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Heritage tourism, historic roadside markers and “just representation” in Tennessee, USA

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ABSTRACT

The American landscape is increasingly populated with memorial tourist sites showing a devotion to the past. In the last published statewide study of Tennessee historical roadside markers, Jones (1988) analyzed the 1,170 roadside markers across the state. In his analysis, markers devoted to black history or white women accounted for only 0.7% ($n=8$) and 0.8% ($n=9$), respectively, of all markers. At the time of this study there were more roadside markers solely dedicated to David Crocket (0.9%, $n=11$) than to either of these groups. Additionally, Native American people merely accounted for 3.0% ($n=35$), while white men accounted for 11.7% ($n=137$) – including 3% dedicated to Klu Klux Klan Founder Nathan Bedford Forrest (Jones, 1988). This particularly visible expression of public history serves primarily to preserve a white, Protestant, male history of the area (Jones, 1988). Using data on the 313 historical roadside markers erected since 1988, we (1) update the analysis of Jones (1988) and (2) discuss the lack of a “just representation” of non-white male history in these markers that has carried forward to 2019. The study is informed by social representation and critical race theory.

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Introduction

Public history is a critical component of the ways that contemporary society memorializes the past, and the American landscape is increasingly populated with tourist sites showing a devotion to iterations of public history (Doss, 2010; Alderman & Inwood, 2013). These representations of the past in the American South, however, often focus on white hegemonic notions of the past, either overtly or covertly through racist messages. The controversy surrounding Civil War monuments, most of which were erected during the Jim Crow era, serves as just one example of the tensions running through the American South. Historical roadside markers are another way in which public history is memorialized across the United States. Both their content and intent have been increasingly scrutinized by both the communities in which they are erected and by the communities they represent, as well as public historians and geographers. Despite this attention to historical roadside markers in recent scholarship, they have been relatively under-scrutinized in the state of Tennessee and their role in representation as cultural and heritage tourism sites deserves greater attention.

Silberberg (1995, p. 361) defined cultural tourism as “visits by persons from outside the host community motivated wholly or in part by interest in historical, artistic, scientific or lifestyle/heritage offerings of a community, region, group, or institution.” Within cultural tourism, heritage tourism occurs when visitors engage with museums, festivals, humanities, and historic preservation sites such as memorial sites (Seba, 2011). Smaller memorial sites, however, are erected and visited in towns, large and small, across the United States; historical roadside markers are among these. Memorial sites are often indicated by historical markers that bear texts or images meant to commemorate people, events, and places associated with these sites. In fact, Jones (1988) argued that, “perhaps two of the most visible and easily recognized components of what has been called public history are found in historic roadside markers and listings in the National Register of Historic Places” (p. 19). Historical markers are commonly placed along major highways in conjunction with tourist spots and are also referred to as “roadside markers.”

The practice of using historical markers to commemorate the past originates from England, where William Ewart, a member of parliament, proposed the first commemorative marker program in 1863. Following Ewart, the Society of Arts constructed two plaques, celebrating the lives of poet Lord Byron and Napoleon III in 1867 (“The History of Blue Plaques,” n.d.). The first historical marker program in the US began in Virginia in 1927 when William E. Carson, the first chairman of the Virginia Conservation Commission (Bardet, 2012), erected a handful of markers along U.S. 1 between Richmond and Mount Vernon (Virginia Department of Historic Resources, 2019). Other states, such as North Carolina, followed a few years after by starting their own historical marker programs (North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, n.d.). Despite this long history, or perhaps because of this long history, there is a need to reevaluate historical roadside markers through the lens of sustainable and socially responsible tourism. As cultural and heritage tourism sites, these markers are dominated by sectional interests that inherently represent those who hold power in the community (Hall, 2003).

As much of American history is seen through historical markers, it is essential that they reflect all American history or what we refer to herein as providing a “just representation.” That is, markers should include and represent *all* aspects of American culture, both tangible and intangible, equitably and fairly. In just representation, the intangible cultural heritage—defined as “the practices, representations, expressions, as well as the knowledge and skills, that communities, groups and in some cases individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage” (Intangible Heritage Convention as cited in Ruggles & Silverman, 2009)—is incorporated into the tangible heritage, such as historical roadside markers, for all social groups. Just representation as used in our study entails a more equitable representation of minority groups and gender representation in historical roadside markers as tangible heritage sites.

Historical markers are important for the value they add to cultural and heritage tourism (Otterstrom & Davis, 2016). Moreover, they accentuate places, people, and events that may have otherwise remained unknown to the public. They also direct the tourist gaze to select national and local history. History and events of the past are crucial parts of social life as they give communities a sense of self-identity; the memorialization and representation of place is inherently a social process rendering public memory a social construct (Alderman, 2012). However, historical markers usually represent what is deemed important to remember by a subset of the broader community (Alderman, 2010). As access to power often determines who makes decisions about historical markers, it is imperative from a sustainable tourism perspective to address important questions about the role of stakeholders, their aims, and the power and politics present in tourism (Hall, 2003). The purpose of this paper is to assess the extent of “just representation” of non-white male history in Tennessee historical markers.

The paper is organized as follows: In the next section, we introduce the literature used to conceptualize just representation, including an overview of social representation theory and of extant research on historical marker research in Tennessee. This is then followed by the details of the study approach, outlining the research questions, the dataset, and the data coding

analysis. We then present the results, followed by a discussion of these results and directions forward.

Conceptualizing “just representation”

An emphasis on sustainable tourism includes considering social impacts, including internal divisions within communities (Buckley, 2012). Although community-based planning is promoted in both bureaucratic and academic approaches to tourism development (Murphy, 1988; Hall, 2003), it is one among many components of promoting sustainable tourism. To understand the role of the community, we must first address power dynamics—politics determine power and who gets what (Lasswell, 1936); thus, public representation is a form of power. Decisions affecting tourism are representations of power and the values of those with control over scarce resources, rendering representation in tourism as political in nature. Thereby, “any satisfactory account of politics and the political must contain the element of human conflict; of groups of human beings in constant struggle with each other over resources and ideas about the distribution of resources” (Thirft & Forbes, 1983, p. 247). Lukes (1974; 2004) presented power as the successful control of one group over another group in which the group in power secures the compliance of the group not in power. In Lukes’ conceptualization of power, like Bachrach and Baratz (1970) before him, power is intrinsically related to authority, coercion, force, influence, and manipulation. Although the role of community in tourism and tourism planning is increasingly recognized (Hall, 2003), regarding tourism development, it is well established that power is not distributed evenly within the community (Hall & Jenkins, 1995; Hall, 2003), which is in part related to issues of public participation in tourism planning, such as difficulty in attaining representativeness in the planning stages, as well as addressing the general apathy of citizens (Jenkins, 1993).

