When the World Becomes Flesh: The International Day of Remembrance as Spatially Redressing Hampton, Virginia's Buckroe Beach

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When the World Becomes Flesh: The International Day of Remembrance as Spatially Redressing Hampton, Virginia’s Buckroe Beach

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Africana Studies from The College of William and Mary

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When the World Becomes Flesh: The International Day of Remembrance as Spatially Redressing Hampton Virginia’s Buckroe Beach

Amirio Freeman

College of William & Mary

Advisor: Professor Artisia Green
“When we love the earth, we are able to love ourselves more fully.” —bell hooks

“Can we accept the idea that the richest soil has been tainted—or maybe enriched—by the negative?” —William Pope.L

For my maternal grandfather, whose agricultural alchemy inspired this project.
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Abstract

Since the birth of the United States, the Black body has functioned as a depository of Black pain (via subjection to slavery, police brutality, etc.). However, rather than passively submit to the infliction of pain, Black persons have historically engaged in several practices to disrupt the acceptance of violence, such as escaping plantations, marching to achieve civil rights, and even practicing, in the language of scholar and author Saidiya Hartman, “redress.” The term “redress” refers to any embodied act that enslaved Blacks utilized to remember the humanness of their bodies, even while objectified and dehumanized via enslavement. Beyond embodied Black pain, Black trauma is also spatialized through the haunting of the natural realm by memories of historical racialized terror. To conceptualize the “healing” of landscapes and waterscapes “pained” by memories of Black atrocity, I argue that Hartman’s redress can extend beyond instances of embodied Black suffering to instances of extracorporeal Black suffering. Using oral histories to unfold an instrumental, single case study of the International Day of Remembrance—an annual event at Hampton, Virginia’s Buckroe Beach that celebrates the lives of the Black individuals who died via the Middle Passage—I suggest that the three main pillars of Hartman’s redress can emerge in moments of “healing” Black pain in a spatial context. I characterize that iteration of Hartman’s redress as “spatial redress.”
Chapter 1: Introduction

Figure 1: Personal photograph of Buckroe Beach taken on March 6, 2017 (Personal Image of Buckroe 1, 2017)

On “Redress”

The experiences of enslaved Black persons in America can largely be narrated via considering the Black body, especially physical and psychic injury to the Black body. Black individuals, for instance, were oftentimes overworked, underfed, branded, kept in poor living conditions, separated from loved ones, and enslaved Blacks often encountered egregious corporeal harassment. While the condition of Black people in the United States did vary from location to location and from time period to time period, the institution of slavery was anything but benign to the Black body. Considering the immense cruelty of slavery begs the question of how enslaved Blacks withstood material and ontological degradation and survived the enforced accommodation to the normalization of their pain. When consulting texts that offer an indication of how enslaved people endured their enslaved condition (including slave narratives, journal entries, newspaper articles, Black cultural content, academic secondary sources, etc.), it appears
to me that Black people, in part, rebelled, resisted, and reclaimed their bodies by working against the objectives of the institution of enslavement. Black people physically confronted their superiors, shirked labor duties, feigned illness, performed abortions, stole necessities (food, etc.) from their masters, ran away from plantations, and even practiced, in the language of author and professor Saidiya Hartman, “redress.”

In the book, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America*, Hartman (1997) borrows the term “redress” from the anthropological world and applies the term to the embodied means by which Black people maintained a sense of being human while objectified and dehumanized in America’s slave-based “web of domination” (p. 49). Hartman considers activities such as “stealing” time away for quilting, dancing, storytelling, and attending Sunday praise meetings as examples of redressive actions enslaved Blacks used to achieve healing resistance against enslavement. Recognizing that those and other redressive tactics did not completely remove enslaved Black persons from America’s oppressive “peculiar institution,” Hartman argues that the tactics still granted enslaved Black persons a momentary opportunity to re-recognize their bodies as corporeal planes that could experience more than just violation and debasement. In other words, redressive practices—especially those that elicited feelings of pleasure and enjoyment—served as embodied tools that helped Black individuals with remembering the humanness of their bodies. The remembering of Black people’s humanity offered remedy for slavery’s dehumanizing pain.

In more specific, descriptive language, Hartman (1997) characterizes redressive techniques as acts that engendered the “re-membering” (p. 77) of the “dis-membered body of the slave” (p. 77) into a whole “site of pleasure, eros, and sociality” (p. 77). Through Hartman’s use of metaphorical imagery that visualizes the Black body as severed and dehumanized by the
brutality of enslavement, Hartman conceptualizes redress as those actions that briefly reformed enslaved Black bodies into pleasured/pleasuring, erotic, social, and (re-)humanized flesh. Through engaging in redressive activities away from White surveillance that redefined how their bodies could navigate the world, enslaved Blacks gave curative meanings to their bodies. Those “curative meanings” transformed enslaved Blacks from socially dead “[beasts] of burden” (p. 77) used for labor into human flesh with some sense of personhood. Through redress, hands that produced agricultural products could praise supreme beings; backs that bore the wrath of whippings could gleefully arch, bend, and sway during a communal dance; and even arms toned from hours of involuntary labor could work on patching a garment for a loved one. In a sense, redress imbued enslaved Black bodies with “new narratives of affirmation and presence” (Lowe, 2015, p. 40).

Per Hartman (1997), a significant aspect of the healing property of redress is redress’ corporealization of the desires of and suffering experienced by enslaved Black people. Through physically manifesting enslaved Blacks’ wants and experiences of toil, redpressive practices articulated the reality that enslaved Black persons harbored humanity. Hartman argues, for example, that the performance of Black vernacular dance by Black enslaved people was redressive because the performances showcased enslaved Blacks’ hunger for pleasure and joy, was an attempt at working through enslaved Blacks’ pained condition, and, ultimately, displayed Black people’s core humanness. When focusing specifically on redress’ material representation of Black strife, this characteristic of redress mirrors characteristics of Emilie Townes’ “lament.” In the words of Townes (2008), “lament” (in the form of a memorial ceremony, etc.) allows one to “walk or crawl or roll into grieving” (p. 88) to put suffering into words and make said suffering more bearable.
Today, the formal architecture of America’s institution of slavery is no longer a part of American life. However, the type of pain engendered by American slavery and endured by enslaved Black persons is still inflicted on present-day Black bodies. Across the U.S., the health of Black bodies has diminished at the hands of phenomena such as poverty, Black bodies have found themselves incarcerated at alarming rates, and agents of the state have continued the historical trend of terrorizing Black bodies via police brutality. Beyond America, Blacks across the world are similarly devalued, disregarded, and imperiled (via neocolonialism, etc.). With so many systems and institutions of “captivity, dispossession, and domination” (Hartman, 1997, p. 51) still “dismembering” Black bodies, redressive tactics are still necessary to “re-member” Black bodies into sites of humanity. However, redress is not only needed to grapple with embodied Black pain: redress is also needed to “heal” disembodied Black pain, especially Black pain situated in natural sites of land and water.

