocations of her that support a simplistic and depoliticized orientation to anti-Blackness. The sterilization of Truth focus on aspects of her life that support themes of unity rather than confrontation of anti-Blackness. Ultimately, Truth's intensity is washed away, and her social and moral legacy is sterilize.

Sanitized remembrances of Truth in Michigan link her to recognizable historical figures with similarly sterilized memories. The fragments examined construct a figurative family tree of activism that not just identify not just who white Michiganders should associate her memory with, but also who she should be distanced from. Truth is often the earliest "ancestor" noted in this lineage of a "broader 'American' past," in which she was the impetus for change.³²⁶ Truth is frequently connected to Rosa Parks, Harriet Tubman, Susan B. Anthony, Martin Luther King Jr.,

³²⁵ Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, 272.

³²⁶ VanderHaagen makes a similar argument about how Truth is linked to Rosa Parks in children's biographies. VanderHaagen, "Practical Truths," 33-34.

and Elizabeth Cady Stanton through abolition, women's rights, or activism more generally, and is often noted as lesser known than these historical figures. Director and creator of the documentary "Truth," Calloway explains

Ninety percent of the people I ask, have they heard of Sojourner Truth? They have no clue. But as soon as I say Rosa Parks they say of course. Harriet Tubman, of course. Martin Luther King Jr., of course. And Sojourner Truth was born before all of them. She was an inspiration to Rosa Parks.³²⁷

Calloway links these notable activists who exist in public memory as reformist icons, two of which with relationships to Michigan. Parks refusal to give up her seat to white passengers on a local bus prompted the Montgomery Bus Boycott and she moved to Detroit in 1957 where she stayed until her death.³²⁸ King's time in the state was much shorter and included the debut of his "I Have A Dream" speech months before the March on Washington and a visit to Grosse Pointe in 1968 weeks before he was assassinated.³²⁹ While there is not historical evidence that links Tubman to Michigan, she is a powerful figure that worked the Underground Railroad which had legs in the state, which Truth is frequently connected to despite a lack of historical verification.

Tubman, King, and Parks are linked by their sterilized and sanctified images in public memory. Leigh Raiford and Renee C. Romano explain that King is remembered as "nonthreatening and harmless by ignoring [his] struggles against poverty, his critique of

³²⁷ McVicar, "Documentary to Feature."

³²⁸ "Rosa Parks: Detroit 1957 and Beyond," *Library of Congress*, n.d., Retrieved from <https://www.loc.gov/exhibitions/rosa-parks-in-her-own-words/about-this-exhibition/detroit-1957-and-beyond/#:~:text=In%20August%201957%20Raymond%20and,to%20Detroit%20in%20December%201958> (Accessed August 8, 2023).

³²⁹ Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-1963* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988): 843; Emma Maniere, "A 'Most Conscientious and Considerate Method': Racial Segregation and Integrationist Activism in Grosse Point, Michigan, 1960-1970," *Journal of Urban History* 0, no. 0 (2022): 1-22.

capitalism, and his attack on American foreign policy.”³³⁰ Instead, King is heralded as a national hero for his nonviolent and integrationist tactics. Parks’ public memory falls victim to Owen J. Drwyer’s contention that in the 1960s civil rights struggle “when individual women are commemorated, they are usually celebrated for their personal courage rather than their organizing within broader social networks.”³³¹ The complex circumstances of Parks’ life and her political motivations are frequently diminished in remembrances of her as an integrationist, and, therefore, nonthreatening figure. Commemorations of King, Parks, and Tubman forward, what historian Clay Carson called, the “Great Man” myth. Dominant narratives about each of these historical figures tell the reductive story of exceptional individuals acting in accordance with American values.³³² For example John Lucaites and Celeste Condit argued that King frequently drew upon “the American Dream” and the “Christian Faith.”³³³ Despite historical evidence, Americans remember King, Parks, and Tubman not for their radical critiques, rhetoric, and actions, but for their personal exceptionalism and alignment of values with white values.

Tethering Truth to the mythologized King, Parks, and Tubman is significant for how it associates her with palatable symbols of reform and how it dissociates her from Black activists we remember as radical. Truth is likened to “good” Black activists who are rendered nonthreatening not through their complex circumstances, rhetoric, and actions, but through

³³⁰ Leigh Raiford and Renee C. Romano, “Introduction: The Struggle Over Memory,” in *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory*, eds. Leigh Raiford and Renee C. Romano (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2006): xviii

³³¹ Owen J. Drwyer, “Interpreting the Civil rights Movement: Contradiction, Confirmation, and the Cultural Landscape,” in *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory*, eds. Leigh Raiford and Renee C. Romano (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2006): 11.

³³² Clayborne Carson, “Martin Luther King Jr.: Charismatic Leadership in a Mass Struggle,” *Journal of American History* 74, no. 2 (September 1987): 448-454; See also Sara C. VanderHaagen’s critique of the “Great Man” approach to rhetorical criticism Sara C. VanderHaagen, “‘A Grand Sisterhood’: Black American Women Speakers at the 1893 World’s Congress of Representative Women,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 107, no. 1 (2021): 16-17.

³³³ John L. Lucaites and Celeste M. Condit, “Reconstructing <Equality>: Culturetypal and Counter-Cultural Rhetorics in the Martyred Black Vision,” *Communication Monographs* 57, no. 1 (1990): 5-24.

extractive mythic greatness. In Michigan remembrances, her mythic greatness is rooted in the fortitude that enabled her to overcome obstacles and a legacy of equality grounded in personal qualities void of power relations and systemic oppression. Like King, Parks, and Tubman, Truth is rendered a “good” Black activist and “good” Michigander because her memory does not threaten whiteness. Truth is strategically distanced from Black activists like Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael who have historical and personal connections to Michigan but are remembered as radical and sometimes hostile toward white Americans.³³⁴ Malcolm lived in Michigan from 1928-1940.³³⁵ Carmichael lectured at the University of Michigan in 1966 and 1983, as well as Michigan State University in 1967 on civil rights.³³⁶ Malcolm and Carmichael’s memories are wrapped in revolution, separatism, and hostility that threatened the power and centrality of whiteness. Truth is distanced from these historical figures with Michigan ties because their activism and memories are tied to centrality of race to equality.

The sterilization of Truth in Michigan remembrances also extends beyond nineteenth century civil rights activists to twentieth century Michiganders. Commemorating the centennial of Michigan’s ratification of the 19th Amendment, which took place one year before the national ratification, Governor Whitmer recognizes “perseverance, dedication, and sacrifice of the

³³⁴ For commentary on Malcolm’s memory see Lisa M. Corrigan, “50 Years Later: Commemorating the Life and Death of Malcolm X,” *Howard Journal of Communications* 28, no 2 (2017): 144-159.

³³⁵ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcom X* [As Told to Alex Haley] (London: Penguin Books, 2001); Rita Kiki Edozie and Curtis Stokes, *Malcolm X’s Michigan Worldview: An Exemplar for Contemporary Black Studies* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2015); Manning Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011); Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Legacy of Malcolm X: Why His Vision Lives on in Barack Obama,” *The Atlantic*, May 2011, Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2011/05/the-legacy-of-malcolm-x/308438/>

³³⁶ “Stokely Carmichael at Podium, Hill Auditorium, 27 September 1966/HS8836, University of Michigan Library Digital Collections, September 27, 1966, Retrieved from <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/b/bhl/x-hs8836/hs8836>; “Black Activist Kwame Toure (L) Formerly Known as Stokley [i.e., Stokely] Carmichael... at the University of Michigan to Discuss Civil Rights at a Forum. Another Civil Rights Leader Roas [i.e. Rosa] Parks (R) has a Lighter Movement with Toure After a Panel Discussion.../UPI Photo, Library of Congress, February 14, 1983, Retrieved from <https://www.loc.gov/item/2015645705>; “Stokely Carmichael Speaks at *Great Issues Lecture Series*, 1967,” Michigan State University on the Banks of the Red Cedar, February 9. 1967, Retrieved from <https://onthebanks.msu.edu/Object/162-565-2325/stokely-carmichael-speaks-at-igreat-issuesi-lecture-series-1967/>

[Michigan] suffragettes before us,” including Truth.³³⁷ Noting that the state ratified the right for women to vote a year before the nation did positions the state and suffragists of the time as progressive and willing to weather formidable obstacles. Whitmer and *Detroit Free Press* reporter Kathleen Gray then connect Truth and other Michigan notables including Michigan’s first female governor Jennifer Granholm, the first Black woman elected to the Michigan House of Representatives Charline Rainy White, and Rosa Parks. By linking Truth with Michigan women who were “firsts” in their field or remarkable in other ways regardless of their identity or area of achievement, Truth’s activism transcends her intersectional oppression and historical circumstances. Truth’s lineage is then extended by Whitmer to women voting in the 2020 presidential election, “it won’t be the so-called ‘angry woman’ demographic who will be decisive. ‘Smart women will decide who the president if the United States is going to be.’”³³⁸ Gray and Whitmer’s statements simultaneously characterize Truth and present-day white Michigan women as “smart” while distancing Truth and Michigan women from more confrontational orientations to political and social issues like of the “angry Black woman” trope.³³⁹ Specifically, Whitmer asks Michigan women to vote rationally, void of emotion, and

³³⁷ Kathleen Gray, “Celebrating Prominent Michigan Women as State Marks 100 years of Women’s Right to Vote,” *Detroit Free Press*, June 11, 2019, Retrieved from <https://www.freep.com/story/news/politics/2019/06/11/michigan-women-voting-rights-prominent-women/1419307001/> (March 14, 2023).

³³⁸ Gray, “Celebrating Prominent Michigan.”

³³⁹ For representative scholarship on the angry Black woman trope see Marsha Houston, “The Politics of Difference: Race, Class, and Women’s Communication,” *Women Making Meaning: New Feminist Directions in Communication*, in Lana F. Rakow (ed.) (New York: Routledge, 1992): 45-59; Brenda Allen, “Black Womanhood and Feminist Standpoints,” *Management Communication Quarterly* 11, no. 4 (1998): 575-586; hooks, “Ain’t I a Woman?”; Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde* (Freedom, CA: Crossing Press, 1984); Olga Idriss Davis, “A Black Woman as Rhetorical Critic: Validating Self and Violating the Space of Otherness,” *Women’s Studies in Communication* 21, no. 1 (1998): 77-89; Joni L. Jones, “‘Sista Docta’: Performance as Critique of the Academy,” *TDR (1988-)* 41, no. 2 (1997): 51-67; “What if I am a Woman?” in *Black Woman in White America: A Documentary History*, Gerda Lerner (ed.) (New York: Vintage Books, 1992); Rachel Alicia Griffin, “I AM an Angry Black Woman: Black Feminist Autoethnography, Voice, and Resistance,” *Women’s Studies in Communication* 35, no. 2 (2012): 138-157; D. Sonyini Madison, “Crazy Patriotism and Angry (Post)Black Women,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 6, no. 3 (2009): 321-326; and Lester C. Olson, “Anger Among Allies: Audre Lorde’s 1981 Keynote Admonishing the National Women’s Studies Association,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 97, no. 3 (2011): 283-308.

working within current system of whiteness, rather than voting for radical change repackaged as hostility, rage, and stubbornness connected to experiences of oppression. “Smart” is racially coded for rationality that bolsters the centrality of whiteness without explicitly identifying it. Like the voters Whitmer attempts to hail, Truth’s memory is deployed void of her experiences with violence, oppression, and discrimination.

Contemporary remembrances of Truth in Michigan universalize her activism for equality by veering away from her radical, intersectional orientation. Instead, Truth is remembered as supporting equality for all without consideration of identity differences that shape movement toward equality that typically mark her activism. This sanitized image of Truth is like claims made by scholars of King who have traced how his memory is often used to argue for racial harmony.³⁴⁰ Close readings of Truth’s speeches by scholars demonstrate that Truth was often at odds with white women who cast Black women as “other,” and Black men who perpetuated patriarchal privilege who gained suffrage before Black women.³⁴¹ Remembrances of Truth in Michigan turn away from these complexities, instead positioning Truth as a symbol of unity that disregards her defiant intersectional questioning of others and systems of domination. In a description of Truth’s statue in Battle Creek, the Arts Council of Greater Kalamazoo described her as “a woman who traveled the Underground Railroad on a mission for humanity, equality and the humane treatment of slaves, women and the poor.”³⁴² This telling falsely links Truth to

³⁴⁰ Michael Eric Dyson, *I May Not Get There With You* (New York: The Free Press, 2000): 14, 46; Travis Smiley, *Death of a King: The Real Story of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s Final Year* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 2016); Edward P. Morgan, “The Good, the Bad, and the Forgotten: Media Culture and Public Memory of the Civil Rights Movement,” in *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory*, eds. Renee C. Romano and Leigh Raiford (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2006): 137-166.

³⁴¹ See Zackodnik, “I Don’t Know”; Poirot, “Recognizing Sex”; VanderHaagen, “Practical Truths”; Mandzuick & Fitch, “The Rhetorical Construction”; Jacqueline Bacon, *The Humblest May Stand Forth: Rhetoric, Empowerment, and Abolition* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2002), 182.

³⁴² “Sojourner Truth,” Arts Council of Greater Kalamazoo, n.d., Retrieved from <https://www.kalamazooarts.org/public-art/sojourner-truth/> (Accessed May 26, 2023).

the Underground Railroad and depicts her activism as oriented toward the issues the enslaved, women, and the poor face but not the underlying systemic orientations that lead to this treatment. Truth is a symbol of the dispossessed but only on a single axis, failing to recognize the significant intersectional experiences that motivated her rhetoric. Further, in this account Truth appears to work within, rather than resist, a white patriarchal capitalist society by arguing for *humane* treatment of various groups of oppressed people grounded in benevolence rather than systemic change. Disembodied portrayals of Truth's activism are made on the bases of sex and race. The Battle Creek government website explains that while Truth resided in Battle Creek she continued to travel, "agitating for human rights for blacks and whites alike."³⁴³ Similarly, Battle Creek native Vivian Laws-Ritter who campaigned to have Truth appear on the \$20 bill in 2015 told a local journalist "but to put her on the \$20 would increase the knowledge and awareness and reinforce the educational component that say this woman really was instrumental in freedom for males and females."³⁴⁴ Here, the systemic oppression of males/females and Black/white Americans are made indistinguishable and the distinct social, legal, and political issues faced by Black women, Black men, and white women are obscured.

Truth's memory also is utilized to make claims of diversity that overlook systemic oppression in favor of racial conciliation. Saginaw resident and pastor of the city's Kingdom of Life Ministries Reverend Alvernis Johnson spoke to a local newspaper about Truth's lectures in the church, commenting "it's important to understand the contributions that were made for not just one people but for all people. Our heart is for unity and diversity so that we can move together because I really believe the only way forward is together."³⁴⁵ Johnson's remarks

³⁴³ "History."

³⁴⁴ Carlson, "Imagine Sojourner Truth."

³⁴⁵ Jordan, "Michigan Church."

decontextualize not just Truth's activism, but also what diversity is and how it is achieved. While diversity and unity are appealing goals, Truth's contributions were, according to Haraway, radically specific, "in other words through the displacements and resistances to unmarked identity" as means of claiming human subjectivity.³⁴⁶ Truth's activism was not about Black women joining the ranks and advancing the positions of white women and white/Black men, but transformative social change that necessitates the complex differentiation and alignment with various groups.³⁴⁷ Likewise, contemporary work toward diversity and racial conciliation requires the careful consideration of Truth's intersectional, dynamic, and strategic alignment and division with others. Ultimately, Truth's doubled critique is lost in the name of unity.