Heritage tourism is a large component of tourism worldwide, and its intricate link to culture and society, bringing its historical past to the attention of present and future generations of visitors it is imperative to consider its sustainability from a social and cultural perspective (Garrod & Fyall, 2000). The concept of sustainable development, defined by Pearce (1993, p. 4) as the desire to “pass onto the next generation a stock in capital assets no less than the stock we have now”, is also applicable in the study of representation of historical markers. Here, both the tangible and intangible aspects of culture and heritage must be considered. The Intangible Heritage Convention describes the long-term aspect of intangible culture as that which is transmitted across generations and part of community identity (Ruggles & Silverman, 2009). Du Cros (2001) argued that there are two objectives to sustainable heritage tourism planning: (1) to determine the most appropriate places for heritage tourism development and (2) to determine the most appropriate way to manage these sites for sustainability. However, as she notes the “ways to manage” the sites are power laden and do not equally incorporate or represent the community in which these sites are situated. Intangible heritage such as cultural rituals and traditions passed down orally is particularly difficult to ensure fairness representation, for unlike physical built sites, they leave little to no material traces. We therefore argue that from a sustainability perspective, just representation of cultural heritage entails fair consideration and incorporation of intangible heritage along with tangible cultural heritage in heritage tourism development.

Both heritage tourism and sustainability overlap in the concept of preservation. They both seek to conserve sites, but from a tourism development standpoint, also to commodify them for visitor experience (Du Cros, 2001). From a societal perspective, however, many groups in society are not given the same consideration in heritage tourism planning. Among these, in Tennessee and in much of the United States, are Blacks, Native Americans, and White women. There is a large body of literature on the intersection of landscape representation and race in the American

South (Inwood & Martin, 2008; Dwyer et al., 2013), but limited studies that have included representation and the symbolic-discourse of multiple social groups, providing a comparative perspective on the social inclusion of non-White male history. Thus, we introduce “just representation” through the lens of social representation theory to contribute to the scholarship and praxis on the social sustainability of historical roadside markers. We also draw from critical race theory to inform our framework of social justice and inclusiveness for “just representation.”

Social representation theory

Moscovici's (1961, 1981, 1983, 1984, 1988) social representation theory reformulates Durkheim's (1898) conceptualization of collective representation in which social representations perform as interpretive framings for understanding society and culture (Doise, 1989; Bright & Carter, 2018). In other words, representations are part of the social world and form socially constructed ways of knowing (Fredline & Faulkner, 2000), including the narrativized world (Holland et al., 1998). Social representations are anchored and objectified through situations, objects, and narratives that contribute to an individual or collective realm of knowledge. Thus, *objectification* is a tool of meaning making that varies from group to group and interacts with past experiences to make sense of the world. It is through objectification that social representations are acted out collectively and create their object (Wagner et al., 1995). In the context of historical markers, this theory provides that the signs do not hold value alone, but provide larger interpretations about the values of society. They reflect beliefs about the world in both what select groups seek to memorialize and in the convictions of those groups about what is of social importance. As representations and their respective objectifications are formed by social units, the narratives they construct favor some social conditions over others (Wagner et al., 1995). Roadside markers are in this sense objectification devices.

To adequately assess just representation in Tennessee roadside markers, social representation theory is coupled with critical race theory. Recognizing roadside markers as objectification devices, it is important to understand the values that are represented and the social constructions that are implied in these representations, including those related to race, ethnicity, and sex. Together, these theories inform the framework that guides this research. As such, the messages presented on historical markers as objectification devices can be analyzed to better understand past and present constructions of power and race relations.

Following the discussion above, it can be argued that historical roadside markers perform as interpretive framings for understanding the values of society; they narrate a version of history through the anchoring of these events and sites of public history into our cognitive mappings. The historical roadside markers are also products of socialization that provide individuals with cues about the world around them (Fredline & Faulkner, 2000)—the representations that are constructed present a constructed historical past that continues to structurally reinforce specific ideologic meanings, power, and race relations. In the American South, the dominant social representation is a “nostalgic social representation” that idolizes a simpler, distant, and more peaceful time—one that did not actually exist (McKittrick, 2016; Bright & Carter, 2018). Critical race theory (Delgado & others, 1989; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017), like social representation theory, focuses on knowledge shared and development of representations, central to which is race and power. Thus, following social representation and critical race theory as described above, we use the following theoretical framework to guide our study: (1) we identify roadside markers as objectification devices that serve as a conceptual tool (story-telling device); (2) they represent a history that is deeply culturally engrained; (3) this history embodies structural and historical racism; and as such, (4) the narratives can be analyzed to assess the inequity in representation in the stories memorialized.

Historical roadside marker research in Tennessee

Like much of the American South, the state of Tennessee has a long and shameful history of slavery, racism, and segregation. Native Americans, Blacks, and women have been unjustly treated and have lacked representation and power within the state. There is evidence of Native American presence in Tennessee dating back to the Archaic Period. In the late 1600s, these tribes (Cherokee, Yuchi, Shawnee, Creek, Chickasaw, among others) came into contact with Euro-Americans and were forcefully removed within the century, violating the Proclamation of 1763, which reserved the Tennessee land to the Native Americans. As all of their land became ceded to Tennessee by the American government under the Revolutionary War, the Native Americans were forcefully removed under President Andrew Jackson's Indian Removal Act in the 1830s. Those seeking to remain were forced into internment camps. Seven tribes remained in colonial Tennessee and today, two tribes are federally recognized in the state: Choctaw and the Muscogee "Creek" Nation Citizens. There are an additional eight tribes currently seeking recognition in the state (Central Band of Cherokee, Cherokee Wolf Clan, Remnant Yuchi Nation, Chikamaka Cherokee, Far Away Cherokee, Upper Cumberland Cherokee, American Indian Association of Millington, and Native Cultural Circle) (House Bill 3299/Senate Bill 3123).

Black history in the state is equally problematic. Despite the abolition of slavery in 1865, gross abuse of blacks and other minority groups continued unabated for decades (Tischauer, 2013). There were laws that protected racists actively until the mid-1960s, when the civil rights movement gained in popularity. These laws were referred to as Jim Crow laws, a suite of rules and legislation designed to enforce racial segregation (Tischauer, 2013). Black people were not allowed to enjoy the same benefits as whites in public and private places; they were not allowed to live in the same neighborhoods as whites, eat at the same restaurants, or even attend the same schools. It was not until 1956 that the first public high school in Tennessee was desegregated, in the small town of Clinton (West, 2018). Blacks were not allowed to vote and even though slavery was abolished, blacks were often forced into sharecropping and other exploitative situations (Tischauer, 2013). This segregation and racism has impacted the way history was recorded in Tennessee as the efforts and contributions of blacks and other minorities to the history of the state were downsized at the advantage of the contributions of white males, who at the time had and still have more power in lawmaking and society shaping. For instance, regarding gender, Tennessee's first female senator, Marsha Blackburn, was not elected until 2018.