Because of the violent human dramas involving Black persons that have occurred in natural spaces (e.g. the finding of Emmett Till’s body in the Tallahatchie River in Mississippi, the lynching of Blacks in wooded landscapes, etc.), there are geographies in the United States, and abroad, that harbor haunting memories of racialized terrorism. As discussed by Anissa Janine Wardi (2011) in the book, Water and African American Memory: An Ecocritical Perspective, memories of Black pain in outdoors spaces often construct the natural realm as a “politically charged racialized topography, imprinted with a history of slavery, racism, and barbaric Jim Crow practices, where the woods are not merely unspoiled sites of wilderness” (p. 12-13). The memories of Black horror attached to natural sites become most pronounced when in tension with other, oppositional memories. Exemplifying this idea, Amanda Hess, in the opinion piece, “Why Are People Still Having Weddings at Plantations Slaves Built?,” attempts to
understand the curious modern-day trend of hosting weddings at still-standing American plantations:

Say what you will about the legacy of slavery, at least it produced some fabulous venues. Like this one, an immaculate Louisiana estate that once enslaved 500 humans. The venue’s website is littered with details you can't make up: The plantation is still equipped with the quaint antique bells the children of the house rang to summon their slave servants. It still equates enslaved human beings with ‘the family’s most prized furniture and china.’ It still calls itself the ‘White Castle.’ And it still attributes its impressive grounds to its original slaveholding owner and the ‘business savvy that fostered his tremendous wealth,’ as opposed to, say, human bondage. (Hess, 2011, para. 4)

With the consideration of the fact that America is home to a topography of bodies of land and water “pained” by memories of Black victimization, a question emerges: can “pained” bodies of land and water, like bodies of human flesh, be “healed”?

In the article, *African Dance as Healing Modality Throughout the Diaspora: The Use of Ritual and Movement to Work Through Trauma*, Nicole M. Monteiro and Diana J. Wall (2011) discuss that physical and psycho-spiritual illnesses emerge, per traditional African cosmologies, from individuals’ lack of alignment with the material, social, or spiritual worlds. Per Monteiro and Wall, transgressing social boundaries, not engaging in rituals that maintain a connection with God or the Supreme Being, or even having a conflict with a community member can cause a lack of balance that engenders bodily and mental distress. In order for healing to occur, material and immaterial realignment must take place (e.g. by mending social fractures, re-engaging in spiritual practices that reconnect one with a revered higher entity, etc.). Applying the language of Monteiro and Wall to environmental bodies instead of human ones, landscapes and waterscapes that are reservoirs of Black pain lack alignment and need healing equilibrium. I argue that one can imagine and enact such necessary healing equilibrium with Saidiya Hartman’s redress.
As aforementioned, Saidiya Hartman’s redress considers how enslaved Black bodies were symbolically healed via redefining the bodies with significations of humanity instead of violence. Noting how definitions and meanings can shape both bodies and locations, I argue that “injured” waterscapes and landscapes can be “healed” by undergoing what I call “spatial redress.”¹ Here, and throughout this paper, “spatial redress” refers to the process of applying Hartman’s redress in a spatialized context. Using a collection of oral histories to construct a case study on the International Day of Remembrance—a commemorative event that takes place annually at Hampton, Virginia’s Buckroe Beach—I contend that one can conceptualize the healing, or realignment, of spaces of extracorporeal Black pain by applying Hartman’s redress to said spaces. For the sake of organization and clarity of ideas, I unfold the case study on the International Day of Remembrance in the following chapters using the “linear-analytic method.”

The method is an approach to composing research reports that involves writing a report with segments that discuss “the issue being studied” (Stjelja, n.d., p. 21); review “the relevant previous literature” (Stjelja, n.d., p. 21), “methods that were used” (Stjelja, n.d., p. 21), and “how data were collected and analysed”; and that examine final “conclusions and implications of…findings” (Stjelja, n.d., p. 21).

**On Rationale and Relevance**

In addition to applying Hartman’s redress to instances of disembodied Black pain, I also aim to use this paper to accomplish other items. Firstly, through connecting embodied Black suffering with disembodied Black suffering rooted in land and water, I plan to facilitate a reconceptualization of what Black pain is and, more broadly, what constitutes the Black body. Such a reconceptualization offers novel imaginings of the relationship between the human body

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¹ I more thoroughly discuss how definitions and meanings shape bodies and places in Chapter 2 (in “On ‘Authoring’ Bodies of Flesh, Land, and Water”).
and the natural world. For instance, through reconsidering the overlaps between embodied Black pain and spatialized Black pain, space opens for considering innovative approaches to lessening the reproduction of Black pain (e.g. approaches that are more environment-minded, etc.).

Secondly, I intend to further investigate and elucidate the ambivalent relationship between the natural realm and Black people. Throughout American history, Black persons have perceived the environment through many prisms. For Black individuals, the earth has been a space of practicing spirituality and religion; of refuge from the brutality of the plantation; of death by the hands of slave catchers, Ku Klux Klan members, and lynch mobs; of escape from the ills of urban life; of sustenance; and even of recreation and leisure (Bowker & Johnson, 2004; Dawson, 2006; Kearney & Vasudevan, 2016; Rosenthal, 2006). At different historical moments, Black individuals have seen the natural realm as “a sympathetic ally and an entity that was forced to collude with oppressive systems” (Wardi, 2011, p. 13). Through focusing on the idea of extracorporeal Black turmoil embedded in landscapes and waterscapes, and through addressing how bodies of land and water can be agents in healing modalities performed by Black persons, I will contribute to understanding and unpacking how nature is a site that is both a space of Black vitality and Black death. Thirdly, through completing oral histories, I will contribute to the task of documenting and archiving Black history. After learning about the International Day of Remembrance and deciding to make it my case study for this paper, I immediately learned that few digital or physical resources exist providing details about past International Day of Remembrance ceremonies. Often, the resources that are available discuss the International Day of Remembrance in a manner that provides broad coverage of the activities of the yearly program without nuanced considerations of history and context. For example, few resources attempt to understand items such as the ambivalent relationship between water and different
communities throughout the African Diaspora. Therefore, the oral histories collected will do the work of making sure that the history of the International Day of Remembrance is both understood in a holistic way and not forgotten. Lastly, I plan to use this paper to shed light on the importance of not just healing Black pain embodied in Black bodies, but also spatialized Black pain.

