RECKONING AND JUSTICE:

Better Practices for Memory Work, June, 2024

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WHAT IS MEMORY WORK

To work with memory, we acknowledge the passing of time and the value of remembrance. We define memory work as the process of acknowledging, preserving, and interpreting past events. Memory work can take many forms: storytelling, food preparation, site preservation, land acknowledgement, commemoration, historical archiving, ethnography, art making, dancing, music, and creating exhibits in common places. All of these forms of memory work keep alive histories that have been actively neglected, erased, silenced, and might otherwise be forgotten.

WHY DO WE CALL IT MEMORY WORK?

We use the term memory work to acknowledge those who came before us. Our form of memory work puts silenced histories and experiences front and **center**. It gets these stories told and makes room to tell our stories and those of our descendants

WHO IS THIS FOR?

and who are we?

This guide is intended to support community activists & stakeholders, historians, preservationists, academics, scholars, artists, architects, and others who want to participate in community-based and community-driven memory work. Those who want to illuminate silenced, undervalued, devalued, and erased histories. It is especially intended for those **directly connected** to this history. These people determine what memories to share, and how to share them. It is also for people who work with history and want a more informed archive, research repository, or more complete context for a historical event.

Who are we? **We are memory workers. We have many backgrounds. Some of us are architects, artists, archivists, oral historians, scholars, and social activists working in communities, colleges, universities, research facilities, and libraries and archives. We live in the United States and are each impacted by the indifference, historical perspective, and continued systemic intent to silence, misinterpret, and erase the histories of people viewed as marginal.**

HOW WE DO MEMORY WORK

As memory workers, we prioritize care and kinship at the center of our work.

We recognize that not everyone will be in the same place—what people understand about the past, how to work collaboratively, and educate others—when people decide to undertake memory work. Engaging in memory work requires respect, trust, transparency, integrity, and patience. It also requires that we commit to advocating for choices and decisions about memory work made by those directly connected to that history.

We hope this toolkit will help people where they are, **lift up** the questions they are asking as an impacted community, and shape a process of truth-telling about the past.

We believe people from impacted communities should engage in their unique forms of memory work and **remain at the center** of this process. They should set the expectations for what memory work looks like, determine who leads and who facilitates the process, and we should listen to and honor their decisions.

Listening is a practice of care. People who facilitate memory work need to be excellent listeners. We need to listen deeply to the stories that impacted communities want to tell. This is essential for building and nurturing good relationships.

In our culture, however, listening is rarely taught and thus very hard to practice. All memory work starts with practicing this core value: **listening to one another.**

01.

Listening

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"When memory fails and forgetting wins, the stories stop and the people die."
—JAMES P. RONDA

For us, listening is the beginning of every successful memory work project. It is not just hearing. It is a listening that is intentional; listening is participating. We listen to, rather than impose on, community members. We acknowledge that we all hold grief from structural violence, as well as individual and collective trauma. Some of our memories are rooted in trauma and need to be treated with great care. **Reciprocity** in relationships occurs only through active and intentional listening by all. Remaining to listen when it is most difficult keeps us accountable.

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In order to make our listening a reflective and meditative practice, we reflect on:

1. who, when, how, and what are the memory components;
2. how are we listening;
3. how are we continuing to refine and train ourselves in new listening practices, and new educational tools (new mediums and tools emerge from unexpected places in the digital and analog world);
4. how we can be flexible, nonlinear, and innovative in our listening.

02.

Facilitator Role

"We can't change our past, but we can change our blindness to the past."
-CHIMAMANDA ADICHIE

As we facilitate memory work alone or as a group, we think about how we hold ourselves **accountable**. Many memory workers are part of institutions, and we must constantly reflect on how to be good partners as the impacted community works to tell their truths with the utmost integrity. We practice listening and reflecting deeply in order to stand with these people for the long haul.