The history of these groups within the state is not given equitable visibility in memorialization. American history is bound by accounts and contributions of multiple people, with different backgrounds. It is rich with diversity, and reflective of its current society. Still, the commemorative landscape excludes various dimensions of American history and American people, and seems to focus on a specific group: white men (Alderman, 2010). According to Alderman in *Surrogation and the politics of remembering slavery in Savannah, Georgia (USA)* (2010), African Americans used traditional, often oral, methods to conserve memory. Unfortunately, African Americans did not have the opportunity to share their memory with a larger audience because their commemorative practices were contained within their own community (Alderman, 2010). Additionally, they had limited access to public spaces (Alderman, 2010). For instance, "when African Americans occupied city streets and parks to celebrate holidays, such as Emancipation Day or the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass, they exercised only temporary use of these public spaces before they reverted back to white control" (Alderman, 2010, p. 92). From heritage sites to schools, minorities are deculturized in that their cultures and history are not given representation and often erased or minimalized (Spring, 2016). Similarly, women are often invisible in American history, which indicates the relative importance they were given in society compared to men (Clark et al., 2004).

To date, only two scholarly works have explored roadside historical markers in Tennessee since the inception of the program in 1950, following the design of Virginia and North Carolina:

Jones' (1988) statewide study, and more recently, but limited to one county, Abdallah (2015). In *More to the story: Historical narratives and the African American past in Maury County, Tennessee*, Jaryn Abdallah explored historical production in Maury County, Tennessee (2015). In an attempt to gain insight about the way Maury County's history is portrayed, Abdallah examined historical publications, surveying historical markers ($n=27$) and monuments ($n=22$) (Abdallah, 2015). Out of the 27 historical markers of Maury County, 22 were dedicated to the history of white residents, while only 5 mentioned African Americans (Abdallah, 2015). Out of the five, two recognized the contribution of African Americans and just one focused on slavery (Abdallah, 2015). These historical markers are erected in places highly visited by the African American community (Abdallah, 2015). Again, some of these markers were cumbersome to obtain and the African American Heritage Society of Maury County had to take major efforts to have them erected (Abdallah, 2015). No similar studies exist focusing on the coverage of Women in History or Native Americans in Tennessee.

In the only published statewide study of Tennessee historical roadside markers, Jones (1988) analyzed the 1,170 roadside markers erected across the state. In his analysis, markers devoted to Black History or Famous White Women accounted for only 0.7% ($n=8$) and 0.8% ($n=9$), respectively, of all markers. In context, at the time of this study there were more roadside markers solely dedicated to David Crocket (0.9%, $n=11$) than to either of these groups. Additionally, Native American markers only accounted for 3.0% ($n=35$), while Famous White Men accounted for 11.7% ($n=137$) – including 3% that is dedicated to Klu Klux Klan Founder Nathan Bedford Forrest (Jones, 1988). This particularly visible expression of public history serves a white, Protestant, male history of the state (Jones, 1988).

Social importance

Jones' (1988) findings are thus echoed in Abdallah's (2015) findings. Just as Abdallah (2015) argued that for visitors (or even locals) unfamiliar with Maury County's history, seeing the topics commemorated by their historical roadside markers can be misleading, making people assume that white residents majorly shaped Maury County's history. These representations ultimately exclude African American views and experiences from the overall narrative (Abdallah, 2015). Jones (1988), nearly three decades earlier, found that African Americans and other minorities are often omitted from these commemorative sites. The lack of representation not only threatens public memory but also historical accuracy, and accuracy is latently important when trying to celebrate the past (Bardet, 2012). Moreover, lack of representation of African Americans from Maury County's historical production prevents the county from making economic gains from their history (Abdallah, 2015). This is particularly relevant as Maury County's economy considerably benefits from tourism, and "the exclusion of people of color from the representation of the past may also impact their access to power in the present" (Abdallah, 2015, p. 37). These issues speak to the relationship between power and the production of history through tourism (Norkunas, 1993) where "the exclusion of people of Mexican, Native American and Chinese descent from the representation of the past" has negatively impacted "their access to power in the present" (Abdallah, 2015, p. 37). This exclusion is important for a number of reasons; for example, presentations of the past shape the public's perception and knowledge of culture and heritage (Jones, 1988), as well as wider social discourse around race and gender.

Similarly, Hanna and Hodder (2015) shed light upon the disparities between historical accuracy and the landscape commemorative markers in Fredericksburg, Virginia (Hanna & Hodder, 2015). After crucially studying Fredericksburg's commemorative landscape, paying close attention to markers commemorating slavery and emancipation, the authors concluded that the city needs more markers dedicated to these events, as they are central to the city's history but are not reflected adequately in the commemorative landscape (Hanna & Hodder, 2015).

Alderman (2010) adds that the ability to erect more of these markers is often held by bodies of individuals that do not reflect the population. More specifically, in the U.S., state governments, as well as local organizations and individuals, can fund and therefore influence what historical markers to erect. The content of commemorative site memorialization is indicative of the cultural value or political importance of a limited group's perception of the past that may not reflect the larger population. "If the values held by those responsible for deciding what is worthy of remembrance reflect the common heritage or a more selective past, because markers and listing are examples of what perspicuously could be termed 'client,' or 'constituency' history" (Jones, 1988, p. 18). Looking at the profile of such groups in the examples shown illustrates an overwhelming majority of white males, especially in the South. The ability to fund and make decisions about historical markers gives white males control over memory (Alderman, 2010), and helps sustain their power over American history, enabling the distortion of historical facts and omission of contributions made by racial minorities and women.

Study approach and research questions

In his analysis of national register listings and roadside historic markers in Tennessee, Jones (1988, p. 28) asserted:

Most recently, in 1987, as the result of newly conscious and organized constituency, Ida B. Wells, a late nineteenth-century civil rights activist and newspaper editor in Memphis, was memorialized with a marker. It is tempting to say that this represents the beginning of an increase in marker and listing behavior from the black or black-female constituency, but it is too early to tell.