**On Content**

Following this chapter, Chapter 2 will serve as my literature review. Using feminist literature, scholarship from cultural geographers, academic literature related to memory, and an assortment of texts regarding the history of Hampton, Virginia, I will generally consider how landscapes and waterscapes become “pained” and I will discuss how Buckroe Beach is an area of historical Black trauma. In all, the literature review will provide contextual information for this paper. After, Chapter 3 will function as the section to discuss my original research. To provide evidence that will either support or refute the core thesis of this paper, I will place my collected oral histories in conversation with Hartman’s redress, religious studies texts, ecocritical literature, texts regarding the significance of the Middle Passage in the collective Black consciousness, and information about the International Day of Remembrance. My last chapter will contain a summation of my paper’s overarching findings and will discuss potential points of departure for future scholarship.
Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Figure 2: Personal image of Buckroe Beach taken on March 6, 2017 (Personal Image of Buckroe 2, 2017)

On “Authoring” Bodies of Flesh, Land, and Water

Within the feminist literary canon, scholars theorize that there is no one definable human body (Longhurst, 2005). Scholars instead argue that there are only bodies in the plural. After all, with the presence of varied systems, institutions, and discourses that constantly engage in the process of differentiating bodies (through racing, sexing, gendering, etc. bodies), a multitude of possible bodies are imaginable. With this argument that bodies are sites with constructed, always negotiated meanings (often to the point that any given body’s meaning is forever ambiguous), there is the suggestion that the human body is a “surface of social and cultural inscription” (p. 91). Through this lens, the body is akin to a text that cultural and social discourses, systems, and institutions “author” with specific “narratives” (Grier, 2015). Similarly, those in the world of cultural geography—an expansive field that explores “how social groups engage with their landscapes” (Jackson, Sibley, & Washbourne, 2005, p. xv) and how “people construct and make
sense of their places and spaces” (Jackson, Sibley, & Washbourne, 2005, p. xv)—argue that individuals make and remake spaces and places by constantly “reauthoring” them with different meanings, or “narratives” (Longhurst, 2005). With that in mind, cultural geographers have extended feminist scholarship’s textual metaphor beyond bodies of flesh to bodies of land and water (Mitchell, 2005).

A foundational idea of cultural geography is that “space has no ontological status, no fixed characteristics” (Longhurst, 2005, p. 93). This is not to suggest that landscapes and waterscapes do not have a defined sense of materiality, but, rather, this is to suggest that the significations of locations are non-discrete. Instead of places being available with fixed and inherent meanings, places are, instead, brought into being via a confluence of meanings, originating from sometimes disparate and sometimes overlapping actions, memories, voices, values, emotions, cosmologies, lived experiences, and other human artifacts (Livingston, 2013). In a sense, locales sit at the cross section of a mix of “narratives” introduced by an assortment of communities. Places, then, are the products of communal, collective labor (Mitchell, 2005).

With Kathleen Brogan’s suggestion that “places are processes” (as cited in Livingston, 2013, p. 7), in the sense that locations come about through the consistent assignment of meanings to them, places are then sites that are “re-authored” repeatedly with new “narratives.” Expanding the “place as text” metaphor, landscapes and waterscapes are like palimpsests: multilayered as far as definition. As discussed by Michel de Certeau in a portion of *The Practice of Everyday Life*, “Every place has its own story, or even a proliferation of stories, and every spatial practice constitutes a form of re-narrating and re-writing a place” (as cited in del Pilar Blanco & Peeren, 2013, p. 396). De Certeau continues by noting that “haunted places are the only ones people can

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2 Interestingly, the term “geography” stems from two Greek words: “geo,” meaning “the earth,” and “graph,” meaning “to write” (Dempsey, 2013).
live in” (p. 397). In Toni Morrison’s novel, *Beloved*, the character Sethe, while remembering the plantation Sweet Home, echoes de Certeau’s idea that places are “haunted”:

> Where I was before I came here, that place is real. It’s never going away. Even if the whole farm—every tree and grass blade of it dies. The picture is still there and what’s more, if you go there—you who never was there—if you go there and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there for you, waiting for you. (Morrison, 1987, p. 43)

Through the logic of de Certeau and Morrison, waterscapes and landscapes are chaotic, pulsating crucibles of meaning rather than seamless, cohesive “narratives.” With this understanding of spaces as having both resolved and contested significations, any given locale becomes able to simultaneously signify several meanings that one can stumble upon, including meanings of pain. **On Spaces “Inked” with (Black) Pain**

People often imagine the “doing” of memory as an individual project, but memory is not only practiced on the individual level. Memory-making is also “social and collective because it occurs relationally through our interactions with others” (Courtheyn, 2016, p. 271). Per Maurice Halbwachs, the memories produced between certain individuals only exist among those individuals (Bowker & Johnson, 2004). In order for the individuals’ memories to persist in perpetuity, the individuals must generate, record, transmit, and, ultimately, circulate their memories. This process of persons generating, recording, transmitting, and circulating their memories conjures the creation of “collective memory.” Bowker and Johnson (2004) suggest that the “experience of Jews during the Holocaust and the ‘memory’ of the Holocaust by successive generations of Jews” (p. 58), for instance, exemplifies the development of collective memory.³

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³ Throughout this section of the paper, I mention both the horrors experienced by Jewish and Black populations. Though I mention both, I should note that the mentioning of both is not for the sake of comparing the unique tragedies experienced by Jewish and Black persons.
Kathleen Brogan asserts that, “Most groups preserve their [collective] memories by spatializing them: they ‘engrave their form in some way upon the soil and retrieve their collective remembrances within the spatial framework thus defined’” (as cited in Wardi, 2011, p. 7). Through the prism of Brogan’s assertion, a group’s collective memory can be present not only within the “mental spaces” of a group, but “inked” onto physical spaces as well. Collective memory can exist in one’s body, but also in space. The spatialization of collective memory transforms and “authors” specific sites into “affective reservoirs” (Kearney & Vasudevan, 2016, p. 456) or, alternatively, lieux de mémoire—“sites, realms, and places that serve as material, non-material, symbolic, and/or functional memory” (Courtheyn, 2016, p. 270). In metaphorical terms, Pierre Nora says sites that hold (collective) memory are like “shells on the shore when the sea of living memory has receded” (as cited in Montano, 2008, p. 10). Referring back to the example involving Jewish individuals and the Holocaust, Berlin, Germany, a “place haunted with landscapes that simultaneously embody presences and absences, voids and ruins, intentional forgetting and painful remembering” (Gould & Silverman, 2013, p. 792), could be a residual “shell” for Jewish persons and others. In their article, African-American Wildland Memories, Cassandra Y. Johnson and J. M. Bowker (2004) claim that many places, especially natural, unbuilt “wildlands,” are “affective reservoirs” of Black collective memory. More specifically, Johnson and Bowker maintain that several places in America are “affective reservoirs” of Black collective memory related to pain.