The facilitator role is key to the success of the project:

Facilitation includes explicitly naming and helping the group decide the ways to function effectively:

(a) talk/listen, let one another know we want to talk;
(b) construct a time frame;
(c) share decision-making;
(d) share tasks, "doing the work" – fundraising, organizing meetings, taking notes, research, sharing information, writing for internal and external audiences, outreach, and facilitation;
(e) lead the group through the process of creating a "community agreement" to which all are accountable;
(f) nurture a culture of reciprocal learning and expression.

Equality

is the way **facilitators** connect each value – the facilitator leads and demonstrates this process.

FACILITATORS CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT

where community members can share their ideas of what memory work is. For example: Whose names are acknowledged? What practices, rituals and lineages have they carried through in their respective households and communities? How do they think about practices of memory in the everyday? How do they consider memory as destructive? How do they consider memory as a response to their spiritual/faith-based practices and culture, language, food, music, sound, rituals, gatherings, dances, and art? How and why do they participate in this work? What particular remembrance practices are important?
Facilitators remind everyone that some conversations may be uncomfortable or difficult, but this is part of the process.

ESTABLISH a non-hierarchical exchange:

- To capture an accurate and true representation and expression of voices, insights, perspectives, ideas, memory, teaching, history, wisdom, assets, connection to the land/cultural landscape & heritage, spirituality, ceremony, forms of word, power, relationships, processes, and resources.
- To advance openness and respect for different ways of knowing from all parties involved;
- To frame and acknowledge the context, lay the foundation, and establish priorities important to all co-educators/parties;
- To build awareness, transparency, and agreed-upon ground rules for engagement, process, and consensus-building throughout the work.

Facilitators, cont.

should introduce and/or remind those traditionally considered majority people about the ways they can work to uphold the Principles of Accountable Clarity for Majority People in Memory Work:

1. How are you decentering your experience and centering those most impacted as you set up workflows to share information, resources, and gather people?
2. How are you educating yourself and your people as a <u>productive ally</u>?
3. How are you learning about the <u>pitfalls dominant people in coalition work often fall into</u>, such as:
   a. Saviorism;
   b. Hyper individualism;
   c. Spiritual bypassing;
   d. Racial anxiety/white fragility;
   e. Unconscious bias;
   f. Taking part in and fueling Individual, Institutional, and/or system-wide backlash;
   g. Not tending to self-awareness/health and limits

People and institutions traditionally recognized as decision-makers and power brokers frequently assume and practice **dominance**. Effective memory work recognizes this and requires that **the marginalized community be acknowledged as the dominant power** force in memory work.

03.
Examples

To ensure people have the resources they need, we list examples of successful projects and other useful resources for the work.

In the last few years, more and more people have fought hard to contest exclusionary forms of memory culture and put front and center those who had been erased. Nikole Hannah-Jones's 1619 Project (2019). Raoul Peck's docuseries, Exterminate All the Brutes (2021). The repeated resurrection of Emmett Till's memorial plaque in Mississippi has time and again been turned into metal lace by nightriders' bullet holes. Yet their efforts are often met with leaden silence, political grandstanding, or violent backlash. Here are other examples of memorial work led by impacted communities that inspire our group.

- African Burial Ground National Memorial and Interpretive Center, New York
- American Indians in Texas at the Spanish Colonial Mission and their work to repatriate their ancestors
- Brown, Margaret, dir. Descendant, Netflix (2022)
- Chinn, Ann, Middle Passage Ceremonies and Port Markers Project
- Equal Justice Initiative, National Memorial for Peace and Justice
- Gosper, Bronte, "Collapsing Time: Indigenous Storytellers and the Everywhen" (2023)
- Halperin, Jennie Rose, "Is It Possible to Decolonize the Commons? An Interview with Jane Anderson of Local Contexts" (2019)
- Ikemoto, Wendy, curator of Monuments: Commemoration and Controversy (2022)
- Inuit Qaujimajatuqanjit principles
- Mason-Hogans, Danita, Community History Initiative Chapel Hill, North Carolina
- Miguel, Muriel, Spiderwoman Theater (1974-present)
- Movement History Initiative, The SNCC Digital Gateway (2018)
- Mukurtu museum platform
- Museums of the African Diaspora
- On the Media episode on the fight for history and memory in Poland
- On the Media episodes on Africatown
- Parella-Aureli, Ariel, "Nothing That We Do Is Worthwhile Is Done Alone" (2021)
- Reflections on the Mandela Dialogues (2016)
- Roberts, Tara, "Into the Depths"
- Sims, John, "The Recoloration Project" (2020)
- Šlipavičiūtė-Černiauskienė, Lina, "Walls That Remember"
- Smith, Clint, Monuments to the Unthinkable" (2022)
- Watson, Cornell, "Behind the Mask" (2021-22)