In our study, we assess the accuracy of this statement and critically reflect on its meaning. Using data on the 313 historical roadside markers erected since 1988, we (1) update Jones's (1988) analysis and (2) use the lens of socially just inclusion, from the perspective of social representation theory and critical race theory, to discuss the significance of the lack of inclusion of non-white male history in these markers. Southern sites of past reflection—those sites marking landscapes of public history and encouraging visitors to reflect on this history—are fertile for critical reflection on both the past and how it is portrayed in the present (Cook, 2018). To this effect, two research questions guide this study:

1. How has representation of people of color and women changed since Jones (1988)? In this question we explore not just the frequencies by category, but the content of the signs and how they speak to what society values and whose values are commemorated.
2. How well do the historical roadside markers represent the demographics of the communities in which they are erected? We explore this question through a focus on county-level demographics, as well as the funding source.

Data set

We analysed secondary data provided by The Historical Marker Database (HMDB; www.hmdb.org) that included all markers in the state of Tennessee that have been erected since 1988 ($n=313$). The dataset included: a unique Marker ID; the title of the marker; the year erected; the latitude and longitude; the town, county, and state; and a link to see a picture of the marker to view its content and the funder. We only selected markers erected since 1988 because those prior to that were included in Jones's previous analysis. Detailed information on methods follows.

Data coding and analysis

In our analysis we first replicate Jones's (1988) methods of marker content analysis using his codes and we then respond to his call that, "... comprehensive and detailed content analysis of marker texts ... can provide further information leading to more accurately supported qualitative judgements" (p. 27). Recognizing Jones' findings that non-white male social groups were largely underrepresented prior to 1988, as present not only in the frequency of representation of African Americans, Women, and Native Americans, we sought to reassess inclusion of these groups specifically. To this effect, we used both content analysis and GIS mapping. In all, analysis took place in six steps: (1) Assessing presentation across the state; (2) Comparing thematic preferences in presentations of the past and how they relate to Jones' analysis; (3) Expanding the analysis of the markers by expanded themes albeit with our expressed interest of assessing the change in emphasis on the Native American, Black History, and Famous White Women themes; (4) Expanding upon Jones' analysis to better understand the content of the signs and their funders by analyzing the distribution of the markers, focusing on urban/non-urban, Famous White Women, Black History, and Native American, across the state; (5) Assessing the content of the markers that were coded as Native American, Famous White Women, and Black History. Recognizing that by coding any reference to these groups as a marker representative of these groups that the content might not actually commemorate them or highlight something significant about them, we coded markers as directly related to the group, about a white person in history (but mentioning the marker group), or ancillary (being only related to the space or place, but not commemorating the group); and (6) Finally, we assessed the funders of the 66 markers designated (whether previously coded as ancillary or direct commemorating) as Native American, Famous White Women, and Black History.

Content analysis

This research employs a qualitative approach to providing additional meaning and insight to the content of Tennessee historic roadside markers. Here, we not only approach our content analysis from a qualitative perspective but seek to further delve into what the text may indicate about the cultural value of minority groups. In approaching our analysis this way, we further Bengtsson's (2016) stance that one of the strengths of content analysis is that it "is more than a counting process, as the goal is to link the results to their context or to the environment in which they were produced" (p. 9). For our study, we conducted a content analysis of the text inscribed on historical markers post-1988 in Tennessee using the aforementioned HMDB database. We did this by first coding all historical markers in the same 18 categories that were present in the Jones, 1988 article. Current categories were selected *a priori* based on categories present in the aforementioned research. Because we did not have information as to the criteria Jones used to code markers into categories, we applied a very liberal threshold. For example, if the marker mentioned African Americans, slaves, or black people, we coded that marker as Black History, meaning it had some association with African American culture in Tennessee. We did this for all 313 markers present in the post-1988 data set. After this first stage analysis, we then examined all those that were coded as mentioning Black History, Famous White Women, or Native Americans. In this second stage of content analysis we were looking for deeper meaning behind the text inscribed on the marker. At this stage, we shifted to emergent coding to allow for the most flexibility in analysis. From this, we developed three themes in how the originally coded person/group was mentioned in the historical marker text: 1) the marker was culturally relevant or spoke to the individual/subgroup itself; 2) the marker mentioned the individual or group in relation primarily to a white or male historical figure; 3) the marker mentioned primarily a significant geographical space or event. Simply put, we noted whether the marker was truly about the person or culture or whether the person/culture mentioned was simply a passing note

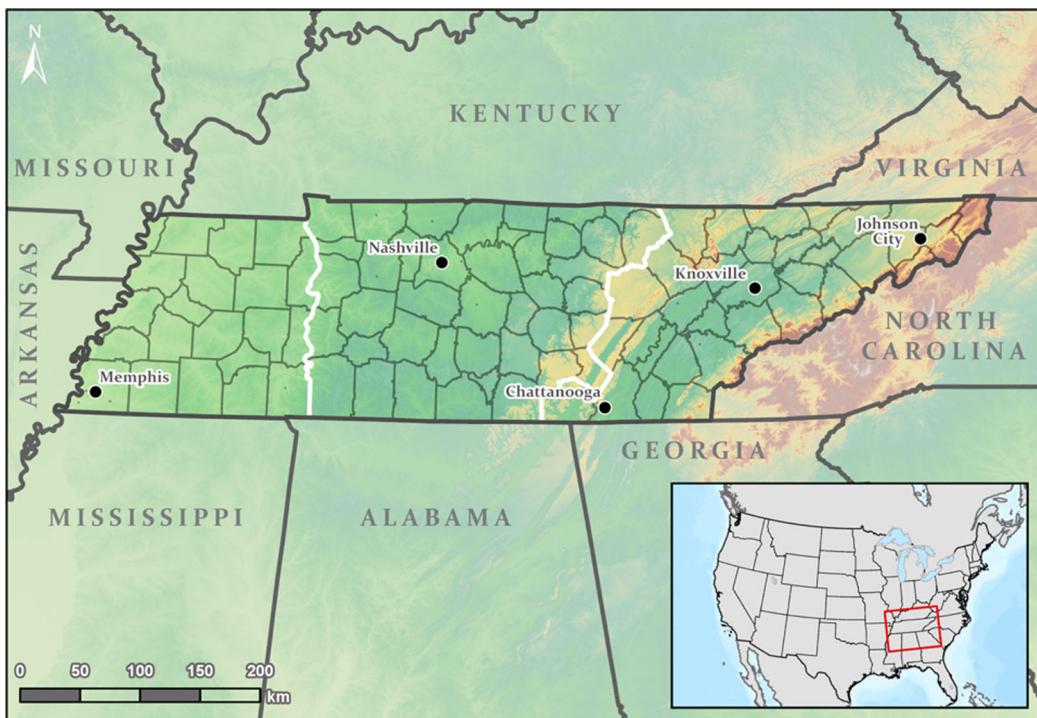


Figure 1. Study area showing all 95 Tennessee counties with white lines representing the three major regions of the state (West, Middle, East). Memphis is the principle metro area in West Tennessee and Nashville is the principle metro area in Middle Tennessee. East Tennessee has three principle metro areas: Chattanooga, Knoxville, and the Tri-Cities (Johnson City, Kingsport, Bristol). Image credit: Authors, 2020.

in another narrative. Utilizing content analysis in this particular way allows us to look at trends and patterns in the data in a unique way (Stemler, 2001).