On Black porches, among the pews of Black churches, and within other Black spaces, Black persons disseminate their collective memories, including those that are replete with instances of place-specific anguish. Memories of Black people enduring backbreaking labor on plantations and in turpentine and lumber camps; memories of Black persons attempting to
outmaneuver slave catchers, Ku Klux Klan members, and lynch mobs in wooded areas; memories of redlining and gentrification spatially impeding Black persons; and even memories of acts of environmental racism move from generation to generation within Black circles (Bowker & Johnson, 2004; Kearney & Vasudevan, 2016; Rosenthal, 2006). Through the transmission or, in the words of Joanne Braxton, “crossing consciousness” (Braxton, n.d., para. 3) of those uncomfortable memories, Black suffering has attached itself to the settings (both actual and symbolic) of moments of Black pain. The attachment of Black distress to those sites has transformed those settings into vessels of the “‘impossible histories’ of slavery and ongoing white supremacy” (Kearney & Vasudevan, 2016, p. 456). Within Black communities, the enduring legacy of place-specific trauma has mythologized certain locales as “‘sick places’” (Bowker & Johnson, 2004, p. 60) that “evoke horrible memories of toil, torture, and death” (Bowker & Johnson, 2004, p. 60). Linking outdoor areas to ideas of “toil, torture, and death,” Black persons have often not imagined the natural world as full of “healing, revitalizing ‘therapeutic landscapes’ or ‘fields of care’” (Bowker & Johnson, 2004, p. 60). Through the physicalization of traumatic Black memoryscapes, a string of geographies of Black pain mark the American landscape. One place, arguably, that is a part of that string of geographies is Buckroe Beach in Hampton, Virginia.

**On Buckroe Beach’s Collection of “Narratives”**

A location’s “social imageability” is a location’s “capacity to evoke vivid and collectively held social meanings among [its] occupants and users” (Hartley, 2006, p. 287). Buckroe Beach is a sandy stretch that largely evokes “vivid and collectively held social meanings” related to pleasure. Because of the beach’s inclusion of certain structural elements and because of how the beach’s visitors choose to navigate the beach, Buckroe exudes ideas
related to delight. Less than a mile long and situated along the Chesapeake Bay, the beach features several facilities and accommodations that materially signify that Buckroe is an accessible vacation destination and beachfront community ("Buckroe Beach and Park," n.d.; "Outdoors and Sports: Buckroe Beach and Park," 2011; Stephens, n.d.). Those facilities and accommodations include rental kayaks and paddleboats, picnic shelters with grills, a walking and bike path, and a stage pavilion used for public programs and events. A string of businesses and a residential area also surround the eight acres of beach; together, these spaces make up Buckroe Beach the neighborhood. As a part of the implementation of the "Buckroe Beach Master Plan," which Hampton, Virginia’s governmental bodies crafted during the early 2000s to restore the beach’s economic and social value, Buckroe also features a rebuilt fishing pier and a redesigned park space (Buckroe Master Plan, 2005). On any given day, varied individuals—families, pet owners, out-of-town guests, etc.—utilize Buckroe’s facilities and accommodations, allowing the individuals to navigate and “read” the beach in ways that imbue Buckroe Beach with a sense of leisure and community-building. With the attachment of economic value to Buckroe by government officials, the beach is also encoded with meanings related to money-making.

As Buckroe has become “inked” with modern meanings that evoke relaxation and capital, the beach’s physical properties have consequently transformed. Like other environmental spaces, Buckroe Beach undergoes perpetual change because of the influence of water and wind. Tides, currents, waves, and rising sea levels constantly alter the physicality of Buckroe (Hardaway Jr., Milligan, Thomas, Varnell, & Wilcox, 2005). To mitigate the movement of beach sediments prompted by indomitable hydrodynamic and aerodynamic forces, the beach has been the recipient of beach fill and nourishment treatments since the 1970s (Bloodgood (USACE), 2012; Virginia’s Public Beach Board, 2000). In addition, Hampton’s government officials have erected
a series of nearshore stone breakwaters—“detached, generally shore-parallel structures that reduce the amount of wave energy reaching a protected area” (“d. Nearshore breakwaters,” n.d., para. 3)—to further stabilize the beach. While Buckroe Beach is by nature a space of change and flux, the beach’s function as a communal, cheerful, and commercial locale necessitates that the beach not diminish. In other words, the narrative inscribed upon Buckroe demands the area’s permanency instead of metamorphosis. With such a demand, the force of “coastal capitalism,” or the “commodification of the beach as a commercial asset, exploitation of natural resources and environmental engineering of coastal zones and bodies of water for aesthetic and recreational purposes, and the transfer of public lands to private entities” (Kahrl, 2012, p. 4), has seemingly gripped Buckroe Beach. The beach’s immaterial definitions have brought forth adverse material consequences, “narrating” Buckroe, in addition to pleasure and profit, as a place of environmental disaster.

Alongside present “narratives,” past “narratives” layer Buckroe. In 1619, upon arriving in the New World, English settlers established the “Buck Roe” Plantation and set the space aside for public use (Elizabeth, 2013; Stephens, n.d.; The WPA Guide to Virginia, 2013).4 Later, the Virginia Company of London sent over Frenchmen to the plantation to set up vineyard and silk-processing operations. After attempting to instill a robust knowledge of grapes and silkworms at Buck Roe failed to be lucrative and worthwhile, the plantation morphed into a commercial tobacco farm. In the postbellum era, the tobacco farm evolved into a fishing camp for both Black and White fishermen.

Following decades of Buckroe Beach being chiefly “authored” as an earnings-focused geography, a slew of individuals, beginning in the early nineteenth century, began to reimagine

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4 The name “Buck Roe” is a reference to Buckrose in Yorkshire, England (Buckroe Beach, 2017).
the beach as a locale for turning a profit while escaping everyday responsibilities and establishing social ties. After purchasing a section of the estate formerly known as the Buck Roe Plantation, a Hampton, Virginia local, Mary Anne Dobbins Herbert, opened a private boarding house for summer guests in 1883 (Buckroe Beach, 2017; Stensvaag, 1985). Herbert’s construction of a bathhouse and a pavilion soon came after, foreshadowing future elements of a yet-to-be Buckroe Beach. Soon after, Edward B. Chiles, also of Hampton, Virginia, constructed the site’s first public bathhouse. Following their purchase of a separate plot of land in the same area, oyster and railway entrepreneur James S. Darling built the Buckroe Beach Hotel, which began operating in 1897. The introduction of the hotel inspired Buckroe’s reputation as a resort area. The successive erection of other public structures of amusement further concretized that reputation. Such structures included the Buckroe Beach Amusement Park; “a scattered collection of bungalows, frame hotels, shacks, and lunch rooms” (WPA Guide to Virginia, 2013, n.p.); and even “shoot-the-chutes, venders’ stands, a pavilion, fortune tellers’ booths, and like contraptions” (WPA Guide to Virginia, 2013, n.p.). Soon, Buckroe Beach was born and became nationally recognized as the foremost “mecca of one-day excursionists” (WPA Guide to Virginia, 2013, n.p.) on the East Coast (Buckroe Beach, 2017). Or, at least, the beach became recognized by some people as such a place.