Ain't I A Michigander?

Local and state remembrances of Truth forward a persona not yet discussed by rhetorical scholars: Truth as the Midwestern ideal. In this chapter I argued that Michigan public discourse about Truth accomplishes this by emphasizing the themes of fortitude, superior morality, and reformist confrontation. In the first rhetorical movement, Truth is constructed as overcoming formidable obstacles and not being limited by her circumstances. This fortitude helped elevate her to legendary status and is reflected back onto white Michiganders as a core part of their identity. These discourses position white Michiganders as being able to accomplish their goals through hard work and bravery. While Truth's accomplishments surely are a demonstration of fortitude, this rhetorical move has three concerning implications. First, it reduces adoption of her legacy to hard work and courage while evading historical and contemporary anti-Blackness. Second, it strips Truth's memory of the doubled oppression she experienced in favor of meritocracy that bolsters white privilege.

³⁴⁶ Haraway, "Ecce Homo," 92.

³⁴⁷ See Painter, *Sojourner Truth*; Mabee and Mabee, *Sojourner Truth*.

The second theme, moral superiority, positions Michigan as a space of morality and white Michiganders as virtuous throughout time. This occurs in three ways. First, morality is reduced to individual enactments and kindness that stem from characterizations of Truth's empathy and altruism. Second, Michigan's analogous superior morality emerges as a predetermined frame through which we understand Truth's choice to reside in Michigan. And third, Truth is often discussed in conjunction with a symbol of superior morality in the Midwest—the Underground Railroad. This work connects to and demonstrates her fortitude and willingness to help others escape to freedom in the face of harsh consequences.

The final rhetorical move discussed in this chapter is the construction of Truth as a sanitized activist. Fragments commemorating Truth on local and state levels position Truth as associated with other sterilized Black activists including King and Parks while distancing her from those whose memories are radical and sometimes hostile. Further, Truth's intersectional orientation is tempered through the universalization of her fight for equality. Truth's life and legacy are remembered as disembodied from her experiences as a poor, uneducated Black woman in the United States. Further, her life experiences and rhetoric are decontextualized from her intersectional standpoint and the socio-political climate of Michigan and the rest of the nation. As a sanitized symbol, Truth's memory is circulated in Michigan for contemporary residents to learn from and follow.

These three themes depicting Truth as the ideal Michigander are interrelated in important ways. Truth's fortitude is not just notable but is an important aspect of her morality as she faced danger and obstacles to help others. The individualistic and superficial moral superiority stemming from Truth's memory is embedded in Truth's persona as reformer of the current racial order that reduces anti-Blackness to overt, individual acts. A reformist orientation is connected to

fortitude as persuasion to alter a dominant system necessitates persistent and strategic rhetorical choices. These themes come together to construct Truth as an ideal Michigander, one that others have followed and should follow today. Unlike the defiant “Ain’t I a woman?” persona, this Michigan persona mitigates more radical aspects of Truth to selectively draw on her memory to bolster the state’s, and ultimately, the region’s, distinctly “nice” reputation and exceptional identity.

Chapter Four:

“Find it Here”: Rhetorics of Heritage in Ripley, Ohio

In 2015, the Ohio state tourism department changed its slogan from “Ohio— the Heart of It All,” to “Ohio— Find it Here.”³⁴⁸ The “find it here” campaign was intended to represent the wide range of activities— including microbreweries and theme parks— in Ohio and “conjure up the emotional response” from potential tourists.³⁴⁹ When the slogan began appearing throughout the state, the “it” of “find it here” was questioned. The responses from Ohioans about what “it” represents varied quite drastically:

“‘IT’ is whatever you make of it, after experiencing OHIO!!! Could be Midwestern values, ways. Could be yummy chocolate Buckeyes, could be the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame or the Lake Erie Island. I could go on about ‘IT’ indefinitely.”³⁵⁰

“It is: crippling depression, opioids, rednecks that wave the Confederate flag even though Ohio was a Union state, climate change deniers, people who votes against their own interests.”³⁵¹

“Skyline Chili? Cedar Point? The ‘Hell is Real’ sign?... Pennywise?”³⁵²

“If you have to ask, you’ll never know.”³⁵³

³⁴⁸ “Ohio Tourist Information Centers,” *Ohio History Connection*, n.d., Retrieved from https://ohiohistorycentral.org/w/Ohio%27s_Tourist_Information_Centers (Accessed April 24, 2023); “Tourism,” *Ohio.gov*, n.d., Retrieved from <https://ohio.gov/tourism/> (Accessed April 24, 2023).

³⁴⁹ Laura Hancock, “New Welcome-to-Ohio Signs are Not a Hit Online. What Do You Think?” *Cleveland.com*, January 16, 2019, Retrieved from <https://www.cleveland.com/open/2019/01/new-welcome-to-ohio-signs-are-not-a-hit-online-what-do-you-think.html> (Accessed April 24, 2023).

³⁵⁰ Alissa Widman Neese, “Your Take on What ‘It’ is in Ohio,” *Axios*, August 22, 2022, Retrieved from <https://www.axios.com/local/columbus/2022/08/22/ohio-tourism-slogan-it> (Accessed April 24, 2022).

³⁵¹ Hancock, “New Welcome-to-Ohio Signs.”

³⁵² Alissa Widman Neese and Tyler Buchanan, “What is ‘It,’ Anyway?” *Axios*, August 18, 2022, Retrieved from https://www.axios.com/newsletters/axios-columbus-80d38b28-8e7a-4203-b627-38e824b4ed97.html?chunk=5&utm_term=emshare#story5 (Accessed April 24, 2023).

³⁵³ Neese and Buchanan, “What is ‘It,’ Anyway?”

In April 2023, Ohio governor Mike DeWine proposed to change the state slogan that would focus on “attracting people to Ohio— to work and live,” rather than messaging solely aimed at visitors.³⁵⁴ While the new tagline has yet to be revealed, its purpose will be to convince people to live in or visit Ohio. For DeWine, the messaging of Ohio’s tourism and job development agencies “are the same,” to bolster the claim that “there’s no better place to work and play.”³⁵⁵

Whether in the city or small town, Ohio tourists are likely to find themselves near a station or trail of the Underground Railroad that ran through the state in the early to mid-nineteenth century. Ohio state tourism efforts are centered on outdoor activities and attractions, theme parks, breweries, wineries, sports, and historic attractions. Cities including Cincinnati, Columbus, and Cleveland promise big city amenities while one can also find “charm and comfort” in “distinctive neighborhoods and historic small towns.”³⁵⁶ Charm is often located in the access to a variety of historic sites connected to the abolition movement of the mid-1800s. Historian Wilbur Siebert estimates that 3,000 miles of Underground Railroad routes weaved through Ohio. The Underground Railroad, a network of trails and abolitionists that attempted to move enslaved people north from the American South north and often to Canada, is perhaps the most well-known aspect of the nineteenth-century abolitionist movement. Ohioans and tourists can drive along the trail to visit various historic sites including the National Underground Railroad and Freedom Center in Cincinnati. While this museum engages in memory work on a

³⁵⁴ Jo Ingles, “Changes Likely Coming in the Way Ohio Markets Itself to Tourists and Business Leaders,” *WOSU Public Media*, April 17, 2023, Retrieved from <https://news.wosu.org/2023-04-17/changes-likely-coming-in-the-way-ohio-markets-itself-to-tourists-and-business-leaders> (Accessed April 24, 2023).

³⁵⁵ Ingles, “Changes Likely Coming.”; “Quality of Life,” *JobsOhio*, n.d., Retrieved from <https://www.jobsohio.com/why-ohio/living-here/quality-of-life> (Accessed April 24, 2023).

³⁵⁶ “Tourism.”

national scale in one of the state’s largest cities, Ohio also delivers on its promise to “historic small towns.”

One of these historic small towns is the village of Ripley, located on the Ohio River 50 miles southeast of Cincinnati and boasting a “proud and rich history.”³⁵⁷ The “it” one finds in Ripley includes abolition memory work, water recreation, and hospitality. Situated on the bank of the Ohio River, Ripley served as a significant landing location for freedom seekers and had frequent Underground Railroad activity. Notably, two historic landmarks in Ripley are recognized by the National Park Service: the John J. Parker Home, the home of a formerly enslaved man, inventor, and Underground Railroad conductor; and the home of abolitionist John Rankin are landmarks recognized by the National Park Service.³⁵⁸ Other historic stories of abolition animate the city. A version of the story of Eliza, a woman who fled capture from Kentucky with her baby and landed on the shore of Ripley, is featured in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s popular novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Even Ripley’s founder Colonel James Poage was noted to be strongly opposed to enslavement. Local memory institutions and municipal entities work individually and together to fashion these stories as significant aspects of Ripley’s identity that make it worthy of a visit to the village. The Brown County Chamber of Commerce website assures that visitors will have access to “historical sites of regional and national significance that offer visitors a fascinating step back in time.”³⁵⁹

The use of local stories promises visitors the opportunity to step back in time in Ripley not merely to learn historical fact of the area, but to experience how abolition continues to

³⁵⁷ “Visit Us,” *Village of Ripley*, n.d. Retrieved from <https://villageofripley.com/visit-us/> (Accessed April 25, 2023).

³⁵⁸ “John P. Parker House,” National Park Service, n.d., Retrieved from <https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/underground/oh2.htm> (Accessed April 25, 2023); “John Rankin House,” *National Parks Service*, n.d., Retrieved from <https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/underground/oh3.htm> (Accessed April 25, 2023).

³⁵⁹ “History & Museums,” *Brown County Ohio Chamber of Commerce*, n.d., Retrieved from <https://www.browncountyohiochamber.com/history-and-museums/> (Accessed April 25, 2023).

animate the city. That is, historical and contemporary fragments are curated to relay certain place narratives. The narrative of place from these abolitionist fragments forward strategic constructions of the past that are tied to a common identity. While large-scale and well-resourced historical tourist sites and destinations garner attention from scholars, Shevaun Watson and Cathy Rex contend that “these ancillary sites are no less influential in crafting shared memories of America’s complicated origins and vexed racial relations.”³⁶⁰ These scholars argue that the construction of race took place in common but distinct ways throughout the nation and is therefore deserving of exploration. These sites are also often not as well “groomed,” opening space for “interpretive possibilities.”³⁶¹ Further, heritage as an inherently spatial phenomenon draws attention to the interaction of local, state, regional, and national scales that shape memories and identity in complex ways.

In this chapter I argue that Ripley’s online tourist materials draw on rhetorics of heritage to argue for the village’s distinct commitments to freedom and moral superiority. More specifically, tourism efforts simultaneously construct Ripley as a site of unimpeded freedom guided by superior morality through the narratives of local abolitionists, contemporary residents, the natural landscape, and the built environment. These distinctive qualities exhibit a temporal continuity as freedom and superior morality are inherited by contemporary residents from prominent abolitionists. Overall, I demonstrate how rhetorics of heritage characterize abolition activities as directly passed to contemporary Ripley and its residents, thereby constructing freedom and superior morality as inherent aspects of the town. As a departure from the ordinary or an opportunity to connect with one’s roots, heritage tourism in Ripley promises tourists

³⁶⁰ Shevaun E. Watson and Cathy Rex, “New Directions for Research: Bringing Together Public Memory, Early America, and Tourism Studies,” in *Public Memory, Race, and Heritage Tourism of Early America* eds. Shevaun E. Watson and Cathy Rex (New York: Routledge, 2021): 14.

³⁶¹ Watson and Rex, “New Directions.”

exemplary enactments of freedom and morality that are tangible and can be experienced if one travels to the village. I conclude by discussing the implications of rhetorics of heritage in contemporary stories of abolition in Ripley.

This analysis examines twenty-four texts representative of tourist efforts in and around Ripley: fourteen webpages, four local newspaper articles, one local speech, two government documents, and two brochures. I do not analyze tourism *per se* in Ripley, but rather promotional materials working to persuade potential visitors that Ripley is a desirable location to travel to and the promises made if they visit. My analysis reads across these various texts to identify Ripley's place narrative, identifying and analyzing how the village is constructed as spatially and temporally distinct. I attend to these aspects by considering how tourist materials construct and reinforce local and regional narratives and ideologies by drawing on historical figures, events, the built environment, and the natural landscape. I also examine these texts for how heritage is constituted as not simply historical remembrance, but as instilling the distinctness of freedom and moral superiority into Ripley and its residents in the past and how they are inherited by the town and its people today. Further, I consider how these rhetorics of heritage articulate identity on multiple scales of space and how they belie contesting accounts of the past and present.

Heritage, Tourism, and Heritage Tourism

Heritage tourism is continuing to grow as a diverse body of scholarship within the social science, hospitality management, and humanities. While Watson and Rex noted a "relative dearth of humanities-focused research on cultural, historical, and heritage forms of travel," rhetorical scholars are more seriously looking to heritage tourism, and tourism more generally, as critical site of inquiry. A significant issue with this area of study is the blurry definitions of heritage, tourism, and heritage tourism. In this case study, I conceptualize heritage as a "species"

of rhetoric that claims a direct passing of an identifiable, unchanging substance to people within constructed spatial boundaries. Rhetorics of heritage are constitutive of and certify group identity which shape one's relationship with the past and present.

In its most basic sense, heritage is defined legally and identifies how property is transferred from one party to another. The Oxford English Dictionary defines heritage as, "That which has been or may be inherited, and esp. land, which devolved by right of inheritance devolves by right of inheritance."³⁶² This invokes the inheritance of wealth, property, and objects and is commonly connected to familial lineages using terms including "ancestors," "heredity succession," and "heir" in subsequent definitions. This "formerly precise legal term" has expanded to "include almost any sort of intergenerational exchange or relationship, welcome or not, between societies, as well as individuals."³⁶³ Biologically, heredity refers to how living organisms transmit biological characteristics to their offspring and subsequent descendants. For instance, a hereditary disposition to breast cancer influences medical professionals' screening and follow-up recommendations for patients.³⁶⁴ Abby Lippman suggested that contemporary discourse on genetics encourages people to see the inheritance of genes as deterministic of all facets of our lives.³⁶⁵ Expanded understandings of heritage also include cultural traits like beliefs, values, language, and religion. Explanations of racial/ethnic heritage bring together both biological and non-biological traits but identifying shared ancestry and cultural practices. The concept of racial/ethnic heritage have been used to justify racial hierarchies through stereotypes,

³⁶² Oxford Dictionary Online, "Heritage," s.v. accessed June 28, 2023.

³⁶³ Brian Graham, Greg Ashworth, and John Tunbridge, "Introduction: Heritage and Geography," *A Geography of Heritage* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2000): 1.

³⁶⁴ Stacey Shiovitz and Larissa. A. Korde, "Genetics and Breast Cancer: A Topic in Evolution," *Annals of Oncology* 26, no. (2015): 1291-1299.

³⁶⁵ Abby Lippman, "Prenatal Genetic Testing and Geneticization: Mother Matters for All," *Fetal Diagnosis and Therapy* 8, no. (suppl.)1 (1993): 175-188. See also Celeste Michelle Condit, *The Meanings of the Gene: Public Debates About Human Heredity* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1999).

prejudice, and eugenics. In any formulation of heritage, some sort of relationship to the past is identified.