GIS mapping

The historical marker database contained latitude and longitude coordinates, allowing them to be mapped as points using a geographic information system (GIS: ArcGIS Pro 2.3). Once mapped, multiple partitions were created: 1) markers in urban locations and non-urban locations (based on US Census-designated urban boundaries), 2) markers representative of white female history, 3) markers representative of black history, and 4) markers representative of Native American history. Additionally, demographic data from the 2010 US Census were obtained at both the county and Census tract levels in GIS format (US Census Bureau, 2010). Percent of population was mapped at the county level in Tennessee for female, black, and Native American populations. Marker locations were spatially joined to the Census tracts, which included population total and totals by race (i.e., black and Native American), allowing for more localized analysis. Traditionally, Tennessee is divided into three geographic regions: West Tennessee, Middle Tennessee, and East Tennessee (The Three Grand Divisions, n.d.). These regions were mapped and markers were queried by region to examine spatial trends since 1988.

Reflexivity and positionality of the researchers

The authors of this research come from different backgrounds, but share an interest in race relations and social equity. Two authors identify as white females, one author identifies as a white male, and one author identifies as a black female. Three of the authors are American born and

Table 1. Marker distribution by the three grand divisions of Tennessee.

Region	Jones		Since Jones	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
West	167	19	90	28.8
Middle	367	41	146	46.6
East	359	40	77	24.6
TOTAL	893	100%	313	100%

one immigrated to the United States within the last five years. Of the authors, three are sociologists and one is a geographer, but all authors share the perception that there is the opportunity to improve diversity in nearly all social representations, past and present. This perception led the researchers to analyze the depth or extent of diversity using roadside markers as the medium of study. It is acknowledged that the researchers' personal and professional positionalities impact their individual views, as well as collective views presented herein, regarding the research topic.

Results

Geographic distribution of markers

Comparing Jones' distribution of markers across the three grand divisions of Tennessee—East Tennessee, Middle Tennessee, and West Tennessee (see [Figure 1](#))—we see an increase in the share of markers erected in the west and middle regions, but a decrease in the share erected in the east region (see [Table 1](#)). Like Jones, we find that in the sampling of markers across the regions, there exists a disproportionate consciousness of history across the state. However, we find that the regional disparity has actually lessened since 1988. Finally, regarding geographic distribution, in alignment with Jones, we find distribution across the state to be somewhat reflective of population centers in Tennessee, with Shelby County (Memphis) standing out in the west and Davidson County (Nashville) standing out in the middle (see [Figure 2\(a\)](#)).

Thematic distribution of markers

Regarding thematic preferences in presentations of the past and how they relate to Jones' analysis (see [Table 2](#)) using the thematic categories of the National Register nomination form (as presented in Jones' coding scheme), we found significant differences across the categories, with the exceptions of religion, government, and Native American. More specifically, there was an increase in the share of markers for historic districts, business/industry, religion, education, transportation, Native American, military, and miscellaneous, while there was a decrease in the share of markers for houses, and government¹.

Racial distribution of markers

While we find substantial increases for Black History and Famous White Women, we find minimal, if any change in the emphasis on Native American history (see [Table 3](#)). Like Jones, we find that Military and Famous White Men hold the highest shares of markers, but Border Markers are no longer accounting for a large share of the markers. Furthermore, the increase of the share of markers related to Famous White Men overshadows the increase we found in our categories of interest. This is likely due to Jones' coding of markers into a single category, while we accounted for plurality of markers. Thus, what we are capturing as an increase could simply be Jones' observation:

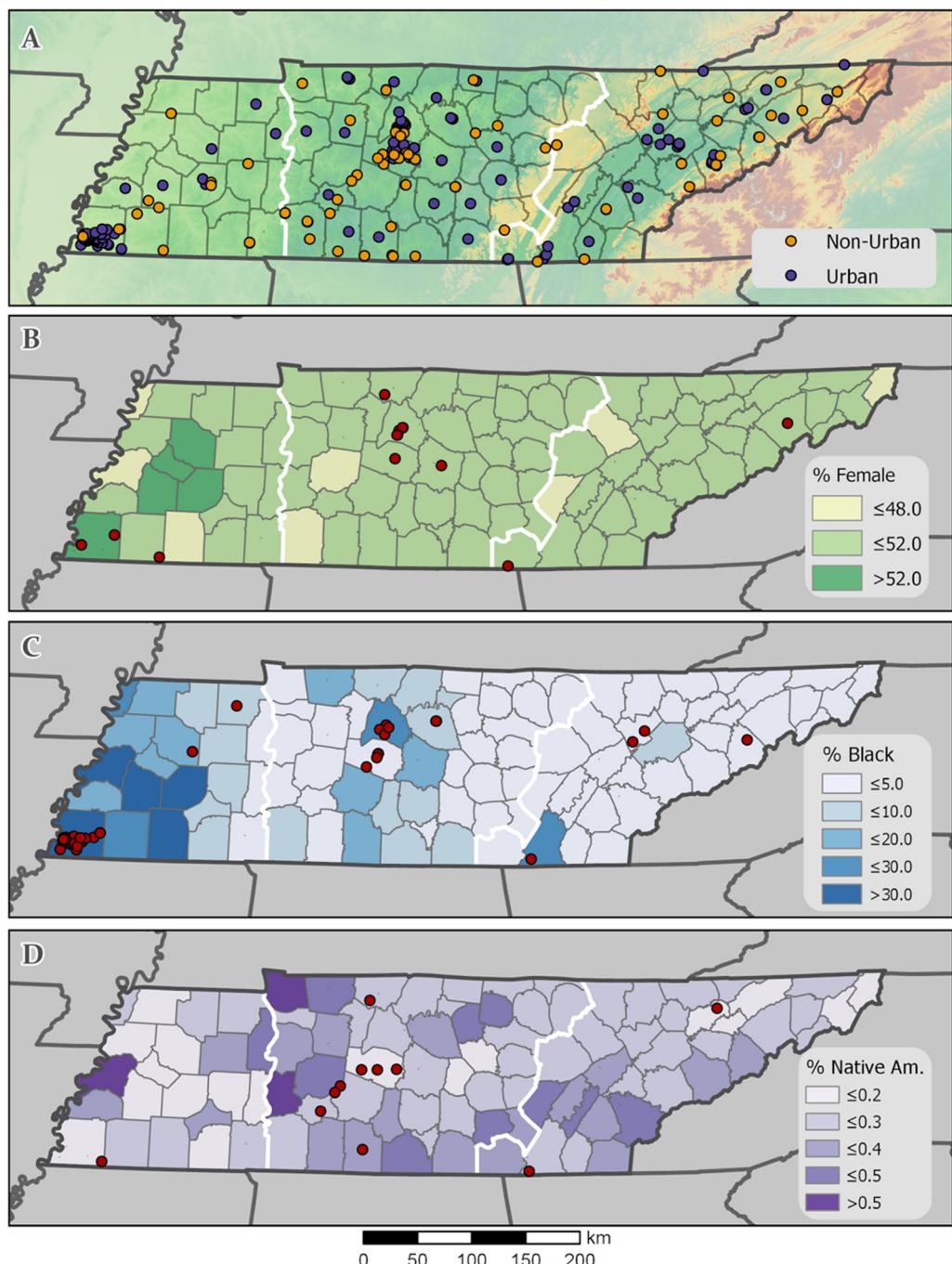


Figure 2. Tennessee historical markers located in urban/non-urban locations (A), representative of white female history (B), representative of black history (C), and representative of Native American history (D). B, C, and D also show the percent of the concurrent minority population by county. Image credit: Authors, 2020.

The fact that so many markers and listings were found to be either directly or indirectly related to famous white men, their 'firsts,' their wars, their politics, and their religion, betrays a previously unexamined dimension to these two public history programs: they almost exclusively represent a well-to-do white male Protestant constituency and reflect what it values in the past (1988, p. 26).

Table 2. Marker distribution by thematic categories of the National Register nomination form.

Category	Jones (N = 893)		Since Jones (N = 313)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Historic Districts	91	10	122	39.0
Houses	400	45	28	8.9
Business, Industry	98	11	52	16.6
Religion	86	10	40	12.8
Education	47	5	49	15.7
Government	47	5	12	3.8
Transportation	42	4	33	10.5
Native American	27	3	11	3.5
Military	19	2	112	35.7
Miscellaneous	36	5	71	22.7

Table 3. Marker distribution by enhanced thematic categories.

Theme	Jones (N = 1170)		Since Jones (N = 313)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Military	227	19.4	112	35.8
Border Markers	215	18.4	1	0.3
Famous White Men	137	11.7	113	36.1
Native American	35	3	11	3.5
Governors	45	4	7	2.2
"Firsts"	168	14	21	6.7
Education	70	6	49	15.6
Black History	8	0.7	42	13.4
Animals	4	0.3	0	0
Religion	56	5	40	12.8
Famous White Women	9	0.8	14	4.5
Business, Industry	53	4.5	52	16.6
Miscellaneous	132	11.3	71	22.7
David Crockett	11	0.9	2	0.6

Table 4. Marker distribution across the grand divisions of Tennessee based on urban boundaries, race, and gender.

Historical Markers	West TN	Middle TN	East TN	All of TN
Total	90 (28.8%)	146 (46.6%)	77 (24.6%)	313
Urban	75 (32.5%)	100 (43.3%)	56 (24.2%)	231 (73.8%)
Non-Urban	15 (18.3%)	46 (56.1%)	21 (25.6%)	82 (26.2%)
Famous White Women	3 (21.4%)	8 (57.1%)	3 (21.4%)	14 (4.5%)
Black History	28 (66.7%)	10 (23.8%)	4 (9.5%)	42 (13.4%)
Native American	1 (9.1%)	8 (72.7%)	2 (18.2%)	11 (3.5%)

Density of markers by population and demographics

Middle Tennessee has the highest share of markers coded as non-urban, Famous White Women, and Native American, relative to their total share (i.e., more than 46.6% of the markers in these categories are in Middle Tennessee; see Table 4). Black History markers, however, have been predominantly erected in West Tennessee. Acknowledging that demographics are not equally distributed across the state and that markers represent local history, we then mapped these select themes to county-level demographics in Figures 2(a-d). We further assessed representation in Figures 3(a,b) by looking at Tennessee historical markers representative of Black History by percent of black population residing in the census tract and representative of Native American history by percent Native American history residing in the census tract, respectively. Visual analysis of these maps reveals that (1) markers are denser in urban population areas, (2) there is a greater density of Black History makers in counties with a higher percentage of black residents, (3) there are not distinct patterns in Native American or Famous White Women markers, and most

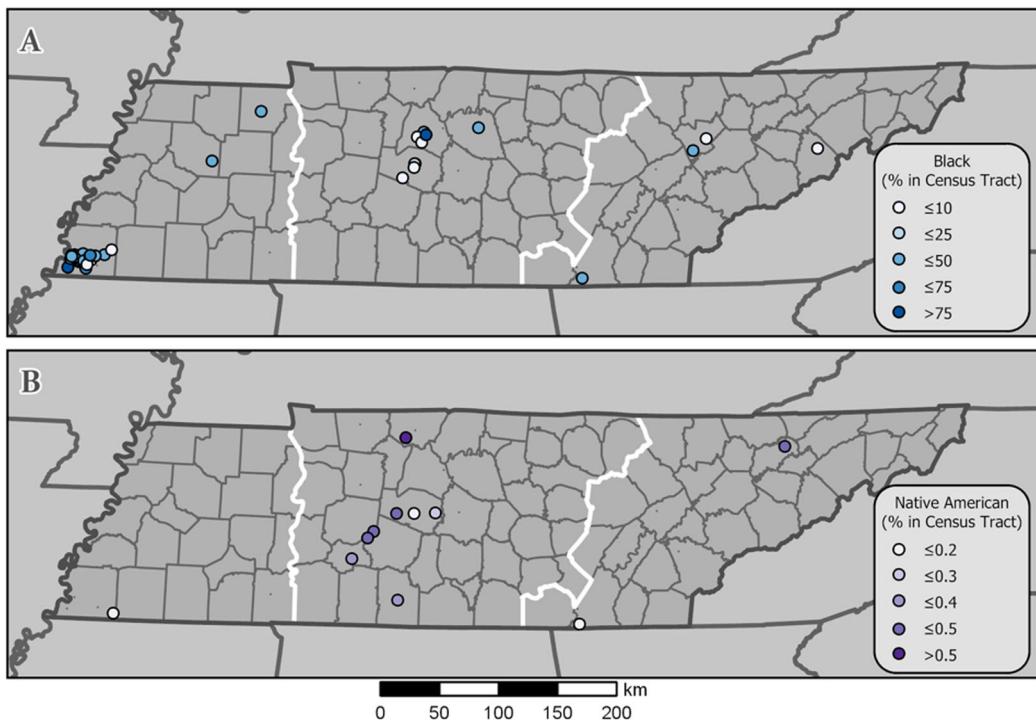


Figure 3. Tennessee historical markers representative of black history and shaded by percent of the black population residing in the concurrent Census tract (A). Tennessee historical markers representative of Native American history and shaded by percent of the Native American population residing in the concurrent Census tract. Image credit: Authors, 2020.

importantly, (4) there is ample opportunity to promote a more “just representation” and inclusive historical portrayal through Tennessee historical roadside markers.