As the dominant discourse attached to Buckroe Beach became one that presented the beach as a Southern summer hotspot, a grim underbelly lurked underneath the dominant discourse’s frivolous surface: in alignment with racist mores of the late nineteenth century, Buckroe Beach denied entrance to Black individuals (Fairfax, 2005). Already embedded with significations linked to fun and finance, the location became further haunted with meanings involving Black oppression, Black domination, and Black pain. Following the lead of other
Black visionaries who sought to author coastal locales as environs of inclusion and economic and social freedom, a group of Black Hamptonians launched the development of an all-Black beach parallel to Buckroe—Bay Shore Beach.⁵

In the late 1890s, a group of administrators from the Hampton Institute (now known as Hampton University) navigated the real estate market in search of a waterfront property that would be appropriate for the construction of a building that would house student athletics and also out-of-town guests visiting the Institute (Kahrl, 2012; St. John Erickson, 2015; Stephens, n.d.). The administrators’ search for the perfect location ended after they bought one and a half acres of land from a “viciously racist beachfront property owner” (Kahrl, 2012, p. 181) who kept a “large sign on the beach that read ‘Niggers, dogs, and Chinamen not allowed on this beach’” (Kahrl, 2012, p. 181). Hampton historians allege that the unlikely transaction between the two parties took place because the original property owner had a dispute with his neighbors, prompting him to sell his beachfront plot to the “most undesirable buyers imaginable” (Kahrl, 2012, p. 181). After acquiring the land, the group of Hampton Institute administrators “re-authored” the site as Black-friendly by fundraising the resources needed to establish a four-room cottage named the Bay Shore Hotel (Kahrl, 2012; St. John Erickson, 2015).

Because many Black people shifted from being propertyless laborers to landowners, acquired coastal regions became places that were representative of liberation, especially from the oppressive hand of White supremacy (Kahrl, 2012). In addition, during the “emergence of the field of coastal engineering, the mass production of the automobile, investment in roads and infrastructure development on the state and federal level, and the rise of a white-collar workforce with weekends off, paid vacations, and disposable incomes” (Kahrl, 2012, p. 8-9) in the early twentieth century, Blacks, and others, with coastal properties began to participate in the United States’ new waterfront economy. Then, coastal locales became representative of social and economic freedom. In all, beaches in the Black collective memory have become a nexuses of different narratives related to liberation.

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⁵ As the American South’s slavocracy fell apart in the aftermath of the Civil War, coastal regions that were once valued for their role in facilitating the existence of slavery saw their worth diminish. The devaluation of the South’s coastal areas actually started prior to the Civil War, as “unsustainable farming” (Kahrl, 2012, p. 7), “unmanageable labor regimes” (Kahrl, 2012, p. 7), “inherent environmental limitations and vulnerabilities” (Kahrl, 2012, p. 7), and even the presence of “mosquitoes, predatory animals, dense forests, and sandy, nonarable soil” (Kahrl, 2012, p. 7) made coastal places unappealing. With the emergence of worthless coastal properties, opportunities for land ownership were available for a population of newly freed Blacks. Soon, coastal sites acquired and owned by Blacks dotted the South.
Opening in 1898, the Bay Shore Hotel, as aforementioned, initially only housed student athletics and sheltered Hampton Institute’s rotation of visitors. After the hotel’s directors discovered that booking out the hotel’s rooms and renting out the surrounding beach to all-Black parties could equal profit, the functionality of the Bay Shore Hotel expanded (St. John Erickson, 2015). As the hotel broadened its services, the number of Black organizations and groups that were willing to pay to stay at the Bay Shore Hotel and visit the emerging Bay Shore Beach proved sizeable. Aided by trolley and railroad innovations, groups as diverse and distant as the Tri-State Dental Association (later renamed the National Dental Association) and the American Bridge Association travelled to and resided at Bay Shore Beach (Fletcher, 2015; St. John Erickson, 2015; Stephens, n.d.). As word of this rare and burgeoning coastal resort area spread across the country, the beach’s cash flow rapidly increased. This growth in funds allowed for the expansion of the Bay Shore Hotel and the establishment of a slew of attractions and amenities. Such attractions and amenities included a dancehall, roller coaster, merry-go-round, shooting gallery, bingo parlor, carousel, ferris wheel, and even bumper cars, mirroring some of the items available at the neighboring Whites-only Buckroe Beach (St. John Erickson, 2015).

While the beach matured in an economic sense, it also accrued social currency as Black bodies populated the beach to participate in the waterfront leisure economy just like their White counterparts. Bay Shore’s accumulated social capital afforded the beach enough pull to be a part of Black America’s “Chitlin Circuit”—the “collective name given to the string of performance venues throughout...the United States that were safe and acceptable for Black musicians, comedians, and other entertainers to perform in during the age of racial segregation” (“The Chitlin Circuit,” n.d., para. 1). Bay Shore attracted the artistry of Redd Foxx, Cab Calloway,

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Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, James Brown, Ella Fitzgerald, and others (St. John Erickson, 2015; Stephens, n.d.). Just as White bodies at Buckroe Beach navigated the space in ways that made it an area for entrepreneurship and leisure, Black bodies moved through Bay Shore Beach in similar ways that made the beach a site of a distinct brand of Black capitalism, cultural content production, and world-making.

Despite successful efforts to provide Bay Shore Beach with a sheen of relaxation that made it an appealing destination for “Sea-Baths, Sea-Food, and Sea-Air” (Fletcher, 2015, n.p.), the specter of racism still loomed over the beach. The presence of a peculiar feature made the “specter” most evident: a fence that “separated” the Black sands and waters of Bay Shore from the White sands and waters of Buckroe (Fletcher, 2015; Kahrl, 2012). The erection of the man-made fence restricted how human bodies could navigate both beaches, ultimately reinforcing racialized hierarchies and making Buckroe another site in the collective web of spaces of Black pain.