Surveying the research on heritage, I draw four interrelated conclusions about the terms. First, heritage is a selective representation of the past shaped by present concerns. Heritage includes of tangible assets (cultural and natural environments, landscapes, historic places and sites, and the built environment and intangible assets (customs, traditions, collections, knowledge, and experiences) that are valued and imbued with meaning based on contemporary perspectives.³⁶⁶ Geographers Brian Graham, Greg Ashworth, and John Turnbridge explained, “Like language, [heritage] is one of the mechanisms by which meaning is produced and reproduced.”³⁶⁷ And these perspectives are multivocal, sometimes oppositional, and processual, resulting in the existence of conflicting meanings. Anthropologist Celeste Ray explained that heritage is “continually evolving and creative selection and generalization of memory that blends historical ‘truths’ with idealized simulacra on the individual and collective level.”³⁶⁸ Representations are often visual but can also be constructed through smell, taste, and touch. Ultimately, heritage is something we “do” rather than receive. My concern with this aspect of heritage is that it so closely aligned with public memory that the two are indistinguishable. In fact, Shevaun Watson and Cathy Rex claim, “Heritage, then, is nearly indistinguishable, from

³⁶⁶ Kelli Ann Costa, *Coach Fellas: Heritage and Tourism in Ireland* (Walnut Creek: Taylor & Francis Group, 2009): 36.

³⁶⁷ Graham, Ashworth, and Tunridge, *A Geography*, 2.

³⁶⁸ Celeste Ray, “Introduction,” in *Southern Heritage on Display: Public Ritual and Ethnic Diversity Within Southern Regionalism*, ed. Celeste Ray (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama, 2003): 3. In the same vein, Historian David Lowenthal contends that “heritage is not history at all; while it borrows from and enlivens historical study, heritage is not an inquiry into the past but a celebration of it, not an effort to know what actually happened but a profession of faith in the past tailored to present-day purposes.” David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoil of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): x.

cultural memory practices.”³⁶⁹ If heritage is conflated with cultural/public memory, then the rhetorical functions of the term are lost.

Second, heritage is a spatial matter. Heritage is bound to a particular place and each locale makes claims about the uniqueness of their own heritage. Historian David Lowenthal observed, “Each people supposes their newly inflated heritage concerns to be unique, reflecting some trait or character or circumstance, some spirit of veneration or revenge that is particularly their own.”³⁷⁰ As a spatial concept, heritage is concerned with location, distribution, and scale. Location draws together space, history, and time by asking where is heritage located and why is it there? Heritage inherently forwards spatio-temporal continuity through the transmission of assets. Sites of heritage function through continuity by “virtue of retaining and displaying the inscribed traces of rhythmic repetition of routines in time and space.”³⁷¹ Distribution distinguishes spaces through heritage. That is, some places will have similar heritage—such as regions like the Midwest—while other places have different heritage. Additionally, people can move heritage across space, changing its meaning. Scale indicates how heritage functions on local, state, regional, national, and international and the social relations constructed between them. Scales are selective social constructions, selective that shape the way we understand heritage, the past, and the present.³⁷² Finally, heritage is spatial in how tourists interact with assets. That is, scholars are concerned the materiality of how visitors bodies are located in

³⁶⁹ Watson & Rex, “New Directions for Research,” 11.

³⁷⁰ Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade*, 4.

³⁷¹ Rob Shields, “Political Tourism: Mapping Memory and the Future of Québec City,” in *Mapping Tourism*, eds. Stephen P. Hanna, Vincent J. Del Casino Jr (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003): 1-27.

³⁷² See Eric Sheppard and Robert B. MacMaster, “Introduction: Scale and Geographic Inquiry,” in *Scale and Geographic Inquiry: Nature, Society, and Method* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2008): 15 and Leslie Harris, “Rhetorical Mobilities and the City: The White Slavery Controversy and Racialized Protection of Women in the U.S.,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 104, no. 1 (2018): 22-46.

particular spaces and with what effects.³⁷³ Greg Dickinson, Brian L. Ott, and Eric Aoki explained that places of public memory are best understood as diffuse texts embedded in broader contexts, “experiential landscapes,” that focus critical attention on how visitors “experience, understand, and use the actual space.”³⁷⁴

Third, heritage constitutes identity. The use of the past for present concerns, including guidance, enrichment, escape, and familiarity becomes a validating force of people’s sameness. It calls into being a way of understanding oneself and others. Put another way, “the past validates the present through the idea of timeless values and lineages, and by restoring what are held to be lost or subverted values.”³⁷⁵ Heritage constitutes identity through connections to place that differentiate “someone’s heritage” and therefore “not someone else’s,” and temporally as it is suggested one can look to the past to tell them who they are.³⁷⁶ The production and reproduction of heritage creates particular spatio-temporal relationships as heritage assets are “tools for stewards and visitors to enact— or act against— particular notions of ‘us.’”³⁷⁷ Constructions of identity are always shaped various scales of place, as scholars have noted how local, state, and regional heritage interact with national identity in complex ways.³⁷⁸

³⁷³ Carole Blair, “Reflections on Criticism and Bodies: Parables from Public Places,” *Western Journal of Communication* 65, no. 3 (2001): 247-278; Victoria J. Gallagher, “Memory as Social Action: Cultural Projection and Generic Form in Civil Rights Memorials,” in *New Approaches to Rhetoric*, eds. Patricia A. Sullivan and Steven R. Goldzwig (2004): 162.

³⁷⁴ Greg Dickinson, Brian L. Ott, and Eric Aoki, “Spaces of Remembering and Forgetting: The Reverent Eye/I at the Plains Indian Museum,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 3, no. 1 (March 2006): 29.

³⁷⁵ Graham, Ashworth, and Tunridge, *A Geography*, 40.

³⁷⁶ J. E. Tunbridge and G. J. Ashworth, *Dissonant Heritage: The Management of the Past as a Resource in Conflict* (Chichester: Wiley, 1996): 21. See also Yaniv Poria and Gregory Ashworth, “Heritage Tourism— Current Resource for Conflict,” *Annals of Tourism Research* 36, no. 3 (2009): 524.

³⁷⁷ Erica T. Lehrner, “Introduction: Poles and Jews: Significant Others,” in *Jewish Poland Revisited: Heritage Tourism in Unquiet Places* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013): 11.

³⁷⁸ See Dickinson, Ott, and Aoki, “Spaces of Remembering”; Tunbridge and Ashworth, *Dissonant Heritage*; Costa, *Coach Fellas*; M. Elizabeth Weiser, *Museum Rhetoric: Building Civic Identity in National Spaces* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2017); Vanessa B. Beasley, *You, the People: American National Identity in Presidential Rhetoric* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2011); and Nicole Maurantonio, “Material Rhetoric, Public Memory, and the Post-It Note,” *Southern Journal of Communication* 80, no. 2 (2015): 83-101.

Third, the constitution of identity in the production of heritage is always inflected with power. The curation, valuation, and circulation of heritage as a selective representation often serves dominant groups and hierarchal social relations including race/ethnicity, gender, religion, language, and sexuality. The production of heritage legitimizes particular ways of seeing the world and divisions of “us” and “them.” While we often connect heritage to race/ethnicity, my conceptualization of heritage does not inherently reference this aspect of identity. When heritage is used to evoke racial/ethnic identity, whether to claim or distance oneself or others from a particular racial/ethnic identity, agency is exercised. Thomas Nakayama and Krizek argued that the white, European ethnicity is commonly not named, as some rejected its centrality to their social location and others did not find “want to use their ethnicity as an anchoring point for their identity.”³⁷⁹ Further, the recognition of this European heritage is often stripped of the recognition of its imbedded power relationships. These discursive moves render whiteness invisible, while maintaining its position of power. In this case study, heritage is produced through rhetorics of freedom and moral superiority which are coded discourses of whiteness.

One can learn and experience one’s own and others’ heritage through tourism. Ginny Cass and Shannon Furniss explained that the basic idea of heritage tourism is that “communities identify their historical and cultural resources and then develop these resources with the intent of sharing them with travelers.”³⁸⁰ Scholars have established that tourism, of any kind, is not merely a commercial or leisure activity, but a powerful ideological practice. This insight was facilitated by the development of three key components of tourism. First, scholars resist characterizations of tourists as “shallow, gullible seekers of entertainment, banal, loud, naïve, and most damning of

³⁷⁹ Nakayama and Krizek, “Whiteness,” 301.

³⁸⁰ Ginny Cass and Shannon Furniss, “Heritage Tourism: Montana’s Hottest Travel Trend,” *Montana Business Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (1998): 21.

all uncultured,” instead viewing them as active, co-producers of meaning that should be valued.³⁸¹ The specificities of the term tourist remain a contested.³⁸² I define tourism as the temporary and chosen act to depart from one’s ordinary life to learn about and/or experience something different or to reconnect with one’s past by moving through space.

Second, and as my definition indicates, tourism is “rooted in the projected or desired departure from the ordinary” that requires the coordination of natural and built environments, narratives, ideologies, material performances, and other discourses to invite tourists to experience “someone else’s everyday life.”³⁸³ Kristan Poirot and Shevaun Watson highlight the rhetorical nature of tourism by drawing from Athinodoros Chronis’ conceptualization of “tourism imaginaries” which they identify as the process in which diffuse fragments cohere to construct and maintain an image of place that accomplish particular goals.³⁸⁴ In particular, tourism imaginaries bring together the real and imagined (or created) to attract visitors to a locale and sell the locale as distinctive. While Chronis’ theorizing exclusively explores marketing attempts, Poirot and Watson argue that tourism imaginaries cannot be reduced to the built environment, governmental regulations, and marketing but should include the multitude of ways tourist venues construct and maintain place narratives.³⁸⁵ For tourist destinations engaging in

³⁸¹ Laurajane Smith argues that these depictions of tourists hinder the legitimacy to those studying tourists and fails to recognize how touristic performances can be transformative and co-constructed processes.

³⁸² For example, anthropologist Joy Sather-Wagstaff uses tourist to describe people pursuing leisure activities away from their everyday environment and experience, rhetorical scholar Phaedra Pezzullo opts to define the act of tourism as “the traveling from place to place, in sequence.” Joy Sather-Wagstaff, *Heritage That Hurts: Tourists in the Memoryscapes of September 11* (New York: Routledge, 2011): 28; Phaedra C. Pezzullo, *Toxic Tourism: Rhetorics of Pollution, Travel, and Environmental Justice* (Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 2007): 26.

³⁸³ Carole Blair, Greg Dickinson, and Brian L. Ott, “Introduction: Rhetoric/Memory/Place,” in *Places of Public Memory: The Rhetoric of Museums and Memorials*, eds. Greg Dickinson, Carole Blairs, Brian L. Ott (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2010): 26; Pezzullo, *Toxic Tourism*, 36; Daniel R. Maher, *Mythic Frontiers: Remembering, Forgetting, and Profiting with Cultural Heritage Tourism* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2016): 23; See also Kristan Poirot and Shevaun Watson, “Memories of Freedom and White Resilience: Place Tourism, and Urban Slavery,” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 45, no. 2 (2015): 91-116.

³⁸⁴ Athinodoros Chronis, “Between Place and Story: Gettysburg as Tourism Imaginary,” *Annals of Tourism Research* 3, no. 4 (2012): 1797-1816.

³⁸⁵ Poirot & Watson, “Memories of Freedom,” 100.

memory work, often called heritage tourism, place narratives are grounded in selling a locale as historically significant and distinctive through “specific stories and identifications.”³⁸⁶

Fourth, tourism serves constitutive functions. While tourism imaginaries rely on the historical significance of a locale, they are simultaneously place-making technologies that transform spaces.³⁸⁷ Keith Basso describes place-making as “retroactive world-building” that both draws on and constructs history.³⁸⁸ Place-making constitutes identities as it creates frameworks through which to see and interact in the world.³⁸⁹ The inventing of the past crystalizes its guiding ideologies and informs individual and group identities. Further, as a place-making technology, tourism imaginaries “saturate, contour, and circumscribe memories and available resources for visitors” to think and act differently. Although tourism imaginaries are constructed to attract visitors to a destination, this memory practice also is a powerful resource for residents to construct and assert their collective identities.

More generally, tourism is an economic enterprise. On a basic level, tourists purchase their experiences through tickets, in addition to transportation, lodging, food, and other services. In 2021, despite the global COVID-19 pandemic, the United States’ tourism output was \$987.7 billion.³⁹⁰ Tourism also contributes to local and national economies by creating revenue streams, creating jobs, and contributing to economic development. However, tourism also necessitates capital on two scales. First, tourist activities and destinations require economic investment to

³⁸⁶ Poirot & Watson, “Memories of Freedom,” 100.

³⁸⁷ Poirot & Watson, “Memories of Freedom”;

³⁸⁸ Keith H. Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1996): 5

³⁸⁹ Theresa Ann Donofrio, “Ground Zero and Place-Making Authority: The Conservative Metaphors in 9/11 Families’ ‘Take Back the Memorial’ Rhetoric,” *Western Journal of Communication* 74, no. 2 (2010): 153; Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, 7; Jessie Stewart and Greg Dickinson, “Enunciating Locality in the Postmodern Suburb: FlatIron Crossing and the Colorado Lifestyle,” *Western Journal of Communication* 72, no. 3 (2008): 290-307.

³⁹⁰ Sarah Osborne, “U.S. Travel and Tourism Satellite Account for 2017-2021,” *The Bureau of Economic Analysis*, February 9, 2023, Retrieved from <https://apps.bea.gov/scb/issues/2023/02-february/0223-travel-tourism-satellite-account.htm> (Accessed April 26, 2023).

build, renovate, preserve, and staff. Second, being a tourist presumes that one can afford to travel (the cost of travel and freedom of taking off work), has the energy to travel, and has the desire to travel.³⁹¹ This marks tourism with power as having the resources and ability to be mobile are requirements for participating in tourist activities.

Heritage and tourism converge in their rhetorical and economic operations. Heritage assets are curated and orchestrated for a desired effect, in the process commodifying education and experience. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett makes a similar argument that heritage and tourism have a collaborative relationship as, “heritage converting locations into destinations and tourism making them economically viable exhibits of themselves[.]”³⁹² Heritage tourism necessitates the transformation of tangible and intangible heritage assets into commodities, used to accomplish various goals.³⁹³ Building off the concept of tourism imaginaries, heritage tourism is understood as the practice and experience in which heritage assets are carefully curated and shaped to construct and maintain a distinct place-based identity. Heritage tourism constitutes identity, shapes visitors understanding of the past and present, reinforces or resists power relations, and produces economic advantages. But what does it mean to claim heritage? What are the implications of identifying and coordinating assets as part of one’s heritage?

To begin answering these questions, I argue that we should consider heritage as a form of rhetoric. Rhetorics of heritage indicate the direct and inevitable passing of a substance from the past. I use substance in the Burkean sense to identify how values and belief are passed along spatial lines to people in the present in ways that mirror biological thinking.³⁹⁴ That is, the

³⁹¹ Pezzullo, *Toxic Tourism*, 37.

³⁹² Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Heritage*

³⁹³ Hilary du Cros and Bob McKercher, *Cultural Tourism*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2014): 8; Poria and Ashworth, “Heritage Tourism,” 523.