Analysis of markers designated as native american, women's and black history

After coding markers as directly related to the group, about a white person in history (but mentioning the marker group), or ancillary (being only related to the space or place, but not commemorating the group), the numbers of sign designated as representing a minority group significantly decreased. Specifically, only 27.27% ($n=3$) of the Native American markers were considered to commemorate Native Americans, 46.15% ($n=6$) of the Famous White Women markers were considered to commemorate white women, and 88.10% ($n=37$) of the Black History markers were considered to commemorate black persons (see Table 5). For example, the “Normal Depot” which is coded as an African American roadside marker actually does not commemorate anything that is culturally significant to African Americans. Rather, the inscription on the marker notes that the Normal Depot is “A brick Craftsman-style building with a tiled hip roof, it was a commuter station with separate white and ‘colored’ waiting rooms.” (<https://www.hmdb.org/marker.asp?MarkerID=84112>) and goes on to discuss how students arrived at the building and when it was decommissioned and sold. The mention of separate waiting rooms by race is hardly unique given the year, 1912, and certainly does contribute to a cultural narrative for the African American community - rather the African American community is mentioned as a byproduct of the operations of the building. Another example is Dorothy Harrison Eustis who is mentioned in a historical marker but not for her achievement of opening The Seeing Eye, the famous dog guide training school, but she is instead mentioned in relation to a male

Table 5. Content designation based on emphasis on key themes.

Category	Content Designation	Number	Percent
Native American (N = 11)	Directly related	3	27.27
	Relation to white person	2	18.18
	Relation to space or place	6	54.55
Famous White Women (N = 13)	Directly related	6	46.15
	Relation to white person or male	2	15.38
	Relation to space or place	5	38.46
Black History (N = 42)	Directly related	37	88.10
	Relation to white person or male	0	0.00
	Relation to space or place	6	14.32

Table 6. Funding sources of key themes.

	Native American	Famous White Women	Black History
Tennessee Historical Commission	1 (9.09%)	1 (7.69%)	6 (14.29%)
Local or Government Historical Group (other than TN HC)	7 (63.64%)	7 (53.85%)	12 (28.57%)
University	0	0	2 (4.76%)
Private Citizen or another group	0	2 (15.38%)	17 (40.48%)
Family of person on sign	0	0	2 (4.76%)
Government agency	0	0	1 (2.38%)
Funder not indicated	0	0	2 (4.76%)

partner - "It was Frank who persuaded Dorothy Harrison Eustis to establish a school in the United States." (<https://www.hmdb.org/marker.asp?MarkerID=61940>)

Analysis of funding

Seven funding types emerged in this analysis (see **Table 6**). While Native American and Famous White Women markers were predominantly funded by local and government groups other than the Tennessee Historical Commission, Black History markers were predominantly funded by private citizens or related groups.

Discussion and directions forward

Southern sites of past reflection are fertile for critical reflection on both the past and how it is portrayed (Cook, 2018) and our landscape is increasing populated with historical tourist sites (Doss, 2010; Alderman & Inwood, 2013). This research has examined the representation of Famous White Women, Native Americans, and Black History in the historical marker memorial landscapes or "memoriescape" of Tennessee. Like all states in the American South, Tennessee has extensive racial history riddled with white privilege and supremacy that is still reflected in current relations and processes of social representation; thus, the findings presented herein are not surprising to the researchers. We have not only sought to assess if Jones' prediction that the placement of the Ida B. Wells marker in 1987 possibly marked "the beginning of an increase in marker and listing behavior from the black or black-female constituency" (p. 28), but we have conducted and presented a critical reading of content of the markers erected over the past three decades to identify the presence and absence of minorities in Tennessee's memorial landscape as presented through historical roadside markers.

While we began this research with the purpose of assessing these sites across Tennessee and evaluating Jones' prediction, we find that little progress has been made in promoting a more equitable or just representation through historical roadside markers in the last three decades. Carlson's (1980) analysis of all listings on the National Register of Historic Places as of 1976 revealed an over-emphasis on urban, influential citizens and reproduced a biased view of the past. In regards to Tennessee historical roadside markers, we concur, as did Jones (1988) and

Abdullah (2015), that we have failed to reach a just representation of history as a state. While we are unable to capture societal values in our research, our thematic analysis is revealing of perceptions of what or whose history is important in Tennessee. Results indicate that even today, in 2019, that there are more historical markers dedicated to Conference General Nathan Bedford Forrest, founder of the Ku Klux Klan, than all white women and Native Americans combined. While we see an increase in markers dedicated to Black History, if we only account for those directly related (removing those identified as ancillary), then we have only five more African American markers across the whole state than those dedicated solely to Forrest. Therefore, we conclude that past events in Tennessee remain to be framed from a white, Protestant perspective and that little progress has been made over the past three decades. Following social representation theory, this entails that this version of history is anchored in the historical roadside markers as objects and in their content as narratives. This history constructs meaning for social context in the past and present—a reality that is socially constructed and narrated through roadside markers as objectification devices. These narratives then provide social cues or ways of knowing. However, from a sustainability perspective, our analysis reveals that the social cues that they are providing are not equitable or socially just.

This finding is easily situated within a larger body of literature documenting divergent, segregated narratives for black and white America (Shipley, 1997). From a social representation theory and more specifically, from a critical race theory lens—the view that race is central to American culture and intersects class and gender—it is important to understand the potential impact of this bias in the memorialization of history on minorities. In 1988, Jones wrote,

In Tennessee the orientation mentioned earlier is one-sided and value-biased and robs entire cultural and ethnic groups of the sense of identity and continuity that history is legitimately supposed to provide... It has made the public's view of the past a monolithic, avocational, and sentimental hallucination that ignores the variegated richness of our collective heritage. The granting of historical legitimacy through markers and listings might even be interpreted as an exercise in social control, an attempt to maintain the values of a secular order confronted by the dynamics of social change (p. 29).