04.

Resources

TOOLS

Sage Crump's Cultural Strategy toolkit/<u>rubric</u>

"NOT TO KNOW WHAT
HAPPENED BEFORE YOU
WERE BORN IS TO REMAIN
FOREVER A CHILD."
    -CICERO

Healing-Scholar practitioners and organizations:

- <u>Ayana Flewellen</u>
- <u>Nick Cave</u>
- <u>Camille Brown</u>
- <u>Cynthia Dillard</u>
- <u>Taryn Brown</u>
- <u>Aimee Meredith Cox</u>
- <u>Alexis Pauline-Gumbs</u>
- <u>Spirit House</u>
- <u>Harriet's Apothecary</u>
- <u>Let's Reimagine</u>
- <u>Diaspora Solidarity Lab</u>
- <u>Memorial rubric</u>

05.

Community Agreements

Expression

- How does your Community Agreement facilitate a culture of reciprocal learning and expression?
- How will leadership reflect the goals, values, and intent of the group?
- How can you help cultivate an inclusive range of expression from co-educators, including, but not limited to, culture, language, ceremony, and other mediums?

a culture of reciprocal learning and expression is key to success

TOOLS

We have provided templates for community agreements and questions that people working at traditional institutions such as foundations, universities, libraries, museums, and archives can use to hold themselves accountable. These materials help everyone involved in memory work maintain good relationships as they participate in these projects.

Such agreements directly address **expression**, **representation**, and **stewardship**:

Representation: The significance of the cultural and historical resource is often rooted in how stakeholders self-identify and value their relationship with the community. An invitation to share individual insights about the community, the cultural resource, and the currency they bring to the initiative helps provide a foundation and member-relevance for the entire group.

1. Self identification: what are the most relevant/important/ things/characteristics/story people should know about you?
2. How would you describe your connections to the community/topic/ space/place?
3. Take a pause! Can you share the tools/methods or ways you choose or actively practice de-centering self?
4. Environment/community
5. What was the motivation for working on this project, and do the stakeholders around the table reflect it?
6. What forms of diverse skills, knowledge and wisdom are present?

Community Agreements, cont.

STEWARDSHIP IS THE THIRD PILLAR OF COMMUNITY AGREEMENTS

The future of the project, its legacy, and the continued impact upon the community, in large part, depends on how generations of community stakeholders will steward it. To sustain and maintain truth-telling, all members of the community should always be able to access the co-creation. Envisioning a way forward to sustain the significance and service of the cultural / historical resource will rely upon how the community interprets stewardship.

- What does stewardship mean to all co-educators/stakeholders?
- What are the ways in which co-educators (stakeholders) can be engaged throughout the life of the project and effectively contribute continuously to support power of place & intention?
- Access and reclamation of space/intention/story are critical to sustaining stewardship. How have you assessed potential barriers - physical, social, cultural, financial, psychological, etc.?

"If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor.
                    -Archbishop Desmond Tutu

06.

Accountable Institutions

TOOLS

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FOUNDATIONS:

- **What ways are you developing a process to allow memory workers who are not associated with a traditionally accepted or established entity, such as a museum or university, to lead grant work?**
- **What other accountability structures can your project teams co-innovate with memory workers that will push forward the work by people most impacted by the events being commemorated?**
- **How are your legal and communications departments developing and implementing practices to better center those most impacted by the memory work you are funding grantees to do?**

"It is the innocence which constitutes the crime."