By the 1970s, the era of Bay Shore Beach ended due to two major forces. The first force was the establishment of newer, grander nearby attractions, such as Virginia Beach and the Busch Gardens amusement park in Williamsburg, Virginia. The second force was the sweep of integration prompted by 1960s desegregation laws (St. John Erickson, 2015; Stephens, n.d.). Both phenomena, especially integration, curbed the flow of Black patronage to Bay Shore, leading to the sale of some sections of the beach to private developers and the overall absorption of Bay Shore into the formerly all-White Buckroe Beach (Fletcher, 2015). Coming back full circle to the present conception of Buckroe Beach, it is clear that the location is replete with significations and has room for more. Buckroe Beach is a site of possibility when it comes to all the potential meanings the beach can harbor. Recognizing the beach’s capacity to take in many
meanings, there is the potential for Buckroe Beach to take in meanings that “heal” the beach’s more unsettling past “narratives.”
Chapter 3: Review of Original Research

*Figure 3: Patrons participating in one of the many events of the International Day of Remembrance (Pennavaria, 2016)*

**On the International Day of Remembrance**

In the above image, the eyes settle upon a gathering of individuals engaging in a collective ritual, demonstrating the application of a shared communal knowledge. Within the captured still, the woman in pink with the black hat is the most prominent figure. Positioned at the photograph’s central axis, the woman stands in a body of water and holds a pair of white roses in one hand while, with her other hand, tossing a flower out into the watery expanse before her. To the woman’s right, a small crowd of individuals in hats, sunglasses, and lightweight fabrics mimics the woman in pink: the people in the crowd also have their arms extended and outstretched, throwing an assortment of flowers into the field of blue. On the left side of the photo, a Black woman and a Black man—outfitted in crisp, white, summertime attire and almost knee-deep in the featured waterscape—also appear to be engaging in the group’s exercise of setting sail to various flower types. Overall, the actions of the figures evoke a sense of spiritual
release, catharsis, and delivery. At the same time, the image is equivalent to a scene from a funeral or aquatic burial. The photograph as a whole has a tension: it elicits feelings of joy and bliss and also sorrow and loss. Considering that the still is of one of the many events of the International Day of Remembrance, the presence of such a tension is understandable, as I hope to make clear below.

The International Day of Remembrance (often referred to as just “Remembrance”) is an event hosted annually at Hampton, Virginia’s Buckroe Beach by the Sankofa Projects. The Sankofa Projects is a network of individuals who prepare “educational and cultural programs that explore the richness and diversity of the African diaspora through the lens of history and culture” (Walke, 2015, para. 1) for communities within Virginia’s Tidewater area and beyond (Interviewee B, interview, March 14, 2017). The word sankofa that is used by the Sankofa Projects is a term from the West African Akan language that translates roughly to “it is not taboo to go back and fetch what you forgot” (“Sankofa,” n.d.). More metaphorical than literal, the definition of the word sankofa refers to the necessity of looking back and then resurrecting, safeguarding, and perpetuating one’s forgotten or erased roots, memories, and histories. The visual icon for sankofa is a bird that flies forward while gazing lovingly upon and protecting an egg—a symbol of the future (Interviewee B, interview, March 14, 2017; “Sankofa,” n.d.). Such a visualization of sankofa suggests that the project of reclaiming one’s past is critical to moving forward and nurturing a bright future. The Sankofa Projects, especially with its facilitation of the International Day of Remembrance, embodies the idea that constructing a robust knowledge of the events of the past is essential to building a healthy tomorrow (and, I would offer, for ensuring a full comprehension of the present).

7 The term sankofa is also sometimes symbolized as a stylized “heart” (Koutonin, 2013).
In 2012, Chadra Pittman Walke, the Sankofa Projects’ founder and executive director, started Remembrance (Walke, 2015). Pittman began the event after learning about the public plea for commemorative activities that “tap into the ancestral presence in the [Atlantic Ocean’s] waters” (Holmes, 2014, p. 177) and that reclaim the bones of the “African bodies in the briny deep [of the Atlantic Ocean]” (Holmes, 2014, p. xxi) made by author and activist Toni Cade Bambara. Delivered in the 1980s at the National Black Storyteller’s Conference at Medgar Evers College, Bambara’s publicized request declared the need to act out *sankofa* (or remember and preserve the past) when it comes to the Black individuals who perished while enduring the Middle Passage (Holmes, 2014; Walke, 2015). The tragedy of the Middle Passage was the coerced movement of millions of captured Africans across the Atlantic Ocean, from Africa to areas throughout the New World (Campbell, 2007). Following collaborations with the City of Hampton, Virginia, the Sankofa Projects produced a proclamation that established the second Saturday of every June as the International Day of Remembrance. With the proclamation, Pittman Walke answered Bambara’s call for a communal, memorializing event that would “honor the spirits of African ancestors who dared to jump ship rather than be enslaved” (Holmes, 2014, p. 177) and provide remembrance for the Black lives lost because of the Middle Passage. As acknowledged by Bambara, such remembrance is necessary because the United States generally does not acknowledge those who died by way of the Middle Passage (Alderman & Inwood, 2016; Atkinson, 2005; Fabre & O’Meally, 1994; Holmes, 2014; Walke, 2014; Walke, 2015). Beyond Toni Cade Bambara, Toni Morrison (2008) also acutely noted America’s general disregard of Black individuals who perished via the Transatlantic Slave Trade during an acceptance speech given after receiving the 1988 Frederic G. Melcher Book Award:

> There is no place you or I can go, to think about or not think about, to summon the presences of, or recollect the absences of slaves; nothing that reminds us of the ones who
made the journey [of the Middle Passage] and of those who did make it. There is no suitable memorial or plaque or wreath or wall or park or skyscraper lobby. There’s no 300-foot tower. There’s no small bench by the road. There is not even a tree scored, an initial that I can visit or you can visit in Charleston or Savannah or New York or Providence, or better still, on the banks of the Mississippi. (para. 4)

The International Day of Remembrance, via its series of events, aims to supply a space for individuals to engage with “the ones who made the journey [of the Middle Passage] and…those who did make it.”

At each Remembrance ceremony, several activities take place, some permanent and the rest not (Interviewee B, interview, March 14, 2017). There is, among other items, drumming to acknowledge the fact that African practices and customs did not vanish following the Middle Passage and the United States’ era of slavery (Castillo, 2016; Interviewee B, interview, March 14, 2017). Singers, poets, dancers, and other performers present work that is relevant to the goals and general ethos of Remembrance. There is meditation. There is the recitation of a “water prayer.” At noon of each Remembrance event, a libation ceremony occurs, which aligns with libation ceremonies held at other Remembrance-esque programs across the world. As noted at the beginning of the chapter, Remembrance participants of varied backgrounds line the shore of Buckroe Beach and toss memorial flowers into the “watery grave” that is the Atlantic Ocean. Also, at recent Remembrance ceremonies, participants have performed a Black Lives Matter tribute to honor more contemporary Black ancestors who died on land (by way of police brutality, etc.) instead of on water.8 Together, the activities bring the violence of the Middle Passage to the present and do the work of summoning and eternalizing memories of the “‘middle chapter, that untold story’ between slavery and freedom which needs to be told so that all understand the gravity and horror of this often ignored and cruel chapter of American and global

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8 Black Lives Matter is an international “chapter-based…organization working for the validity of Black life” (“About the Black Lives Matter Network,” n.d.).
history” (Walke, 2015, para. 1). Through excavating that “chapter” from the shadows of history, Remembrance not only familiarizes the lives of the victims of the Middle Passage, but Remembrance also disrupts inaccurate, revisionist ideas of how the victims of the Middle Passage engaged with their captivity. Disregarding perceptions that captured African people were passive while enduring the Middle Passage, Remembrance recovers historical truths and foregrounds enslaved Africans’ enactment of rebellion and resistance (Interviewee B, interview, March 14, 2017).

