

Reconstructing the Narrative: Illuminating Savannah's Civil Rights History

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Savannah, Georgia has a long and rich history dating back prior to its founding in 1733 as a colonial settlement. Today the city generates over two billion dollars a year in revenue from tourism centered around the local history. While celebrating antebellum and post Civil War history, Savannah's tourism industry downplays – and at times does not even acknowledge – the history of Savannah's African-American community and Savannah's role in the Civil Rights Movement. While the 1950s and 60s were a violent time in most of the South, in Savannah the Civil Rights Movement was a mostly non-violent and a very effective agent of change. However, tourists and residents must make an effort to seek out information on this important part of history; it is not highlighted by public markers or the narratives presented by guides in the mainstream tourism industry.

In the body of work, *Reconstructing the Narrative: Illuminating Savannah's Civil Rights History*, I look to the past to find inspiration and to interpret the present. Many artists have engaged in rephotography projects – returning to and rephotographing places that were documented by others decades and even a century prior – as commentary on changes to the environment and to photography itself. While I employ a similar strategy, my work is centered on the social and political history of a place. Using archival and historical photographs from the Jim Crow era and the Civil Rights Movement in Savannah, I set out to rephotograph the original, depicted locations. The historical images are then physically pinned onto the contemporary views. This results in constructed images consisting of layered photographs sharing a physical space that simultaneously show both an untold history of the city and the views one sees today. Some of the sites, buildings, and streetscapes remain virtually unchanged, however in other locations, buildings have been altered or even demolished. Yet regardless of changes in the physical landscape, the social, cultural, and political impact of the Civil Rights Movement on today's Savannah is profound. By photographing contemporary views of Savannah, Georgia and physically superimposing historical images culled from archives, *Reconstructing the Narrative: Illuminating Savannah's Civil Rights History* makes overt both the passage of time and the legacy of the Civil Rights Movement in the city.