Our analysis confirms Jones' observation as we conclude that historical memorialization is a form of power. In the case of Tennessee, this power has yet to fully be used to challenge the dominant historical narrative (see Delgado & & others, 1989) and hence we have both failed to achieve a just representation to date and have ample opportunity to rectify this in the future. We thus find that this lack of power presents opportunity in the state in that the narrativized social representations are of a sentimentalized South (c.f., Bright & Carter, 2018). The stories represented by these sites do not present a just representation in that they convey a biased social representation and can be considered a medium for negotiation of this version of history. Through the lens of critical race theory, the voice of black America must be expressed to offer competing versions of history and to challenge the white-centric comfortable versions of history (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Through efforts such as historical roadside marker programs, consciously or unconsciously, the story of black history, of Native American history, and of white women in history has been edited from the perspective of white males, thus altering the American collective memory (see Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

We conclude that the representation of non-white men is limited and unjust. Tennessee was built upon more than a white-male past and Tennessee has more than a white-male present. We have an opportunity to highlight and commemorate differences and uniqueness. In this sense, we find meaning in the signs we assessed, but also in the ones that are absent. Through analyzing the spatial patterns of historic marker locations since 1988, we see that there are many counties across Tennessee that have proportionally higher minority populations, but few, if any, makers have been erected in these areas during the study period. For example, 69 historic markers were established in Shelby County (where Memphis is located), with 26 of those representing black history, two representing white female history, and one representing Native American history. However, four nearby counties with very high black populations (>30%) in

West Tennessee (Lauderdale, Haywood, Madison, and Hardeman) have no historic markers representing non-white males. These areas may represent future opportunities for new historic markers to better reflect their communities. Historical markers provide educational information, but they have also become icons of popular culture that demonstrate how we invest importance in past people, events, and sites. In this sense, aligning with social representation theory, historical roadside markers provide an identity to the community, but this identity is not always fair or just; in fact we might argue that it is rarely representative of the actual community. In other words, as markers of public history, these sites a narrativizing or anchoring a version of history that is not representation of all social groups. As such, these sites either consciously or subconsciously contribute to the social discourse in these communities in giving them this unjust identity. Thus, memoryscapes reproduce and construct history, but as we have found, this is not a representative history nor is it socially just. Rather, it is a mythical version of history curated to legitimate popular, comfortable versions of history.

Alderman and Campbell (2008, p. 338) assertion that sites across the American South are facing symbolic excavation or “the unearthing of difficult and long suppressed (and repressed) historical narratives … through memory work, the construction and representation of the past.” This is also perhaps present in the initiative taken by non-government bodies to erect Black History markers. To see change in the representation of history through historical markers and in heritage tourism more broadly, we have to take a closer look at the funders of history and how this impacts representation. When funders are distorted in their representation, a distorted view of the past may be replicated; they reproduce value-biased views of the past that do not reflect their constituency. The funders are often responsible to constituencies that are not reflective of the broader population. Thus, Jones (1988, p. 26-27) noted, “Other constituencies have found no way to express their history within the confines of the criteria utilized in these two processes, because one constituency has dominated the means of expression.” While we find instances of “memorial entrepreneurship” (c.f., Dwyer et al., 2012; Bright et al., 2018) or efforts to impact these memorial sites, we find more opportunity for engagement by communities to promote just presentation.

Aligning with sustainable tourism related to public history, a greater emphasis should be placed on community-based planning and inclusion. Although a challenging task (Jamal & Getz, 1995), coordination between those erecting objects narrativizing the past and creating tourism sites of them and the communities they represent is imperative. As noted by Hall (2003, p. 99), community-based planning “does not automatically lead to either sustainable tourism development or even a reduction in the amount of conflict surrounding tourism development.” In other words, communities are also complex entities with their own politics and conflicts. The results presented herein reflect unequal power and politics within tourism at the community level. Hall and Jenkins (1995) presented that tourism development often entails the suppression of certain issues reflective of power dynamics between stakeholders. While many traditional models of sustainable tourism focusing on community development, such as Murphy (1985) fail to account for representation of the community and power-politics, we recognize that there are politically imposed limitations on decision-making in tourism that are reflected in decision-making and thus reflected in representation (Crensen, 1971; Hall, 1994, 2003). The communities of interest in this study are largely faced with invisibility and unjust representations and are up against a long history of suppressing their cultural identity.

Just as Jenkins (1993) listed the apathy of citizens as one of the impediments to promoting more sustainable tourism, we note that there is perhaps an evolving interest, and thereby relevance, in roadside historical markers. Just as many heritage managers would not even consider themselves in the tourism business (Croft, 1994), there are many individuals who would drive by roadside markers without noticing or giving them consideration. Although historical markers are often thought of as an archaic way to learn about the history of a place or region, in today’s digital age, they are increasingly accessible through mobile and online apps (Georgia Historical

Society, n.1994d.). For instance, it is possible today to plan whole trips revolving around roadside markers based on routes generated online. Moreover, nearly every roadside historical marker can be easily viewed online. This digital cataloguing, perhaps, presents a new body of stakeholders as these heritage tourism sites can be accessed across the world without travel. Although cultural heritage tourism is defined by travel directed to experience these sites (Bright & Carter, 2016), it is conceivable that digital access presents a new body of consumers that have social significance in the development in the future of historical roadside markers.

For praxis, the results herein should be of interest to public historians, geographers, sociologists, and other academics, as well as community leaders, not only in Tennessee, but in other states and countries as well. While there are numerous methodological challenges to assessing how well markers reflect their constituency and if inclusive history is portrayed and protected, this research advances the literature by both enhancing the methods and data provided by Jones (1988), but also by taking a more critical stance on the social importance of a more just, representative history. It is important that scholars, as well as communities themselves, consciously advocate for a more socially just memorialization of history that challenges the comfortable myths that are currently portrayed. To do so, we have to first be aware of the social and historical ideologies that are present in Tennessee's presentation of history, which is not unique to other regions in the United States. This research has identified white privilege in historical memorialization and sought to speak to the opportunity to counter the mythical, nearly hegemonic, portrayals of our past.

Note

1. While percent change could be calculated to compare Jones' thematic category shares to our analysis, this would be misleading because Jones' placed each sign into a single theme, while we found numerous markers fell under more than one category. More specifically, 217 of our 313 markers were coded as two themes.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Data availability statement

Raw data were generated at www.hmdb.org. Derived data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, Candace Forbes Bright, on request.

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