While Remembrance occurs annually at the defined setting of Buckroe Beach, it is not a singular anomaly of an event. Serving as a microcosm representing a larger movement, Remembrance is a part of an international collective of ceremonies that happen yearly to “Remember, Commemorate, Honor and Restore the humanity of [the] nameless, faceless Ancestors who perished as a result of and during ‘The Middle Passage’” (“Purpose,” n.d., para. 2). According to the main website for the Sankofa Projects, Remembrance is an “extension of a 23 year tradition of Tributes to the Ancestors which began in New York in 1989 under the direction of the late Dr. Mary Umolo and Brother Tony Akeem” (Walke, n.d., para. 3). Since the 1980s, the work of Umolo and Akeem has spread, as evidenced by Umolo’s and Akeem’s efforts serving as the inspiration for a slew of Remembrance-like programs within the United States and around the world. Such programs include South Carolina’s Middle Passage Remembrance Day (“Ceremonies honor slaves who died crossing Atlantic,” n.d.).

To provide organizing resources for Afro-Diasporic communities that are interested in preparing events that pay tribute to the Black ancestors lost because of the Middle Passage, Tony Akeem, Chadra Pittman Walke, and others established the International Coalition to Commemorate African Ancestors of the Middle Passage (“Founding Board Members,” n.d.). Per
digital materials created by the coalition, ICCAAMP organizes and provide toolkits for executing “activities that are designed to remember the millions of Africans who were sold, kidnapped, shipped then died along the route from Africa to the Americas” (“Mission,” n.d., para. 1). The organization believes that such activities are necessary for providing a space for Afro-Diasporic communities to engage in (1) “Consciousness Raising and Development” (“Purpose,” n.d., para. 1), (2) “Healing from the deeply embedded pain resulting from the vestiges of enslavement” (“Purpose,” n.d., para. 1), and (3) “Reclamation and Restoration of cultural identity, dignity, and pride” (“Purpose,” n.d., para. 1). Creating room for the enactment of those items, several events affiliated with the International Coalition to Commemorate African Ancestors of the Middle Passage commemorate the Blacks persons who perished via the violence of the Middle Passage. For example, there is the Annual International Libations for the Ancestors program in Oakland, California; the Annual Charleston Remembrance Program at Sullivan Island in South Carolina; and the Annual African Diaspora Ancestral Commemoration Institute’s Annual ADACI River Walk in Washington, D.C. (“Commemoration Locator,” n.d.). Also, emphasizing ICCAAMP’s international focus, there are commemorative events that take place in Brazil, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Nigeria, Cameroon, and even Senegal. Beyond remembrance ceremonies associated with ICCAAMP, there are ceremonies that take place domestically and abroad through other bodies, including the United Nations (“Background,” n.d.). The emergence of memorializing programs that extend across borders demonstrates the international nature and lasting residue of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. The worldwide engagement with the “desperate need, the unbearable pain, the tortuous triumph, [and] the sensuous joy” (Braxton & Diedrich, 2004, p. 7) produced by grappling with the history of the Middle Passage communicates a desire among Black communities in varied spaces to disrupt the repression of Middle Passage
memories buried within the Atlantic Ocean and other sites associated with the global history of Black enslavement.

Circling back specifically to Hampton, Virginia’s International Day of Remembrance, the event, overall, actualizes *sankofa*. The program, like the events mentioned above, metaphorically exhumes Black bodies from the Atlantic Ocean to reclaim the exhumed bodies’ narratives. Through this actualization of *sankofa*, Remembrance not only offers a moment for remembering, but Remembrance also offers a moment for celebrating the past, revering the past, gaining strength from the past, and grieving for the past (Interviewee B, interview, March 14, 2017). This array of sometimes contradicting experiences that takes place at Remembrance—from instances of celebration to grieving—gives those in the present a chance to heal. After all, as suggested by Cheryl J. LaRoche (2014), “contemporary commemoration and ceremonial performances can serve physically ameliorating, culturally regenerative, and racially restorative purposes” (p. 297). For communities dealing with the residue of the Middle Passage, such amelioration, regeneration, and restoration are necessary to curtail the “deterioration of psychic function” (Monteiro & Wall, 2011, p. 238), “spiritual and mental breakdown” (Monteiro & Wall, 2011, p. 238), and the “breaking [of] one’s sense of integrity” (Monteiro & Wall, 2011, p. 238) that can occur from direct or indirect “exposure to traumatic stimuli” (Monteiro & Wall, 2011, p. 238). Overall, the diversity of experiences had at Remembrance constructs the International Day of Remembrance as an event with, as aforementioned, an inherent tension between celebration and mourning.

While activating the term *sankofa*, Remembrance also seems to do something else: spatially redress Buckroe Beach. Those who participate in the ceremony’s series of programs transform Buckroe—a site of historical Black trauma that sits along the Atlantic Ocean, the stage
of the Middle Passage—from a location of disembodied Black pain into a place of Black joy, comfort, remembrance, and healing grief. The International Day of Remembrance “authors” Buckroe Beach with new, redressive “narratives” each year. Remembrance’s apparent process of curative meaning-making and narrative-building at Buckroe Beach makes Remembrance an appropriate site—or, rather, case study—for investigating how Hartman’s idea of redress unfolds with landscapes and waterscapes that harbor extracorporeal Black suffering.

**On Methods and Methodologies**

A case study is a “research strategy which focuses on gaining an understanding of the dynamics present within single settings” (Gray, 2014, p. 266). Drawing data from a “small sample of interest” (Gray, 2014, p. 266) or a “focused range of people, organizations or contexts” (Gray, 2014, p. 266), case studies have a tight scope that allows for researchers to shed light on the subtleties and nuances of varied themes, subjects, and phenomena. With case studies, the unearthing of the granular details of certain themes, subjects, and phenomena can be useful when explaining said themes, subjects, and phenomena to uninformed outsiders (“Case Studies,” n.d.). Beyond educating others about items they may not be familiar with, case studies are also useful for testing hypotheses: by observing how a theory, phenomena, etc. engages with the real world, researchers can reject or accept formulated hypotheses or generate completely new hypotheses.