³⁹⁴ This could be understood as an extension of intangible heritage assets.

substance is identifiable, static, and directly passed to successors occupying the same space in a different time. To claim heritage is to be consubstantial on spatial lines and it becomes a mode for thinking and acting in the world. Rhetorics of heritage are deterministic in their orientation to the world, thwarting alternative accounts of the past and present and making tangible and intangible heritage assets explainable through the transmitted substance.³⁹⁵ The deterministic nature of heritage is evident in Kelly Happe's research on the Human Genome Project as she treats "heredity" as a scientific and political concept in which pathologies of the body are "inherited at birth and immune to change."³⁹⁶ For Happe, heredity operates as an ideological mode of thinking that constructs the body as fixed and absolves other factors that contribute to cancer risk. Rhetorics of heritage are also authoritative because of claims to have access to the same substance ancestors of the past had. Consubstantiality suggests intrinsically "authentic" understandings of history and collective identity that can be shared with tourists.³⁹⁷

Rather than being concerned with the authenticity of heritage assets, I am concerned with how discourses of heritage wield power by claiming a pure, uncontaminated substance has been passed through time. Authenticity can be an inventive resource for refutation that bolsters dominant perspectives and nostalgia, but it can also be a powerful resource for reclamation. For example, Badia Ahad Legardy argues that food production and consumption can be an avenue

³⁹⁵ This conceptualization is similar to Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's "invented tradition." Hobsbawm defines this term as "taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past." Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," in *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983): 1.

³⁹⁶ Kelly E. Happe, *The Material Gene: Gender, Race, and Heredity After the Human Genome Project* (New York: New York University Press, 2013): 7.

³⁹⁷ For references of authenticity in studies of heritage tourism see Cass and Furniss, "Heritage Tourism"; Graham, Ashworth, and Tunbridge, "A Geography"; Graham M. S. Dann and A. V. Seaton, "Slavery, Contested Heritage and Thanatourism," *International Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Administration* 2, no. 3-4 (2001), 1-29; Amy E. Potter, Stephen P. Hana, Derek H. Alderman, Perry L. Carter, Candace Forbes Bright, and David L. Butler, *Remembering Enslavement: Reassembling the Southern Plantation Museum* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2022); Lehrer, *Jewish Poland Revisited*.

for African Americans to connect with their African heritage. Specifically, Ahad Legardy contends that culinary experiences around a shared heritage can be “contextualized within a larger political tradition of black resistance to white hegemony[.]”³⁹⁸ Food production and consumption can connect African Americans with the black radical consciousness,” “the relationship between food choices and cultural pride,” and subjectivity.³⁹⁹ Further, Patricia Davis’ *Laying Claim* exemplifies how heritage can be resistive. Davis does this by developing a distinct African American Southern identity that “broadens the discursive contours of southern heritage.”⁴⁰⁰ Thus, rhetorics of heritage are not inherently negative.

My theorization of heritage stems also from E Cram admonition that rhetorical scholars resist simplistic identifications of inheritance as a classification of regulations, but rather as a “species of rhetoric and a public vocabulary for the negotiation of public memory.”⁴⁰¹ Particularly, heritage marks “an imagined relation to the past that *also* invites particular action in the present” and negotiates belonging (emphasis original).⁴⁰² Cram’s thinking about heritage elucidates how claims of heritage are always rhetorical and serve the present. By developing rhetorics of heritage as a species, scholars can consider how agents in the present make claims to heritage and to what ends. In the case of Ripley, Ohio, rhetorics of heritage are used to endow the village and its residents with commitments to freedom and moral superiority across time. Tourists are promised to learn about these values and experience them by moving through various spaces in Ripley.

³⁹⁸ Badia Ahad-Legardy, *Afro-Nostalgia: Feeling Good in Contemporary Black Culture* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2021): 117

³⁹⁹ Ahad-Legardy, *Afro-Nostalgia*, 127.

⁴⁰⁰ Patricia Davis, *Laying Claim: African American Cultural Memory and African American Southern Identity* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2016), 11.

⁴⁰¹ E Cram, *Violent Inheritance: Landscape, Memory, Materiality, and Queer Feelings in the Rocky Mountain West*, Ph.D. diss., (Indiana University, 2015): xiv

⁴⁰² E Cram, *Violent Inheritance: Sexuality, Land, and Energy in Making the North American West* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2022): 15; Cram, *Violent Inheritance* (diss), xiv, 111.

Freedom in Ripley's Tourism Imaginary

Ripley's tourist imaginary is marked by claims that commitments to freedom are an integral part of the village's heritage. Ripley's distinct relationship to freedom lays in how memory fragments are coordinated to depict the village as in sharp contrast to space across Ohio's southern border and how residents came together to resist the ensure that all people found freedom. While legal freedom was a backdrop for other Northern locales, white Ripley residents are represented as having actively fought for the freedom of all people in the nation. Almost all memory fragments about abolition in Ripley opened by discussing the village's freedom since founding and how white abolitionists fought to preserve this piece of heritage. Freedom was marked in this basic, sense but also in the more complex coalescing of fragments that trace the direct passing of freedom from generation to generation.

In tourist materials, a narrative of freedom marks Ripley's past and present. Ripley's origin story identifies that the land of Ripley has an inherent and created quality of freedom that attracted abolitionists. According to Touring Ohio's "Ripley" page, European settlers were drawn to the area's abundant wildlife, proximity to the Ohio River, and timber that could be used to build various structures.⁴⁰³ Colonel James Poage served honorably in the war but was not drawn to the area simply because of the land grant provided to Virginia's Revolutionary war veterans. The webpage states that Poage, a former enslaver owner who had come to abhor enslavement and its effects was attracted to Ohio because it entered statehood free.⁴⁰⁴ Anti-slavery became an integral part of the town Poage founded, Staunton, which would eventually be

⁴⁰³ "Ripley," *Touring Ohio: The Heart of America*, n.d., Retrieved from <http://touringohio.com/southwest/brown/ripley.html> (Accessed May 10, 2023).

⁴⁰⁴ "Ripley"; Brown County," *Touring Ohio: The Heart of America*, n.d., Retrieved from <http://touringohio.com/southwest/brown/brown-county.html> (Accessed May 10, 2023). See also Judge Thomas F. Zachman, "Ripley Bicentennial Opening Program Speech," *Historic Ripley Ohio*, n.d., Retrieved from <http://www.ripleyohio.net/htm/keepers.htm> (Accessed May 10, 2023)

renamed Ripley. The beliefs of Poage, as stated by the Touring Ohio webpage, were well known and “became a magnet for like-minded individuals,” mirroring the constructed relationship between Sojourner Truth and Battle Creek, Michigan.⁴⁰⁵ Poage’s founding of what is now Ripley is explained by the Touring Ohio website as “the beginning of a long history of Ripley becoming a gateway on the Underground Railroad.”⁴⁰⁶ In this narration, tourists learn that freedom was embedded into the land of Ohio since statehood and that Ripley’s early settlers were attracted to the area because of this principle. While Poage’s founding serves as a beginning point for Ripley, the community’s name changed in 1816 functions as a bookend. When Poage and residents discovered the name Staunton was already the name of a town in the state, they renamed the town Ripley after in honor of War of 1812 veteran General Eleazer Wheelock Ripley. The development of Ripley in name and community was the catalyst that the “Ripley” webpage contends “began a long journey that would ultimately come to fruition with the end of slavery in the United States.”⁴⁰⁷ Both bookends identify freedom as an intrinsic quality of Ripley and its residents and mark their commitment to freedom as the impetus for two key historical enactments of freedom: the end of slavery and the Underground Railroad.

Ripley’s distinct commitment to freedom is evidenced not only by the village’s origin story, but also by the notoriety of its abolitionist network, the success of Underground Railroad conductors, and the spatial terms used to characterize the Ripley. White abolitionists can be understood as continuing to act upon the natural freedom of the town and successors of Poage. First, Ripley is consistently described as a key abolitionist location during the early to mid-1800s. Ripley is even described an “epicenter” for anti-slavery and the abolitionist movement in

⁴⁰⁵ “Ripley.” See also. Zachman, “Ripley Bicentennial”; “Brown County,” *Touring Ohio: The Heart of America*, n.d., Retrieved from <http://touringohio.com/southwest/brown/brown-county.html> (Accessed May 10, 2023).

⁴⁰⁶ “Ripley.”

⁴⁰⁷ “Brown County.”

Ohio by the Ripley webpage and former local judge Thomas F. Zachman.⁴⁰⁸ White Ripley residents' abolition activities are described by many online tourist materials as thriving, "robust," "a hotbed for abolitionist sentiment," and the abolitionists as "fervent."⁴⁰⁹ Despite the relatively small size of Ripley at the time, its abolitionist network gained such a reputation that its notoriety surpassed that of larger locales like Cincinnati. These online tourist materials note that Ripley was condemned by pro-slavers as "the black hole of abolitionism" and an "abolitionist hellhole."⁴¹⁰ These characterizations suggest that Ripley's abolitionism was a concentrated but powerful and influential force that was nearly impossible to conquer and threatened to suck in those who came near. Additionally, calling Ripley a hellhole— simply put, an unpleasant place— supports claims about abolitionists' fervent nature.

Second, the city's dedication to preserving the freedom embedded in Ripley is also evident through discussions of the town's distinct relationship to the Underground Railroad. While tourists get the impression that Ripley was founded on freedom, Ripley's participation in the Underground Railroad serves as evidence of its continuity. On the border of Kentucky, Ohio "likely had more Underground Railroad stations and trails than other states," but Ripley is claimed to be the most active stop in the Underground Railroad with roughly 3,000 miles of

⁴⁰⁸ "Ripley"; Zachman, "Ripley Bicentennial Opening."

⁴⁰⁹ Michael A. Caldwell, "John P. Parker House Study Act," *Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs*, May 11, 2022, Retrieved from <https://www.doi.gov/ocl/s-3685>; "Historical Sites and Museums," *Historic Ripley Ohio*, n.d., Retrieved from <http://www.ripleyohio.net/htm/hs.htm> (Accessed May 10, 2023); "Ripley/The John P. Parker House(a)," *The Historical Marker Database*, n.d., Retrieved from <https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=135431> (Accessed May 11, 2023); Zachman, "Ripley Bicentennial Opening."

⁴¹⁰ "Ripley/The John P. Park House(b)," *Remarkable Ohio*, n.d., Retrieved from <https://remarkableohio.org/marker/4-8-ripley-the-john-p-parker-house/> (Accessed May 11, 2023); "Been There! Southwestern Ohio," *African American History & Heritage Site: Travel and Tours Upper Midwestern United States: Been There!*, n.d., Retrieved from <http://creativefolk.com/travel/tours/ripley.html> (Accessed May 11, 2023); Zachman, "Ripley Bicentennial Opening."

routes.⁴¹¹ Ripley is even given the honor as the location where the “famed” Underground Railroad name was coined.⁴¹² A local newspaper article recounts that the name was first stated when runaway slave, Tice Davids, swam across the Ohio River in search for his freedom. His owner in a boat a short distance behind him landed at the Ripley wharf and was amazed that Tice had disappeared among the cellars, attics, and alleys. Tice’s owner later told friends that it was like Tice had boarded an “Underground Railroad.”⁴¹³

Identifying Ripley as the origin of the name of a national symbol of freedom and resistance serves an indication of the widespread freedom of the town. These narrations also transform the Underground Railroad from an unpredictable, in-the-moment journey north to freedom necessitating creativity and fortitude into a cohesive and well-organized path created by local white abolitionists.⁴¹⁴ This is further evident in how tourist materials discuss the efficacy of Ripley’s “branch” of the Underground Railroad. Tourists learn that about 100,000 people utilized

⁴¹¹ “Underground Railroad in Ohio,” *Touring Ohio: The Heart of America*, n.d., Retrieved from <http://touringohio.com/history/ohio-underground-railroad.html#:~:text=Although%20there%20were%20Underground%20Railroad,slave%20states%3A%20Virginia%20and%20Kentucky> (Accessed May 11, 2023); See also “Ohio’s Underground Freedom Stations: Traveling the State’s Underground Railroad,” *Discover Ohio*, n.d., Retrieved from <http://creativefolk.com/travel/pdf/oh.ugrr.pdf> (Accessed May 11, 2023).

⁴¹² “Ripley/The John P. Parker House(a)”; “Ripley/The John P. Parker House(b).”

⁴¹³ Ned Lowick, “Brown County Battles on the Border,” *News Democrat*, April 19, 2018, Retrieved from http://uniontownship.advantage-preservation.com/viewer/?k=slavery&i=f&d=01012015-12312021&m=between&ord=k1&fn=news_democrat_usa_ohio_mt_orab_20180419_english_2&df=1&dt=10 (May 11, 2023). This story is corroborated in scholarship about the Underground Railroad. See KaaVonnia Hinton, *The Story of the Underground Railroad* (Hallandale, FL: Mitchell Lane Publishers, 2009); Jeanine Michna-Bales, *Through Darkness to Light: Photographs Along the Underground Railroad* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2017); Lottie Jones Hood, “The Trans Atlantic Slave Trade and the U.S. Underground Railroad,” *International Congregational Journal* 9, no. 1 (2010): 47-57; and Dann J. Broyle, “The Underground Railroad as Afrofuturism: Enslaved Blacks Who Imagined a Future and Used Technology to Reach the ‘Outer Spaces of Slavery,’” *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies* 6, no. 3 (2019): 170-184.

⁴¹⁴ See Cheryl Janifer LaRoche, *Free Black Communities and the Underground Railroad: The Geography of Resistance* (Baltimore: University of Illinois Press, 2013); Karen Lewis, “Unquiet Journeys: Enacting the Underground Railroad,” Research project presented at the Maps and America Annual Lecture, American Geographical Society Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, May 2023.

the network to escape slavery and an 40,000 came through Ohio.⁴¹⁵ The concentration of escapes is narrowed further to the work of two local historical figures who are said to have moved thousands through Ripley and onto freedom.

Memories of John P. Parker and Reverend John Ranking are vehicles through which Ripley's distinctive commitment to freedom are illustrated. Parker and Rankin are commemorated throughout Ripley for their successes as conductors on the Underground Railroad and their homes are important tourist locations in the area. Parker was born into enslavement but purchased his freedom in 1845, settling in Ripley. By 1854, Parker is said to have been an established entrepreneur, businessman, and blacksmith.⁴¹⁶ In fact, Parker is noted by many of the materials as the first African American to receive a patent before 1900 for his iron castings and tobacco press.⁴¹⁷ These accounts of Parker's life not only recognize his accomplishments but point to Ripley's commitment to freedom for enabling these successes. That is, they are the fruits of Ripley's freedom. Parker also owned an iron foundry and employed Black and white workers, demonstrating not just freedom, but integration in the town.⁴¹⁸ As a free Black man, Parker also symbolizes "the oft-untold side of the Underground Railroad" for Ohio Senator Sherrod Brown.⁴¹⁹ Parker is claimed to have helped nearly one thousand people

⁴¹⁵ "Ohio's Underground Freedom Stations."

⁴¹⁶ "Brown Calls for Study on Designating John P. Parker House as Part of the National Park Service System," *Sherrod Brown U.S. Senator for Ohio*, July 20, 2015, Retrieved from <https://www.brown.senate.gov/newsroom/press/release/brown-calls-for-study-on-designating-john-p-parker-house-as-part-of-the-national-park-service-system> (Accessed May 12, 2023); "The Land of Grant," *US Grant Homestead Association*, n.d., Retrieved from <https://usgrantboyhoodhome.org/historic-brown-county> (Accessed May 11, 2023); "Historical Sites and Museums"; "John P. Parker House Study Act."

⁴¹⁷ "Brown Call for Study"; "About," *John P. Parker Museum & Historical Society*, n.d., Retrieved from <http://johnparkerhouse.net> (Accessed May 12, 2023); "Ripley/John P. Parker House(a)"; Wade Linville, "Parker House Moves One Step Closer to Becoming a Unit of the National Park Service," *Ripley Bee*, July 25, 2022, Retrieved from <https://www.ripleybee.com/2022/07/25/parker-house-moves-one-step-closer-to-becoming-a-unit-of-the-national-park-service/> (Accessed May 12, 2023); "Ripley/John P. Parker House(b)"; "Ripley."