-James Baldwin

MUSEUMS

- **What work are you doing internally to fight systemic institutional bias? How are you making that information accessible to the public?**
- **Do you have an auditing process to examine who is making decisions inside the organization about who to hire? What are exhibit foci? What are collecting priorities?**
- **Are you redistributing wealth? Is there leadership by members of minoritized groups at the board and staff levels?**
- **What is the percentage of art made by minoritized populations in your collection? In your current exhibitions? Who has a solo exhibit? How frequently is this art incorporated into your scheduled exhibits?**
- **What is your process for addressing the provenance of artifacts from minoritized communities who have requested their return?**
- **Is there a plan for marginalized communities to have access in a way that will not be financially prohibitive or inaccessible once the project is complete?**

1.

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UNIVERSITIES & MUNICIPALITIES:

- What legal structures are you offering to ensure memory workers have copyright over their material, even if the university is maintaining/storing the material?
- In what ways are you making your histories transparent?
- Are you providing internal mechanisms to "continuously improve" your faculty and leadership's awareness of the university's history (and thus its institutional obligations)?
- Who in your leadership is responsible for building and nurturing relationships with communities most impacted in your immediate environment? By what specific public measures are you holding your institution accountable to those communities?

Conclusion: OUR VALUES

We hope this toolkit will help impacted people (re)gain trust and set the stage for conversations about doing memory work on their terms.

We come together to do this work of **Remembering Ancestors** in a specific way that reflects our values:

- **reclaiming** the cultural historical significance and impact of persons, places, things;
- **including personal and public** broad ranges of actors and history;
- creating **space and time** as key components of memory for forthright community dialogue that enables actors to inform the general public about the significance of this memory;
- sustaining **multigenerational community** and **communal** aspects of memory building;
- employing language and definitions with **respect** and **clarity**. Words must clearly convey the group's intention/purpose regarding what the memory addresses;
- maintaining **care** and **responsibility** -" **Ubuntu**" - "I do well, you flourish; i don't do well, you don't do well";
- providing, valuing, and encouraging the expressions and experiences of the **most-impacted communities** by the past/present/future directions;
- establishing protected time and place for **responses** and **emotions** ranging from ambivalence, pain, confrontation, weeping, shame and guilt is as important as the history itself. These responses are part of the history itself. Not manipulating them, but letting them be. Always allow expression of ambivalence when doing memory work;
- acknowledging how and why this work includes **different perspectives** and **interpretation** - not everyone has the same sense of place, person or event and it is important not to ignore this;
- contextualizing a framework to **clarify assumptions** and **state values** -- a person cannot just throw words out there;
- understanding **artistic** and **cultural performance** enhance interpretation and education in memory work - this can be a crucial element for ceremonies and exhibits;
- supporting **forms of resistance** and protest by the community when a site, person, event is not treated with respect.
- using **intergenerational ritual** highlights the importance of established and familiar Individual and communal acts of connection - "I'm walking in others' footsteps"; This illustrates a sense of shared knowledge, experience, and collaborative care
- **connecting ritual and resistance** in order to help people survive through individual and communal acts of memory. At times this provides a pathway to another form of action, dialog, and planning.
- **incorporating senses** (smell, touch, sight, taste) to memory work can be essential. , How does djembe drum make you remember? How do smells make you remember? Incorporate and use all or most of senses is **core** to memory work;

OUR TEAM

Why do this work? We do this for our ancestors, we do this for the ones who come next, and we do this because we were born free.

Work Group 2022-2024

Online via a Franklin Humanities Institute Grant

We formed a work group in January 2022 to meet 1-2x per month online as part of a grant supported by the John Hope Franklin Humanities Institute at Duke University, "Reckoning and Justice: Art, Historical Memory and Commemoration.

More information about the Franklin Humanities Institute can be found at https://fhi.duke.edu/

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