

Assignment

Unit #3: Writing Counter-Histories: A Place-Based Approach to Intersecting Rhetoric and Race

Overview and Purpose:

bell hooks's book *Belonging: A Culture of Place* articulates one African American woman's relationship to place. In it, hooks delves into her own history of place: the places she has felt connected to, the places she has felt exiled from, and everything in between. For hooks, to understand Black rhetorical practices and identities, one first needs to understand how displacement and recurring themes of place have shaped their collective identity and, when displaced, many African Americans (including hooks) "[feel] a greater necessity to articulate the role of homeplace in [their] artistic vision" (22).

As we have read in this unit, a substantive body of rhetorical scholarship has interrogated the relationships among bodies, the places and space they inhabit, and how histories are constructed through memorials, monuments, and historical markers. These receptacles of history, however, tell a partial history, one that is often "whitewashed" to minimize violence.

Assignment:

To further our understanding of the relationship among communities, rhetoric, and space, in this assignment you will choose a historical marker through the Texas Historical Commission (THC), analyze how history is rhetorically constructed within the marker, and write a six- to eight-page proposal to the THC to revise a historical marker to include a more inclusive history for that location.

Requirements:

1. To begin this project, you should select a Texas historical site. For purposes of this assignment, I am asking you to go through the [Texas Historical Commission \(THC\)](#). You should select a site that is of interest to you. If you don't have a site in mind, you might explore what is available through several means, including:

- THC's Atlas, which allows you to conduct keyword searches, searches by County, and more can be found here: <https://atlas.thc.state.tx.us/>

- THC's map of African American history markers:
<https://www.thc.texas.gov/preserve/projects-and-programs/state-historical-markers/thematic-marker-maps/african-american>
- THC's map of Hispanic history markers:
<https://www.thc.texas.gov/preserve/projects-and-programs/state-historical-markers/thematic-marker-maps/hispanic-history-texas>
- THC's map and listing of historical sites:
<https://www.thc.texas.gov/preserve/projects-and-programs/thc-state-historic-sites>

2. The proposal you write should be organized into the following six sections:

- A. Introduction
- B. Established History of the Site
- C. Significance of Site to local/state/regional/national/transnational histories
- D. Analysis of Missing Histories
- E. Proposed Revisions with justifications
- F. Conclusion

In Sections B and C of the proposal, you are engaging in historical writing (we will talk more about this in class). You will research the history of this site. Using a minimum of five (5) sources from the library (three scholarly and two non-scholarly), the proposal should explore the history of the site while also illuminating what is missing from that history. In Section D, for example, if I were analyzing the historical marker on page 1 of this document, I might explore the development of Conroe as a city, but I also might want to explore how any previous histories are rendered invisible by the sign: it's almost as if nothing was in this area prior to 1890. Your job is to discover or speculate about that history. For example, I might guess that there may have been Hispanic or Indigenous communities prior to the 1890s and, using the library resources, try to recover that history. If you are interested in thinking about indigenous histories, you might consider beginning with Native Land Digital's excellent resource: <https://native-land.ca/>.

Even if you are not able to make a clearly recoverable revised history, such as locating a specific community on the exact site of the historical marker, the idea is to demonstrate an understanding about how histories tend to marginalize the role of non-white bodies. So, doing research about Native tribes local to Walker County and speculating about how that might relate to Huntsville would be perfectly fine. In Section E, the writer should provide some new verbiage for the marker and justify why the revisions are important. Sections D and E are perfect opportunities to blend analysis and creativity.

3. Special Collections in the Newton Gresham library has a lot of great Texas-specific materials, so you might also try searching in the special collections database for unique primary materials relevant to your site.