⁴¹⁸ "Been There! Southwestern Ohio,"

⁴¹⁹ "Brown Calls for Study on Designating John P. Parker House as Part of the National Park Service System," *Sherrod Brown U.S. Senator for Ohio*, July 20, 2015, Retrieved from

escape enslavement, even crossing the Ohio River to look for those traveling by night.⁴²⁰ His exploits were known by white Ripley residents and pro-slavers who offered a \$1,000 bounty for his capture or death.⁴²¹ Each of these moves to remember Parker's life imply, first, that his successes grew out of Ripley's various commitments to freedom and, second, that his unrelenting efforts to help others toward freedom are representative of other white Ripley residents at the time. Parks social and financial mobility are markers Ripley's inherent freedom and white abolitionists' protection of that freedom.

The work and home of writer, preacher, and abolitionist Reverend John Rankin also serve to illustrate Ripley's purported freedom on a national scale. Tourists discover that Rankin moved his family to Ripley where he built a home on what is now known as Liberty Hill now claimed to be the most active stop on the Underground Railroad.⁴²² Tourism materials explain that a lantern in the attic of the home or a flagpole on the grounds indicated that to runaway slaves that the waterfront was safe as they crossed the Ohio River.⁴²³ According to the Ripley, Ohio and the Historic Ripley Ohio websites Rankin's home is said to have housed up to 12 runaway slaves at one time, helping an estimated 2,000 onward to freedom and leaving Rankin "proud of never

<https://www.brown.senate.gov/newsroom/press/release/brown-calls-for-study-on-designating-john-p-parker-house-as-part-of-the-national-park-service-system> (Accessed May 12, 2023).

⁴²⁰ Sheena Elzie, "Underground Railroad Stop Closer to National Recognition," *Spectrum News 1*, February 9, 2023, Retrieved from <https://spectrumnews1.com/oh/columbus/news/2023/01/28/underground-railroad-stop-closer-to-national-recognition> (Accessed May 12, 2023); "Brown Calls for Study," "About,"; Zachman, "Ripley Bicentennial Opening."

⁴²¹ Lodwick, "Brown County Battles."

⁴²² "The Land of Grant." According to the National Park Service, the origin of "Liberty Hill" is unknown. Its first appearance is traced to the 1912 Ripley centennial celebration but "these patriotic references likely did not come into general use until after the State purchase of the site in 1938, as no mention has been found in publications of written materials prior to this time." "John Ranking House: National Historic Landmark Nomination," *National Park Service*, September 17, 1996, 5, Retrieved from <https://npgallery.nps.gov/GetAsset/8fe8a500-a088-4038-920f-6abae4a07159> (Accessed May 25, 2023).

⁴²³ "Brown County"; "Underground Railroad," *Historic Ripley Ohio*, n.d., Retrieved from <http://www.ripleyohio.net/htm/underground.htm> (Accessed My 15, 2023); "Ripley."

having lost a ‘passenger.’”⁴²⁴ Like Parker, Rankin had a \$1,000 reward on his head. Rankin is not just known for his efficacy as a conductor on the Underground Railroad but also for how his commitment to freedom inspired others at the time. The magnitude of Rankin’s relationship to freedom is increased by several webpages highlighting that he inspired well-known abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison who, according to the same websites, “called himself a Rankin disciple,” elevating him to a Jesus-like figure guiding and teaching others about freedom.⁴²⁵ In his speech at the bicentennial celebration of Ripley’s founding, Zachman stated that Rankin was known to writers of the mid-1800s as the “father of abolitionism,” bolstering his national appeal and suggesting that he brought freedom to a national audience.⁴²⁶ Zachman’s use of “father” also draws on biological thinking as Rankin’s ideas about abolition are passed to descendants like Garrison or white Ripley residents. The reverend was also friends with author Harriet Beecher Stowe and inspired a story within her well-known novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Rankin recounted to Stowe the story of an enslaved woman, Eliza, who carried her child across the thawing Ohio River while bounty hunters pursued her. It is noted by Zachman that Eliza’s story “touched the hearts of millions of readers. Public opinion began to change” as more people in the area joined in the abolitionist movement and found slavery morally corrupt.⁴²⁷ Further, the Touring Ohio webpage on Ripley states that Lincoln credits Stowe’s book with starting the Civil War.⁴²⁸ Rankin’s connections to notable white abolitionists and his work as an Underground Railroad conductor evidence his exemplary enactments and commitments to freedom. It is then suggested

⁴²⁴ Been There! Southwestern Ohio”; “The Land of Grant”; Wade Linville, “Ripley to Receive Grant Funds for Ranking Hill Road Repairs,” *The News Democrat*, May 23, 2022, Retrieved from <https://www.newsdemocrat.com/2022/05/23/ripley-to-receive-grant-funds-for-rankin-hill-road-repairs/> (Accessed May 15, 2023); “The Rankin House,” *Historic Ripley Ohio*, n.d., Retrieved from <http://www.ripleyohio.net/htm/rankin.htm> (Accessed May 25, 2023).

⁴²⁵ “Historical Sites and Museums.”

⁴²⁶ Zachman, “Ripley’s Bicentennial Opening.”

⁴²⁷ Zachman, “Ripley’s Bicentennial Opening.”

⁴²⁸ “Ripley.”

that Rankin's home today showcases Ripley's role in the Underground Railroad, a network working for freedom.

Some accounts assert that Parker worked closely with Rankin, implying coordinated efforts toward freedom by Ripley residents, despite evidence of the Underground Railroad's spontaneous nature. These assertions make claims to the collective nature of freedom as part of Ripley's heritage. Some narrations of Ripley explain that Parker and Rankin worked together and with others to support the "robust" abolitionist movement in the town and along the Ohio River. A 2004 immersive film experience *Brothers of the Borderland* weaves the work of both abolitionists through familial ties. The construction of Parker and Rankin's coordinated efforts are emblematic of Ripley's commitment to freedom. The John P. Parker Museum & Historical Society purports that Parker and Rankin's homes were selected in 1999 by Elizabeth Smith Brownstein, author of *If This House Could Talk: Historic Houses, Extraordinary Americans*, to "tell the story of the antislavery crusade and the [U]nderground [R]ailroad in Ripley."⁴²⁹ In the introduction of the book, Brownstein explains that they wanted to "choose houses that could serve as metaphors... for larger events and personalities in our political and cultural history."⁴³⁰ According to Brownstein and the tourist materials analyzed, Ripley's personality is freedom.

Finally, Ripley's commitment to freedom is evidenced through how the village is discussed using spatial rhetorics. Tourists are led to believe that Ripley was an impenetrable space of freedom. Those escaping enslavement across the Ohio River are described as landing on "free soil," which identifies Ripley/Ohio as inherently free and suggests that freedom and integration were inevitable despite the Fugitive Slave Act that allowed slave catchers to penetrate

⁴²⁹ "Facts," John P. Parker Museum & Historical Society, n.d., Retrieved from <https://johnparkerhouse.net/facts/> (Accessed May 15, 2023).

⁴³⁰ Elizabeth Smith Brownstein, *If This House Could Talk... Historic Homes, Extraordinary Americans* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999): 277.

the state's boundaries and made it illegal to aid freedom seekers. This also masks that "[a]bout half of the state's population supported slavery and would go out of their way to turn in an escaping slave."⁴³¹ This fact was avoided but all but one of the texts analyzed. Ripley is also described as a threshold to freedom, further bolstering the village as a place of certain freedom.⁴³² In fact, Ripley is often referred to as "freedom's landing" by Zachman, the "Ripley" page on the Tourin Ohio website, and the Historic Ripley Ohio website.⁴³³ The Ohio River is even described by former Judge Zachman as a "Jordan-like river," comparing crossing the Ohio River to the literal and symbolic crossing of the Israelites crossing the River Jordan into the Promise Land and liberation.⁴³⁴ Ripley as a threshold to freedom is underscored by characterizing the Ohio River as a border demarcating freedom. Indeed, the river divided the North and South, free states and slave states, but locating the battle over slavery on the border puts Ripley front and center in the fight for freedom. Bordering is dynamic and occurs both in the natural landscape and discourses that "symbolize a social practice of spatial differentiation," and define "terms of identification and exclusion."⁴³⁵ The characterization of Front Street, the location of Parker's and other Underground Railroad conductors' homes, as the "frontline" in the

⁴³¹ "Ripley"; Lodwick, "Brown County Battles."

⁴³² "Brown County"; "Ohio's Underground Freedom Stations"; "Ripley."

⁴³³ Zachman, "Ripley's Bicentennial Opening"; "Ripley."

⁴³⁴ Zachman, "Ripley's Bicentennial Opening." See Daniel L. Dreisbach, "Micah's 6:8 in the Literature of the American Founding Era: A Note on Religion and Rhetoric," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 12, no. 1 (2009): 91-105 and John M. Murphy, "Barack Obama, the Exodus Tradition, and the Joshua Generation," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 97, no. 4 (2011): 387-410.

⁴³⁵ Henk van Houtum and Ton van Naerssen, "Bordering, Ordering, and Othering," *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* 93, no. 2 (2002): 125; D. Robert DeChaine, "Bordering the Civic Imaginary: Alienization, Fence Logic, and the Minuteman Civil Defense Corps," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 95, no. 1 (2009): 46; See also Lisa A. Flores, "Constructing Rhetorical Borders: Peons, Illegal Aliens, and Competing Narrative of Immigration," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 20, no. 4 (2003): 362-387; Jan Nespor, "Discursive Geographies: Politics and Public Narratives of Immigration in a Midwestern US City," *Journal of Language and Politics* 13, no. 3 (2014): 490-511; Vincent N. Pham, "Drive-By Cinema's Drive-Outs and U-Turns: Materiality, Mobility, and the Reconfiguring of Forgotten Spaces and Absurd Borders," *Women's Studies in Communication* 41, no. 4 (2018): 370-382; D. Robert DeChaine, *Border Rhetorics* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2012); Karma Chávez, "Border (In)Securities: Normative and Differential Belonging in LGBTQ and Immigrant Rights Discourses," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 7, no. 2 (2010):136-155.

battle amongst borders (or between Ripley's heroic abolitionists and slave catchers) constructs an impenetrable boundary between freedom and enslavement. While slave catchers threatened to penetrate the border, white abolitionists heroically defended it. Thus, using bordering discourses solidifies Ripley as a space of freedom and its white residents as resisting efforts to thwart freedom from the South.

Tourist materials also create narratives of freedom by emphasizing how the natural landscape of the river and hills aided abolitionist activities and dissociated the village from the border slave owning Kentucky. Here the natural river and bluffs are transformed into agents of heritage through their narration in memory fragments about abolition. Dave Tell made a similar argument about the ecology of memory in commemorations of Emmett Till in the Mississippi Delta. Tell contends that regional memories of Till have always been entangled with the "natural, cultural, and built environments of the Delta."⁴³⁶ More specifically, commemoration of Till

bears the imprint of the Delta, that the physical, cultural, and symbolic landscape of the Delta has been permanently altered by the memory of Till's murder, and that racism works most powerfully at those moments in which it is difficult to distinguish racism from the natural environment, when historical revisionism is driven by soils and prejudice at the same time, and when intolerance seems to be a function of a river's path through the Delta.⁴³⁷

Heritage functions similarly in Ripley. The river, hills, and other aspects of the natural landscape are remembered as functioning in service of white abolitionists and their efforts to secure freedom. And because these are stable aspects of the landscape, minimally changed over time, they are evidence of Ripley's commitment to freedom.

⁴³⁶ Dave Tell, *Remembering Emmett Till* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019): 27.

⁴³⁷ Dave Tell, *Remembering Emmett Till*, 10.

Ripley's location on the Ohio River, close to the Kentucky border, is identified as an ideal location for fighting for freedom. The river narrows considerably around Brown County and made for a straight passage across to Ripley making it, according to the Touring Ohio website "natural crossing point," one that Miami and Shawnee communities utilized, as well as those escaping enslavement.⁴³⁸ The river also naturally flows along Front Street, both pointing to the North Star. Former Judge Zachman remembers the relationship between the two in a speech commemorating the town's bicentennial founding, declaring the North Star

A sign of stability in the heavens and a graphic beacon to past freedom seekers, gently reminding us that Ripley's river history is more than just of ship building, commerce and cargos. Her history is an aspiring and breathtaking saga of the town's defiance and determination in the face of adversity and oppression. Here is a special place that touches the heart and soul of free people in this land and those that aspire to be free in any land.⁴³⁹

Zachman's comments reinforce an inherent orientation toward freedom in the village while also arguing for the temporal continuity of freedom. The North Star and the Ohio River are seemingly unchangeable entities that represent freedom and connects freedom to Ripley. Accordingly, freedom is an unchangeable facet of the town that is passed from one generation to the next. The high bluff Ripley sits upon allowed for monitoring for people traveling across the river to freedom or to capture those escaping to freedom. Additionally, the local creeks aided in white abolitionist efforts because, as the Touring Ohio website states, "escaping slaves los[t] their scent from the tracking dogs that would soon be on their heels."⁴⁴⁰ While existing far before abolition,

⁴³⁸ "Brown County." See also "Ripley."

⁴³⁹ Zachman, "Ripley's Bicentennial Opening."

⁴⁴⁰ "Ripley."

the river, bluffs, and creeks of Ripley all aid in white abolitionist endeavors and become evidence of the town's commitment to freedom.

The built environment also verifies the narrative of freedom in Ripley as white abolitionists' home serve to amplify their commitment to freedom and construct temporal continuity for tourists. The homes of Parker and Rankin on bluffs overlooking the Ohio River are in "prime" locations for helping those seeking freedom and traveling via the Underground Railroad.⁴⁴¹ The home of Rankin underscores his local reputation as the "father of abolitionism," as it sits upon Liberty Hill overlooking the river and "commands one of the most beautiful views on the Ohio River."⁴⁴² Atop Liberty Hill, Rankin's home is a symbol of liberty in the past and present that overlooks a prominent path to freedom. The home's simplicity is further reinforced by accounts by Zachman and the Touring Ohio website calling it a "lighthouse for freedom," as it was likely one of the first things a runaway slave may see while/after crossing the river.⁴⁴³ The location of Rankin's home on a hill "almost directly above the John Parker House" not only functions to direct tourists but also to imply Rankin's status and indicate that the two worked together to help those using the Underground Railroad.⁴⁴⁴

Upon reading the online tourist materials, tourists can expect to witness the freedom of Ripley by visiting these historic homes constructing temporal continuity. Both the Parker and Rankin homes have been restored and function as museums open to the public. Rankin's home is described by the Ohio Underground Railroad Freedom Station webpage as "showcasing Ripley's role as an Underground Railroad hub for more than 50 years."⁴⁴⁵ Visitors to the home are

⁴⁴¹ "Been There! Southwestern Ohio"; "Historic Sites and Museums."

⁴⁴² "Historic Sites and Museums."

⁴⁴³ "The Land of Grant."

⁴⁴⁴ "Been There! Southwestern Ohio."

⁴⁴⁵ "Ohio's Underground Freedom Stations."

promised an opportunity to observe Ripley’s commitment to freedom of the past through its “peaceful, panoramic view of the Ohio River Valley and a rebuilt ‘Freedom Stairway’ encourages guest to experience the climb up Liberty Hill themselves.”⁴⁴⁶ Tourists are assured that the peaceful view represents the safety provided to those escaping enslavement in Ripley and prompted to encounter how Rankin oversaw the protection of freedom on the bluff. Parker’s home is described similarly. The African American History & Heritage site provides a picture of the east side of the house and states, “It’s easy to imagine Parker looking across the Ohio River at night, watching for a signal from a fugitive slave in need of his help.”⁴⁴⁷ In both cases, tourists are called to see themselves as white abolitionists and see Ripley as village distinctly marked by freedom in its natural and built landscapes throughout time.

Ripley’s unwavering commitment to freedom is evident in tangible heritage assets including the natural landscape and historic sites and intangible heritage assets including the historical and constructed knowledge of abolition activities and experiences tourists are promised. Together, these heritage assets are used to make claims that a commitment to the freedom of all is passed from generation to generation of Ripley residents since Poage’s founding of the town. Ripley residents of the past and present are constituted as beyond race—colorblind. This framework dismisses evidence of the profound role of race and racism in the village across time. Further, it suggests that racism comes in the form of overt forms of anti-Blackness. This claim disregards how racism has evolved and how whiteness resecurates its dominance in complex ways. Ultimately, white Ripley residents of the past and present are depicted as innocent and absolved of ongoing anti-Blackness by firmly grounding their identity in the passage of commitments to freedom.

⁴⁴⁶ “Ohio’s Underground Freedom Stations.”

⁴⁴⁷ “Been There! Southwestern Ohio.”

Moral Superiority in Ripley's Tourism Imaginary

Ripley's tourist materials suggest that its white residents' commitment to freedom was and remains motivated by moral superiority. While other locations that engaged in abolition were motivated by political, religious, or other reasons, white Ripley residents are distinctly marked by their desire for equality. The Oxford English Dictionary defines moral as "of an action: having the property of being right or wrong, or good or evil; voluntary or deliberate and therefore open to ethical appraisal."⁴⁴⁸ This definition illuminates two critical ideas about the heritage of superior morality in Ripley. First, morality is concerned with what is good, virtuous, and desirable. Second, morality is open to ethical evaluation. In Ripley's "tourism imaginary," residents across time are positioned not just as morally superior over slave holding Southerners, but other people who did not actively fight for the freedom of all. Further, Ripley residents are appraised morally by today's standards. Their heritage is of timeless moral superiority. The morality of Ripley residents throughout time is not explicitly discussed by tourist materials. I trace superior morality by virtuous traits and characterizations of white abolitionists and contemporary white residents that remain desirable by contemporary understanding of race relations.

In Ripley's tourist materials, enslavement is framed as not just a legal battle, but a moral battle. Ripley's location on the Ohio River was characterized by Zachman as "frontlines in the battle for the nation's soul" and white abolitionists were "angels."⁴⁴⁹ As angels, white Ripley abolitionists fought for the morality of the nation's soul and to protect the "flesh and blood and souls of men and women" who were enslaved.⁴⁵⁰ Moral superiority is written onto all Ripley

⁴⁴⁸ Oxford English Dictionary, "Moral," s.v. accessed July 3, 2023.

⁴⁴⁹ "Ohio's Underground Freedom Stations"; Zachman, "Ripley's Bicentennial Opening."

⁴⁵⁰ "Historical Sites and Museums."

residents who are characterized as being inherently moral or gaining morality after learning the atrocities of slavery. The former group are described as dedicated to freedom, courageous, and noble as they “stood during a dark time in America against a vicious culture of chains, subjugation, and human misery and prevailed.”⁴⁵¹ Further, the Touring Ohio “Ripley” webpage explains that these white abolitionists “saw a wrong and tried to correct the damage” ultimately risking their livelihood and possession by violating the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850.⁴⁵² While some cowards shielded themselves under the law, it is suggested that white, freed Black, and Native American Ripley residents worked together to create a trustworthy, integrationist network to defend freedom and fight moral corruption.⁴⁵³ A second group of white Ripley abolitionists can also be discerned from the town’s tourist materials: those who had acquired superior morality and joined the fight against slavery. These white Ripley residents were “converted” from inactivity or supporting slavery to claim active participation in the abolitionist movement. The highlighting of two different groups of white Ripley residents elucidates three things: first, apparently all residents were abolitionists; two, white abolitionists were privileged with the choice to be active or inactive in the fight against slavery; and three, there is a construction of cohesion amongst the goals and motivations for participation in abolition ground in moral superiority.

The stories of prominent abolitionists and freedom seekers are vehicles where Ripley’s moral superiority is demonstrated. Remembrances of these historic figures and their commitment to freedom in local tourist materials are circumscribed by superior morality, constructing abolition and the Underground Railroad as “romantic tales of heroism and moral drama[.]”⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁵¹ Zachman, “Ripley’s Bicentennial Opening.”

⁴⁵² “Ripley”; “Underground Railroad.”

⁴⁵³ See “Ohio’s Underground Freedom Stations”; “Brown Calls for Study.”

⁴⁵⁴ LaRoche, *Free Black Communities*.

Parker's story is a testament to the nobility and integration of the village. His choice for moving to Ripley was motivated by knowing the horrors of enslavement and aiding others in their quests for freedom. Parker is described by a local journalist as "selfless" as he risked his life by helping those using the Underground Railroad. His iron foundry employed Black and white workers leading tourists to believe that Ripley was not just a place of integration, but Parker participated in facilitating integration as a business owner.⁴⁵⁵

Rankin's commitment to freedom is also explained by his moral superiority. Accounts of Rankin's life explain that when he moved to Ripley, he *chose* a house by the river, telling tourists that this choice was motivated by how it could facilitate freedom. Rankin's Presbyterian ties also undergirded his morality that guided his commitment to freedom as the Ripley, Ohio website notes that he stated of freedom seekers, "They were all children of God by creation and some of them I believe were redeemed by the blood of the Lamb."⁴⁵⁶ Rankin's religious commitments and Ripley abolitionists characterized as angels articulates a stark moral boundary between North and South, abolitionist, slave catcher, and those were not active on the issue. It is also emphasized that Rankin was not satisfied by his own anti-slavery endeavors, but also sought to teach others about the moral corruption of slavery. Rankin "taught, preached, wrote, and traveled to inform many people of the evils and the need to abolish slavery."⁴⁵⁷ In addition, Rankin is noted to have inspired others to rally around abolition and those already committed to the cause.

Today, tourists are enticed with Ripley's peaceful, friendly atmosphere passed down from local white abolitionists. Contemporary Ripley is described as beleeing what the Touring

⁴⁵⁵ "Been There! Southwestern Ohio."

⁴⁵⁶ "Historic Sites and Museums."

⁴⁵⁷ "Historic Sites and Museums."

Ohio website describes as its “turbulent past,” to offer peaceful views and welcoming hospitality to all.⁴⁵⁸ Tourists are led to believe local white abolitionists resisted violence and cruelty to provide this atmosphere to past and present white residents. The Historical Ripley Ohio home page promises tranquil views coupled with the “welcoming hospitality” and friendliness of the river town that mirror what abolitionists provided to freedom seekers.⁴⁵⁹ Specifically, it is reported by the “Brown County” page of the Touring Ohio website that those escaping to freedom could “count on getting food, shelter, and guidance on the long journey that lay before them.” Such reports are illustrated by an excerpt from Parker’s personal journal on the Historic Ripley Ohio website states, “The occupants of these few houses were the midnight marauders, very secretive and silent in their ways, but trustworthy and friendly to the fugitives.”⁴⁶⁰ Rankin and Parker’s commitment to freedom and moral superiority make the present-day Ripley atmosphere explainable as these substances are directly passed to white residents. For former Judge Zachman, past and present white Ripley residents’ “souls” are inherently connected by their “struggle for human rights, individual freedom and the responsibility of morality and conscience,” and tourists are assured they will see the continuity.

Tourists are also assured that the moral superiority of white abolitionists in Ripley is passed to contemporary white residents and tangible for them to experience. It is not simply that tourists can visit a town “brimming with history”; tourists are encouraged to walk through history that is metaphorically alive with the moral superiority passed to them.⁴⁶¹ Zachman explains that Poage’s memory is very much alive and can be witnessed by gazing upon his former homes which “still stand proudly today on Front Street overlooking the expansive Ohio

⁴⁵⁸ “Ripley,”; “Ohio’s Underground Railroad Freedom Stations.”

⁴⁵⁹ *Historical Ripley Ohio*, n.d. Retrieved from <http://www.ripleyohio.net/index.html> (Accessed May 18, 2023).

⁴⁶⁰ “Historical Sites and Museums.”

⁴⁶¹ *Historic Ripley Ohio*.

River.”⁴⁶² Prominent abolitionists symbolically monitor over contemporary Ripley to ensure the town remains virtuous. Poage’s former homes on Front Street and Rankin’s preserved home on Liberty Hill function as a reminder for tourists and Ripley residents that their moral superiority is carried out. Tourists can also experience the morality superiority permeating the town by visiting one or more of the thirty three abolitionist Underground Railroad sites in the area to experience the “danger, hope, sadness, tragedy, sacrifice, courage, and unity” conductors and freedom seekers experienced together, it is implied.⁴⁶³ The Underground Railroad stands in the public imaginary as a symbol of superior morality and collaborative race relations and the amount of trails strongly suggests the morality of past abolitionists that has been transmitted to contemporary residents.

A hearing for the John P. Parker House Study Act (H.R. 6799) in July 2022 highlighted that the narrative of Parker accurately reflects Ripley’s commitments by stating the home is a “true Southern Ohio landmark.”⁴⁶⁴ As a tourist destination, Ripley emerges as a space of unrelenting freedom defenders and moral purity that visitors can trace and witness at historical sites, through the natural landscape, and in their interactions with residents. Regionally, Ripley’s local stories are righteous tales of fighting for freedom that stand out from other abolitionist activity but display larger regional patterns of moral superiority.⁴⁶⁵ Nationally, Ripley’s place narrative marked by freedom and moral superiority is a resource for argument for what is “truly American.”⁴⁶⁶ This “truly American” nature of Ripley’s place narrative is evident in tourist materials. In recent efforts to add Parker’s home to the National Park Service, it is asserted that

⁴⁶² Zachman, “Ripley’s Bicentennial Opening.”

⁴⁶³ “Ohio’s Underground Railroad Freedom Stations.”

⁴⁶⁴ Linville, “Parker House Moves One Step.”

⁴⁶⁵ Jon Gjerde, “Middleness and the Middle West,” in Cayton and Gray, *The American Midwest: Essays on Regional History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001): 186.

⁴⁶⁶ Martin F. Manalansan IV, Chantal Nadeau, Richard T. Rodriguez, Siobhan, Somerville, “Introduction: Queering the Middle: Race, Region, and a Queer Midwest,” *A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 20 (2014): 1

Parker is an American hero and therefore is a “perfect fit” to be added to the National Register of Historic Places.⁴⁶⁷ Further, abolition in Ripley is characterized as changing the nation and, according to Zachman, a “pivotal and seminal momen[t] in the heritage of free people,” which recognizes the village and its people’s commitments national and internationally across time.⁴⁶⁸

Implications of Rhetorics of Heritage In Ripley and Beyond

In the above analysis, I discussed how freedom and moral superiority are claimed to be the heritage of Ripley, Ohio through memory fragments of abolition that comprise the village’s tourist imagination. Freedom is evident in tangible heritage assets including the natural landscape and historic sites and intangible heritage assets including the knowledge of white local abolitionists and promised experiences for tourists. Both assets are entangled with white innocence and absolution of anti-Blackness by positing that commitments to freedom are directly passed from generation to generation in Ripley. Moral superiority is evident through local white abolitionists’ virtuous motivations for their commitments to freedom and race relations that are positively appraised by today’s standards. Contemporary residents are endowed with the same moral superiority in tourist materials and tourists are promised to be able to experience how race is not a factor in Ripley life. In this case, colorblindness circulates through coded discourses of heritage that claim white innocence from anti-Blackness for Ripley residents across time.

My reading of Ripley tourist materials stems from my conceptualization of heritage as a species of rhetoric that articulates the direct passing of identifiable and unchanging substance to

⁴⁶⁷ Linville, “Parker House Moves One Step.” According to the National Park Service, the National Register of Historic Place, “is the official list of the Nation’s historic places worthy of preservation. Authorized by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the National Park Service’s National Register of Historic Places is part of a national program to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect America’s historic and archeological resources.” “What is the National Register of Historic Places?” *National Park Service*, n.d. Retrieved from <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/what-is-the-national-register.htm> (Accessed May 19, 2023).

⁴⁶⁸ Zachman, “Ripley’s Bicentennial Opening.”

people throughout time within constructed spatial boundaries. Claims of heritage constitute and certify group identity and shape how that group and tourists understand the past and present. In Ripley, commitments to freedom and moral superiority are passed from the village's founder to local abolitionists, to contemporary residents. In this case, heritage claims function to absolve Ripley and its residents of anti-Blackness amidst contemporary racial reckonings. These rhetorics claim a genetic code of the town and its residents that determines racism is not possible.

Rhetorics of heritage in Ripley are significant for how they interact with various scales of place and make authoritative claims about what it means to be American. First, and as discussed above, the essence of Americanness is commitment to freedom and moral superiority—the substance of American exceptionalism. However, Ripley's online tourist materials that spatial bound these substances obscures much of Ohio's documented history. "Romantic tales of heroism and moral drama" simplistically bounds morality to heroes and villains that are easily identifiable by what side of a regional boundary they reside.⁴⁶⁹ Remembrances of abolition and slavery as a moral drama cannot be disentangled from regional rhetorics of the upper Midwest.⁴⁷⁰ Further, these stories reduce anti-Blackness to overt forms of racism. Most of the tourist materials analyzed made no mention of the treatment of Black Ohioans and Ripley residents at the time, despite scholarly evidence demonstrating commitments to enslavement by over half of Ohio's population.⁴⁷¹ While Parker's life illustrates the potentials of opportunities, treatment, rights, and integration of Black folks into the village and state, some Ohioans actively support

⁴⁶⁹ LaRoche, *Free Black Communities*.

⁴⁷⁰ Here I call back to Dave Tell's statement, "Memory making and region making are two sides of the same coin," and "sometimes (if not always) the pure pursuit of commemoration is not a live option" Dave Tell, "Memory Making is Region Making: Emmett Till in Tallahatchie County," in *Reconstructing Southern Rhetoric*, eds. Christina L. Moss and Brandon Inabinet, (Jackson, MI: The University Press of Mississippi, 2021): 51, 61.

⁴⁷¹ Additionally, historian James Loewen noted that sundown towns were found from northwest portion of the state down to the Ohio River and were clustered in the suburbs around Cincinnati and Cleveland. James W. Loewen, *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism* (New York: The New Press, 2005): 67

slavery, were hostile toward Black residents, and engaged in legal and social practices that resisted equality.⁴⁷² Therefore, rhetorics of heritage not only circumscribe Ripley through freedom and morality, but also superficially bound them, in the past and present.

Contemporarily, rhetorics of abolition heritage in Ripley enable the continuation of the village's place narrative in the face of ongoing anti-Blackness. Ultimately, white residents are elevated as national (and even international) heroes of freedom and morality for abhorring and resisting human bondage, while Black historical agents are not afforded the same moral bolstering with the exception of Parker. Parker is rendered the exception for how his life was facilitated by the moral superiority of white Ripley residents.

Heritage also provides contemporary agents with the grounds for making authoritative claims about a space's past and present. Claiming heritage provides endows contemporary agents with the ethos to make arguments about how we should understand the tangible and intangible assets of their ancestors because they share a substance. This can be seen in the narration of various heritage assets in the "tourism imaginary" of Ripley. For example, Parker's successes as a Black man in Ohio were a result of the freedom and moral superiority of white Ripley residents and the city's natural landscape is evidence of these commitments. Alternative explanations are dismissed because present agents have definitive knowledge about the motivations of those who came before them. Further, rhetorics of heritage gain traction by shaping how we understand the natural landscape, while making rivers, streams, and hills appear innately connected to the common substance.

Rhetorics of heritage not only provide authority to spatial successors, but also allow for them purport that the heritage assets will provide an "authentic" understanding of history and

⁴⁷² See Leon F. Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961).

collective identity for tourists. The consubstantiality between white abolitionists and contemporary white Ripley residents is the “it” tourists can find in the town. Insisting that a single authentic experience of history is available for tourists is a claim laden with power and often serves dominant ideologies.

Second, while rhetorics of heritage in Ripley’s tourist materials chart a palatable and predictable past grounded in a white present, and future, they also evade explaining why those seeking freedom from the institution of slavery continued traveling north to Canada. The United States’ violent and ongoing history of enslavement and anti-Blackness are explainable through Ripley’s commitment to freedom and morality that serves as a prism for the nation. For example, one account of Rankin’s home explained that it would provide shelter, freedom, and “guidance on the long journey that lay before them that would eventually take them to Canada and freedom.”⁴⁷³ While this narration certainly suggests that freedom did not lay in Ripley but in Canada, rhetorics of heritage ensure that freedom was and remains an inherent part of the town. The bordering discourses used to demarcate freedom and slavery along the Ohio River also aid in disguising this inconsistency in Ripley’s place narrative.

Overall, this chapter explores how rhetorics of heritage function in public memory in ways (re)secure whiteness’ dominance in Ripley, Ohio’s online “tourist imaginary.” I began by outlining heritage as a species of rhetoric that claims how a pure, unchanging substance is passed throughout time from historical agents to contemporary residents of the same space. Rhetorics of heritage constitute group identity and forward temporal continuity. This characterization of heritage draws from legal and biological definitions of the term but is squarely located in how public memory functions rhetorically. This case study demonstrates how rhetorics of heritage are

⁴⁷³ “Brown County.” See also “Historic Sites and Museums.”

discursive carriers of race that construct spaces on multiple scales. Despite how heritage functions in this analysis, rhetorics of heritage are not inherently negative can resist power relations that maintain racial domination.

My analysis of Ripley's online "tourism imaginary" elucidated that white antebellum abolitions and contemporary white Ripley residents are bound through commitments to freedom and moral superiority. These substances shape how one understands the tangible and intangible assets of the town. Commitments to freedom and moral superiority are place-making technologies that draws on historical facts while (re)constructing history. In the process, whiteness is crystalized shaping the individual and group identities of white Ripley residents. Rhetorics of heritage are a coded way to talk about the persistence of whiteness in the town that echoes claims of purity in remembrances of Glover in Wisconsin and the reflection of state values back to Michigan in local/state commemorations of Sojourner Truth. These discourses avoid explicitly racial terms but are intricately negotiating locales and the upper Midwest on regional lines. While considerations of heritage are not new in rhetorical scholarship, a critical orientation to how claims of heritage can be race-making discourses is important for tracking the constructing of race and racial logics across space and time.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

This project examined how contemporary stories of abolition in the upper Midwest function as inventive resources for constructing race on regional lines. Focusing on three case studies of abolition from the mid-1800s in the region, these analyses have illustrated how rhetorics of whiteness are used to characterize people, their actions and motivations, and space. Together, these seemingly local accounts of heroic white abolition demonstrate similar patterns of whiteness that carve out the upper Midwest's distinct identity. On a broader scale, this dissertation illustrates the entanglement of remembrance, race, and region. Put simply, region cannot be understood outside of how it is constructed in tandem with race. Rhetorical scholars can look to the multitude of ways regions are constructed to trace the rhetorical materials of race and how racial moments are linked across space and time. This project demonstrates the utility of public memory's critical tools for mapping the intricacies of race in particular spatial configurations.

It is from here that we can begin considering how the upper Midwest connects to other spatial configurations. Most notable is the region's relationship to the nation, specifically as its "heartland." Historian Kristin L. Hoganson explained, "The heartland myth insists that there is a stone-solid core at the center of the nation. Local, insulated, exceptional, isolationist and provincial; the America of America. First, the home of homeland security, the defining essence of the center of the land."⁴⁷⁴ If the upper Midwest is a micro-cosm for the nation, a place to find what is truly American, then the solid core at the center of the United States is whiteness. This is no surprise to many. And others are making similar arguments. In 2018, author Tamara Winfrey-Harris wrote, "The so-called flyover states have long been an avatar for the real America —

⁴⁷⁴ Kristin L. Hoganson, *The Heartland: An American History* (London: Penguin Books, 2016): 300.

small towns, country music, conservatism, casseroles and amber waves of grain. Whiteness.”⁴⁷⁵

Anthropologists Britt Halvorson and Hosh Reno’s book *Imagining the Heartland: White Supremacy and the American Midwest* also provides evidence of how regional tropes and narratives are invested in whiteness.⁴⁷⁶

What makes this dissertation distinct is its use of public memory as a hermeneutic to unravel how race and region are constructed in tandem in a particular location through stories of abolition. Utilized in this fashion, public memory offers critical tools to illuminate the processual, persuasive, and constitutive functions of memories of abolition in the upper Midwest. As Sara C. VanderHaagen argues, deploying public memory as a hermeneutic draws attention to the rhetorical facets of remembrance and circulation rather than creating or reifying dichotomies between official memory and vernacular memory, remembering and forgetting, and history and memory.⁴⁷⁷ In this way, public memory is a critical orientation to what historical representations “do” in the present and how they “do” it. For this reason, I find this interpretive guide to be especially apt for engaging in racial rhetorical criticism. VanderHaagen’s conception of public memory has the capacity to draw attention to the centrality of race in historical remembrances because it highlights how agents use the past to make sense of the present. Public memory’s attentiveness to power, ideology, and the constitution of individual and collective identity enables critics to “track, unpack, and make intelligible the particular moments and manifestations of both race and racism” and how they are connected across space and time.⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁵ Tamara Winfrey-Harris, “Stop Pretending Black Midwesterners Don’t Exist,” *New York Times*, June 16, 2018, Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/16/opinion/sunday/black-midwesterners-trump-politics.html> (Accessed June 14, 2023).

⁴⁷⁶ Britt E. Halvorson and Joshua O. Reno, *Imagining the Heartland: White Supremacy and the American Midwest* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2022).

⁴⁷⁷ Sara C. VanderHaaegn, *Children’s Biographies of African American Women: Rhetoric, Public, Memory, and Agency* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2018): 144.

⁴⁷⁸ Lisa A. Flores, “Between Abundance and Marginalization: The Imperative of Racial Rhetorical Criticism,” *Review of Communication* 16, no. 1 (2016): 16.

Additionally, as a hermeneutic, public memory works well with a fragmented approach to textual construction to make intelligible moments of race and racism. First, both engage with the relationship between the past and present. Public memory understands the use of historical representation as responsive to present needs and fragmentation recognizes that “we do not construct ‘explanations’ out of nothing” but through a set of “historically accrued” fragments that are respondent to contingent crisis.⁴⁷⁹ Together, public memory and fragmentation attend to tracing meaning making processes— such as race, racism, and racial logics. Second, deployed as hermeneutic, public memory allows for critics to glean insights about race within and across texts and case studies. This is crucial as critics track patterns of constructions of race across a variety of representative texts that circulate in diverse ways. Fragmentation leaves room for (some) differences and contradictions, while public memory equips critics with the skills to identify patterns of meaning-making. In this dissertation, I identify how the coded discourses of purity, moral goodness, and innocence are race-making materials in contemporary stories of abolition.

Finally, fragmentation aligns public memory and racial rhetorical criticism through an understanding of race an ideology. By viewing race as an ideology, critics can, according to Kelly Happe, “locate and map [race’s] traces in linguistic utterances.”⁴⁸⁰ To attend to the dynamic, complex, contradictory, and evasive whiteness, Thomas C. Nakayama and Krizek mapped these discourses by assembling a “multiplicity of discourses into a discursive formation” to track its strategic rhetorics to secure the center.⁴⁸¹ A fragmentation approach creates space to

⁴⁷⁹ Here Stuart Hall echoes McGee’s theorizing about fragments. Stuart Hall, Charles Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clark, and Brian Roberts, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order* (London: The MacMillan Press, 1978): 166; Matthew Houdek, “Racial Sedimentation and the Common Sense of Racialized Violence: The Case of Black Church Burnings,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 104, no. 3 (2018): 281.

⁴⁸⁰ Kelly Happe, “The Body of Race: Toward a Rhetorical Understanding of Racial Ideology,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 99, no. 2 (2013), 132.

⁴⁸¹ Nakayama and Krizek, “Whiteness,” 298.

make visible representative “racially inflected fragments” brought together by a critic. Analyzing fragments through the hermeneutic of public memory draws critical attention to the rhetorical facets of representations of the past, “on aspects of discourse that may otherwise be obscured or neglected.”⁴⁸² Racial ideology, I argue, is one of these aspects. This dissertation brings together public memory, racial rhetorical criticism, and fragmentation to demonstrate how contemporary stories of abolition are selectively appropriated in the upper Midwest to (re)articulate whiteness as the core feature of the region’s identity. While the region’s reputation as distinct/indistinct and ethos of morality and freedom may appear static, fragmentation illustrates how these regional rhetorics are actively reasserted and grounded in whiteness.

Tracing race and region in tandem is a pivotal for mapping and unpacking how whiteness evades detection and secures its centrality. Regional rhetorics are derived from a variety of rhetorical materials that over time enables the development and bolstering a distinct spatial identity. The multiplicity of regional rhetorics, as Nakayama and Krizek insisted, feed the “dynamic nature of [whiteness’] power relations or forces, always resecuring the hegemonic position of whiteness.”⁴⁸³ Thus, tracing how whiteness is asserted in texts contributing to regional identity across the nation enables the mapping of the strategic moves of whiteness and its discursive terrain. This project elucidates the need for analyses of the intersections of rhetoric, remembrance, race, and region beyond the American South, despite its distinct relationship with race and racism. In fact, the seemingly indistinct relationship the West, Northeast, and other (perhaps smaller) regions throughout the nation have with race is a compelling and critical site for further exploring how regional matters are racial matters. Indistinctness signals whiteness and regionally distinct rhetorical manifestations of racial ideology that interact with local, state,

⁴⁸² VanderHaaegn, *Children’s Biographies*, 33.

⁴⁸³ Nakayama and Krizek, “Whiteness,” 298.

regional, and national scales of place in nuanced ways that shape how we understand and act in the world.

Approaching the texts that comprise each of the three contemporary stories of abolition in this dissertation as rhetorical materials directs critical attention to how they produce the “things of race.”⁴⁸⁴ In other words, each remembrance of abolition in the upper Midwest, analyzed as part of this project and beyond, points us to the “intricacies of things of race.”⁴⁸⁵ Thus, a crucial affordance of public memory as a conceptual lens is the tools it provides for mapping and tracing of the materials of race in texts— and in this project, how they are used to configure people, actions, and identity regionally.

The first case study examined commemorations of the capture and “rescue” of Joshua Glover in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Local and state accounts of Glover’s story utilize rhetorics of purity to construct Wisconsin as uncontaminated by the cruelties of slavery and, therefore, morally superior. Purity is then synecdochically written onto white Wisconsinites, obscuring critical historical-contextual information that states otherwise and forwards a temporal orientation of continuity.

The second case study analyze local and state remembrances of Sojourner Truth in and around Battle Creek, Michigan where she resided until her death. In these remembrances, Truth life and legacy are inflected with a distinctly Midwestern persona. Truth’s constructed fortitude, moral superiority, and sanitized remembrances position her as an ideal Midwesterner that other can model while not threatening anti-Blackness.

⁴⁸⁴ Lisa A. Flores, “Stoppage and the Racialized Rhetorics of Mobility,” *Western Journal of Communication* 84, no. 3 (2020): 251.

⁴⁸⁵ Flores, “Stoppage,” 251.

The final case study examined online tourist materials for the village of Ripley, Ohio and argued they are characterized by rhetorics of heritage. Unlike previous uses of the term heritage in memory-related scholarship, I forward “rhetorics of heritage” as a vocabulary that characterize how contemporary agents connect themselves to agents of the past through a common substance that is directly passed through time. In Ripley’s tourism imaginary, notable white abolitionists of the past and current white Ripley residents are claimed to have the same commitments to freedom and moral superiority, and tourists are promised to experience them.

These case studies also demonstrate my broader argument for the intersection of rhetoric-remembrance-race-region. Read in conjunction, my analyses elucidate how public remembrances actively contribute to the rhetorical construction of race and region, and how they work through each other. That is, race is articulated along regional lines and region is articulated on racial lines. In this project, rhetorics of whiteness carve out the upper Midwest and blanket Midwesterners across time. We came to understand the substance or character of the elusive Midwest, in part, through the stories of abolition: purity, moral superiority, fortitude, and commitment to freedom.

Reading across the three case studies in this project, four recurrent themes emerge. These themes elucidate how three different case studies from the same time period have critical commonalities that articulate race in regionally distinct ways. More specifically, we see the recurrence of construction of temporal continuity, depictions of synergetic space-people relationships, coordination of different scale of place, and a focus on racism, not race. Together, these four themes illustrate regional features of whiteness and their centrality to Midwest identity.

Temporal Continuity

Remembrances of Glover in Milwaukee, Truth in Michigan, and abolitionist activities in Ripley all construct temporal continuity between the past and present. Arguments about the relationship between the past and present in these case studies positioned upper Midwestern space and its people in a single, unbroken bracket of time. Representations of Glover's "rescue" creates a temporal flow of purity. Temporal purity does not bracket race and racism to the past, but rather insists it never existed within a space. Stories about Glover argue that the region was and remains pure of the contamination of slavery. The legacy of Wisconsin's freedom and progressive nature coupled with white abolitionist efforts toward ending enslavement are carried through to present day white residents are understood as taking the baton to *continue* thwarting the occasional, and out of place, racist act. This temporality absolves contemporary white Wisconsinites from claims of the significance of race because the space and those contained within it are pure of the sin of enslavement across time. Temporal purity is cumulative, but in a different way than Ersula Ore and Matthew Houdek outline in their arguments about countertemporalities.⁴⁸⁶ The accumulation of purity is the spatial bracketing of anti-Blackness elsewhere and the amassing of innocence and morality for white Midwesterners that exonerates them from the ongoing, systemic, and national significance of race.

Remembrances of Truth in Michigan create temporal continuity through the enactment of state values evidenced by Truth, other white antebellum abolitionists, and contemporary white residents. Truth is constructed as personifying fortitude, moral superiority, and sterilized orientation to slavery and women's rights. Stories of Truth's life in Michigan depict her as

⁴⁸⁶ Ersula Ore and Matthew Houdek contend that accumulation in countertemporalities of racialized violence connect past, present, and future instances of anti-Black violence as "a condition of ceaseless and imminent violence." Ersula Ore and Matthew Houdek, "Lynching in Times of Suffocation: Toward a Spatiotemporal Politics of Breathing," *Women's Studies in Communication* 43, no. 4 (2020): 445.

overcoming formidable obstacles, which serves as an exemplar for contemporary residents in colorblind meritocracy. Truth's moral superiority is constructed through courage, empathy, and kindness which are taught in educational materials to young Michiganders and positioned as learned skills that will continue her legacy today. In remembrances of Truth, a metaphorical baton of superior morality is passed from generation to generation of Michiganders, never to be dropped. Finally, temporal continuity is constructed by linking of Truth as an inspiration and predecessor to civil and women's rights leaders of the 20th century. Truth is linked to Rosa Parks, who eventually moved to Detroit, and Harriet Tubman, who never lived in the Midwest but worked on the Underground Railroad, creating a regional narrative of progress and activism.

Finally, in Ripley, Ohio temporal continuity is constructed through rhetorics of heritage. I conceptualize rhetorics of heritage as claims of the bounded, fixed, and direct passage of an identifiable substance from one person or generation to the next. While rhetorics of heritage are not biological, they invoke biological thinking because the transmission of a substances is inevitable, immune to change, and provides the grounds for absolving alternative claims. Rhetorics of heritage tie past white abolitionists and contemporary white Ripley residents by insisting that deep-seated commitments and superior morality are an immutable part of their identity. Claims of heritage are also evident in the experiences tourists are promised to have when in the village. By visiting the historic homes of abolitionists, walking former Underground Railroad trails tourists, and interacting with friendly and welcoming white locals, tourists can expect to see how the past and present white "souls" of Ripley are connected through their commitments to freedom and superior mortality.

The temporal continuity of the three case studies in this project function to temporally distance the Midwest and its residents from race, racism, and white supremacy. Race, racism,

and white supremacy are claimed to not be a part of the social landscape of the region because enslavement did not cross its boundaries, creating the appearance of a colorblind meritocracy that one can experience today. There is no space for reckoning with race in the temporal continuity of the upper Midwest, allowing for the centrality of race to be dismissed.

Synergistic Space-People Relationships

In each of the case study analyses, a synergistic relationship between Midwest space and the people that occupy this space is constructed. More specifically, the locations of the contemporary abolition stories have some of the same characteristics as the abolitionists who occupied them. I find that these synergistic relationships create spatial distance between Midwest white abolitionists and white supremacy because it is not just the people occupying the space who are committed to abolition, but the very land they occupy is an active force in the movement.

Remembrances of Glover create a synergistic relationship between space and people in two ways. First, rhetorics of purity are metaphorically embedded into the rhetorical landscape of Wisconsin. The use of terms like seeds and roots in characterizing anti-slavery characterize these efforts as a natural part of the state's identity and an unstoppable force that will continue to grow— further constructing temporal purity. Second, the regional bounding of enslavement to the South functions synecodically to write purity and superior morality onto white Wisconsin abolitionists, constructing simplistic dichotomies of “good” and “bad” while obscuring explanations beyond fighting anti-Blackness for abolitionist efforts.

The connection between land and people in remembrance of Truth in Michigan emerge in the state values of fortitude and moral superiority. Truth's exemplary fortitude is reflection of Michigan's equality and meritocracy, where hard work earns success. Despite much of Truth's

life taking place outside of Michigan, her notoriety today is linked to the opportunities afforded by the state's progressive values.

In the tourism imaginary of Ripley, the land is constructed as working in concert with local white abolitionists. The land is described as having an inherent orientation toward freedom. Ripley's location on a narrowed portion of the Ohio River situates the village as on the frontlines of the borderlands in the fight for freedom. The narrowing of the river is described as a crossing point for freedom seekers and white abolitionists helping them through the threshold to freedom. The bluffs overlooking the river are ideal for spotting those escaping to freedom as well as slave catchers, while the creeks provided opportunities to lose the scent of dogs tracking freedom seekers. Local white abolitionists worked with this seemingly natural orientation toward freedom and built upon it to aid in their efforts.

Coordination of Local-Regional-National

The construction of region is always in connection with other social relations. An important locus of social relations to interrogate is how the articulation of race in a region is connection to national identity. This is especially true for the Midwest, whose identity is tied to what is "truly American." Jenny Rice argued, "Appeals to regional identity may actually be service of national identity, as we see in appeals to Midwestern identity (a place commonly referred to as 'America's heartland')[.]"⁴⁸⁷ In this project, contemporary stories of abolition shifted from local/state pride and values to national significance, constituting these historical people and events as critical to understanding of race on throughout the nation. The oscillating of scales bolsters claims of a distinct Midwestern identity while forwarding an understanding of race that is spatially and temporally bound.

⁴⁸⁷ Jenny Rice, "From Architectonic to Tectonics: Introducing Regional Rhetorics," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (2012): 208.

Glover’s “rescue” is often explained in connection with the national impact it would have through a series of court cases. Sherman Booth, who was arrested for violating the Fugitive Slave Act (1850) for his role in Glover’s escape, charged that the law was unconstitutional. After ten years of court cases, the Fugitive Slave Act was repealed. The story that is a source of contemporary pride for Milwaukeeans positions its residents as “ahead of its time” on a national scale. Local white abolitionists’ deep-seated commitments for free Glover are spatiotemporal markers of justice and equality achieved on a local level that serves as an ideal for the nation.

In Michigan, remembrances of Truth demonstrate the interplay between local/state pride and national significance. Truth is at once claimed as a local hero and national figure, which functions to bolster Michigan’s significance in the national landscape. Truth is commemorated throughout the nation largely for her contributions to abolition and women’s rights in places including New York City, Sacramento, San Diego, and Florence, Massachusetts. Remembrances of Truth in Michigan are distinctive for how they claim her representativeness of Michigan’s best qualities and national prominence to leverage local/state historical and contemporary significance in the national landscape. Michiganders argue that Truth represents the state’s identity— fortitude, moral superiority, and a non-threatening, sanitized form— and a heralded national figure marks the spatial distinctiveness of Michigan in the national landscape. For some Michiganders, Truth is an argument for the state’s historical and contemporary significance in addressing anti-Blackness. Local claims to Truth by Battle Creek residents attempt to bolster the prominence of a largely unknown (outside of Michigan) that is struggling financially on a national scale.⁴⁸⁸ This is especially evidence in how commemorations of Truth are utilized to attract tourists to the locale.

⁴⁸⁸ For information on Battle Creek’s recent financial struggles as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic see Madeline Halpert, “Gov. Whitmer’s New Budget Bails Out 24 Struggling Michigan Cities,” *Bridge Michigan*, February 21,

Ripley's online tourist materials leverage local historical happenings to make regional, national, and international to articulate a historically distinct locale for tourists to visit. In this analysis, rhetorics of heritage situate Ripley as an origin point for freedom fighting. Former Judge Thomas F. Zachman's comment about local white abolitionist activities as a "pivotal and seminal momen[t] in the heritage of free people" locates Ripley at the center and leader of international efforts for freedom in the past, present, and future. The village is further positioned as a core space of freedom through claims of the name the "Underground Railroad" originating by a freedom seeker hiding in Ripley. These shifts to national and international scales situate Ripley as trailblazers with large impact and, therefore, desirable tourist destinations. Additionally, the abolitionists commemorated in Ripley are frequently called American heroes and Parker's home is described as "a true Southern Ohio landmark, illustrating how the nation and region collide. Specifically, abolition at one distinguishes the Midwest from other regions, but their commitments to freedom and superior morality are distinctly American.

A glaring issue in each of these case studies is the failure to explain the traveling on the Underground Railroad *through* the Midwest to Canada. Although these locales are identified as free, abolitionist aided freedom seekers past the international border. While the Midwest provided routes to freedom, the region was not a destination for freedom. The decision to continue one's journey north to Canada may have been motivated by the lack of legal protection under the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act. However, this only a partial explanation as commitments to anti-Blackness in the upper Midwest likely drove Black folks further north across the international border. The case studies in this project illustrate how rhetorics of purity, state

2021, Retrieved from <https://www.bridgemi.com/michigan-government/gov-whitmiers-new-budget-bails-out-24-struggling-michigan-cities> (Accessed July 16, 2023).

values, and rhetorics heritage deflect how the region served as a pathway to Canada while constructing the Midwest as a space of moral superiority and freedom.

White Comfort in Midwest Rhetorics

George F. Will's *Washington Post* article urging readers to turn to Midwestern values and the "reassuring rhythm and rituals of civic affairs," points to a distinct regional culture of whiteness despite a reputation of indistinctiveness. I also find that Will's comments are animated by affect. Specifically, across the three case studies in this dissertation white comfort is circulated in connection with articulation of whiteness in contemporary stories of abolition in the upper Midwest.

Rhetorical scholars have demonstrated that knowledge and ideology are tethered to what Sara Ahmed termed "affective economies."⁴⁸⁹ Ahmed theorized that objects, bodies, ideas, and emotions are circulated through discourse accumulating interrelated meanings.⁴⁹⁰ As an ideology, race is profoundly affective, influencing individual and collective identity, what and who we invest in, and "how knowledge moves us."⁴⁹¹ Public memory is inflected by affect as versions of the past with accumulate interrelated meaning deemed worthy of preserving. Further, affiliation is "the principal modality of public memory," as it facilitates attachments/affiliations/ identifications and disaffiliations/disidentifications shaping our felt experiences of identity and belonging.⁴⁹² Lawrence Grossberg identified "affect can never define, by itself, why things should matter," but "always demands that ideology legitimate the fact that these differences and

⁴⁸⁹ Sara Ahmed, "Affective Economies," *Social Text* 79, no 2 (2004): 117-139.

⁴⁹⁰ Ahmed, "Affective Economies," 120.

⁴⁹¹ Stephanie L. Hartzell, "Whiteness Feels Good Here: Interrogating White National Rhetoric on Stormfront," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 17, no. 2 (2020): 133.

⁴⁹² See Carole Blair, Greg Dickinson, and Brian L. Ott, "Introduction: Rhetoric/Memory/Place," in *Places of Public Memory: The Rhetoric of Museums and Memorials*, ed. Greg Dickinson, Carole Blair, and Brian L. Ott (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010): 16; Lisa A. Flores and Logan Rae Gomez, "Nightmares of Whiteness," in *Interrogating the Communicative Power of Whiteness*, eds. Dawn Marie D. McIntosh, Dreama G. Moon, and Thomas K. Nakayama (New York: Routledge, 2018): 202.

not others matter, and within such differences a particular term becomes the site of our investment.”⁴⁹³ In stories of abolition in the upper Midwest, whiteness is the legitimizing ideology and colorblindness is the operate affective economy.

In contemporary stories of abolition in the upper Midwest, a colorblind affective ideology shapes affective connections and investments in the nostalgic, distinct/indistinct, goodness of the region. Stephanie A. Hartzell argues that critical approaches to rhetoric and affect are attuned to how affective economies manifest, mobilize, and resist the ideological functions of race that prompt “affective investments and disinvestments.”⁴⁹⁴ An affective economy of colorblindness structures white people’s attachments, affiliations, identifications, and knowledge about race. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva explained that the “post-Civil rights white common sense” frame that views race as irrelevant and racism as rooted in pathology is a common sense way of thinking in the United States.⁴⁹⁵ In this post-Civil rights framework, race is not “seen” as meaningful, racism is largely temporally bound and contemporary enactments are reduced to interpersonal interactions, while race and racism circulate in coded discourses that obscure realities of race and maintain whiteness as the dominant racial ideology. As an affective economy in the upper Midwest, colorblindness functions a bit differently. Rather than post-Civil rights common sense, abolition common sense is the operative frame because stories of abolition discursively position the region outside of race since its inception. Abolition common sense is an ideological starting

⁴⁹³ Lawrence Grossberg, *We Gotta Get Out of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992): 86.

⁴⁹⁴ Hartzell, “Whiteness Feels Good Here,” 134. Or as Ahmed stated, “emotions do things, and they align individuals with communities— or bodily space with social space— through the very intensity of their attachments.” Ahmed, “Affective Economies,” 119.

⁴⁹⁵ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*, 4th ed (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2014): 13-14; Ashley Noel Mack and Bryan J. McCann, “Strictly an Act of Street Violence’: Intimate Publicity and Affective Disinvestment in the New Orleans Mother’s Day Shooting,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 14, no. 4 (2017): 335; and Eric King Watts, “Postracial Fantasies, Blackness, and Zombies,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 14, no. 4 (2017): 318.

point from which race and racism are negotiated on local, regional, and national scales and provide paths for navigating the shifting landscape of domination and oppression. In the Midwest, abolition common sense secures white domination and white innocence simultaneously.

An affective economy of colorblindness in the upper Midwest shapes perspectives on the insignificance of race across time while reinforcing the universal, central, and deracialized position of whiteness. The region's discursive location "outside" or beyond race constructed in historical representations of abolition has become a critical inventive resource for thwarting claims of the significance of race and its manifestations. White upper Midwesterners are effectively positioned as comfortable amidst contemporary racial reckonings because of the insignificance of race in their lives and the lives of their "ancestors."⁴⁹⁶ When confronted by persistent centrality of race, solace can be found in the spatial and temporal distance from enslavement, racially coded values, and rhetorics of heritage that bind them to the region's (supposed) colorblind past. Contemporary stories of abolition emerge to bolster regional claims of colorblindness, and, ultimately, whiteness.

A colorblind affective economy also bolsters whiteness on a national scale. Affect is a productive concept for helping rhetorical scholars disentangle the distinct relationship the Midwest has to the nation as what is "truly American" and the "heartland of the nation." Colorblindness provides ideological protection from contemporary manifestations of race and racism that extend from the nation's inception while allowing whiteness to prevail. The uncertainties of the "potentially ominous future" Will speaks of— including the long last impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, economic instability, gun violence, and anti-Black violence— are

⁴⁹⁶ Here I am invoking a vocabulary of heritage to demonstrate how colorblindness is seemingly inevitably passed from generation to generation of Midwesterners.

raced. While the United States reckons with their national and international legacy of race, there is comfort in claiming that the Midwest is the true substance of national identity. Midwestern, and therefore, national comfort is not grounded in tater tot casseroles, bonfires at a lake-side home, or fishing, but in the warmth of ideological whiteness.⁴⁹⁷

Affect also helps me answer the pervasive question that prompted this project. Shortly after the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, a loved one said, “That just doesn’t happen here.” The “here” in this statement referred to the Midwest, while the “that” was racism. As a critical rhetorical scholar, I could make arguments about the discursive and material significance of race on regional and national scales, but I was not fully satiated with these explanations. For us white Midwesterners, there is a discomfort in racism infiltrating our space and comfort in having resources to demonstrate the out of placeness of Floyd’s death (and those like it). We pathologize Derek Chauvin and the Minneapolis police department, while finding reprieve in the shelter of colorblindness that looks away from the significance of race and compelled investments in whiteness. Comfort is reestablishing when we identify these cases as anomalies—the result of individual and overt acts of racism—rather than acknowledging pervasive racial logics that shape how we understand the world on local, regional, and national levels. It feels good to have the discursive materials to insulate oneself and those around you from claims of anti-Blackness. In the story mentioned above, Floyd’s murder may not have just caused discomfort for its violent racism, but for its disruption of regional colorblindness. When confronted with the realities of persisting anti-Blackness that is not defined by region, it *feels* wrong. Abolition common sense *feels* right.

⁴⁹⁷ Satoshi Toyosaki, says this best, “whiteness manifests like a monolithic blanket that covers our world. Some enjoy the warmth and protection, and others struggle and suffocate under it.” Satoshi Toyosaki, “Praxis-Oriented Whiteness Research,” *Journal of Multicultural Discourses* 11, no. 3 (2016): 245.

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