Alongside the enumerated benefits of utilizing a case study for research purposes, the use of a case study also comes with potential drawbacks. For instance, because a case study places an emphasis on depth, performing a case study can prove to be time-consuming. The potential time-consuming nature of a case study can be problematic when a research project must be completed within a firm, inflexible timeframe (“Case Studies,” n.d.). Also stemming from the fact that case
studies favor depth over breadth, another con stemming from executing a case study is that
generalizations cannot come from the information collected from a case study. Because one
unique instance cannot be representative of other instances, the specificities of one, singular case
cannot reasonably be applicable to other different, albeit similar, cases. Despite the limitations
that come with using a case study, I decided to employ the case study as a research strategy to
answer the core question of this paper: how can Saidiya Hartman’s conceptualization of redress
play out at sites of disembodied Black pain, particularly natural sites of disembodied Black pain?

Generally, researchers use case studies when “there is little control over events” (Stjelja,
n.d., p. 15), when the “investigator is trying to examine a particular phenomenon in a real-life
situation or context” (Stjelja, n.d., p.15), and when “answering ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions”
(Stjelja, n.d., p.15). While conducting the original research discussed throughout this chapter, I
aimed to achieve two of the listed objectives by (1) investigating how redress (a “phenomenon”)
can take place in a spatialized context (a “real-life situation or context”) and (2) answering the
aforementioned “how” question regarding the ability of Hartman’s redress to be relevant in
instances of disembodied Black trauma. With my goals aligning with the general goals of a case
study, I decided to conduct a case study to complete the research examined in this chapter.

In particular, I decided to conduct a single, instrumental case study centering the
International Day of Remembrance at Hampton, Virginia’s Buckroe Beach. An “instrumental
case study” is useful when an investigator wants to “improve a theory or gain something else
other than understanding of a particular situation or case itself” (Stjelja, n.d., p. 12). My core
research question seeks to expand—or “improve”—Saidiya Hartman’s redress, and so I
categorize the case study I conducted as an instrumental case study. Regarding why I chose to
conduct a “single case study,” I made such a decision because single case studies are effective at
confirming or rejecting theories, such as the one explored throughout this paper (Stjelja, n.d.). However, it is worth noting that the main limitation with single case studies is that findings from single case studies are not usually generalizable. In addition, I centered the case study on Remembrance. I used Remembrance as a case study because, as briefly discussed in “On the International Day of Remembrance,” Remembrance is a singular, confined event that is relevant to this project due to being in conversation with themes of space, pain, and Black healing modalities.

After deciding to utilize a case study to complete a research project, a researcher then usually collects information for the case study using a variety of sources and data collection methods. Examples of such sources and data collection methods include archives, surveys, ethnography, physical artifacts, documentation, participant observation, and even oral histories (Gray, 2014). The last item mentioned—oral histories—allows for a researcher to obtain “data from people who live during a particular event, who are directly or indirectly involved in an event, or who were able to hear the direct participants of an event tell about their experiences” (Walker, 2016, p. 48). With oral histories involving archiving personal narratives, anecdotes, and memories, the most obvious advantage of collecting oral histories is that a researcher can accumulate knowledge from one of the most powerful primary sources—people (Walker, 2016). However, receiving data from people poses a series of issues. For one, human memory is fallible, making it hard to discern whether the facts of a given oral history are valid and true. Secondly, a storyteller may want to serve their own agenda or serve the agenda of the interviewer, which can skew how said storyteller communicates their oral history. In addition, within a set of oral histories regarding the same subject, event, etc., discrepancies may be present. Any inconsistencies can make it difficult to have a clear and cohesive understanding of a subject,
event, etc. (“Primary Sources,” 2013; Walker, 2016). Lastly, both the time-consuming process of transcribing oral histories and the possibility of a researcher framing questions in a biased way are other difficulties that researchers may have to navigate when using oral histories for collecting data for a research endeavor. Regardless of the disadvantages, oral histories, overall, are still uniquely helpful because they capture an emotionality and humanity that may be lacking with information collected with other data collection strategies. Also, oral histories provide “information about a topic or time period that may otherwise lack documentation in written or archival records” (“Primary Sources,” 2013, para. 10).

For my case study involving Remembrance, I used oral histories to provide data. One item that influenced my choice to compile oral histories is the fact that there is a dearth of documentation regarding Remembrance. With the event being a young, local event, few texts (both visual and otherwise) exist that harbor knowledge of past Remembrance ceremonies. As noted above, one of the main pros of recording oral histories is that a researcher can gain information stored via memory and orality instead of via more conventional and physical archival means. Because Remembrance is an event that lacks tangible documentary materials, performing oral histories seemed fitting for learning more about the International Day of Remembrance, especially in relation to redress. Beyond offering useful data for this paper, I also thought it imperative to compile oral histories for the sake of contributing to the preservation of Black memories and lived experiences. I found preserving Black memories and lived experiences via oral histories significant because these items are routinely forgotten and/or erased in the United States (Atkinson, 2005; Fabre & O’Meally, 1994). Also, this paper deals with the cultural practices and lifeways of Black, Afro-Diasporic peoples. With that in mind, I decided to conduct oral histories to honor all the embodied ways that Black people have
perpetuated and continue to perpetuate knowledge, including means such as movement and, of course, orality (Warner-Lewis, 2004). Lastly, I justified the completion of oral histories for this paper after considering that qualitative, non-numerical data seems best to use when dealing with symbolic, emotional, and metaphysical content, themes, and subjects, such as those discussed throughout this paper. While opting to use one tactic for collecting data may prove problematic since data triangulation (or data corroboration) cannot take place, I felt that utilizing just oral histories for data collection was apt for this project considering the justifications detailed above.

In all, I conducted two oral histories: one with a Remembrance participant (referred to as Interviewee A throughout this paper) and one with a Remembrance coordinator who has played a critical role in facilitating Remembrance since its inception in 2012 (referred to as Interviewee B throughout this paper). I received oral histories from those individuals to gain both internal (or from the viewpoint of a Remembrance facilitator) and external (or from the viewpoint of a Remembrance patron) perspectives on Remembrance. After I contacted both interviewees, explained the objectives of my original research, and secured interview sessions with the participants, I performed the oral histories using a semi-structured interview format (to both perform the oral histories in a systematic way and allow space for further unpacking responses from the interviewees). I asked the following questions, alongside occasional follow-up and

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9 I only conducted two oral histories, mostly to accommodate the availability of interviewees and the rigid timeframe of this project. Also, as aforementioned, I am aiming to use this paper to, in part, record Black memories and, ultimately, transform this paper into a documentary material. To realize that objective, I originally wanted to record and publish the names of Interviewee A and Interviewee B. However, due to institutional rules at the College of William & Mary, I was not able to have a research protocol approved that allowed for me to provide the names of Interviewee A and Interviewee B.

10 I found both interviewees after referring to digital content that listed the individuals involved with past Remembrance events. Also, I first became aware of Remembrance after hearing about the event from a professor at the College; my interest in Remembrance grew after initiating research regarding the annual ceremony. As far as the interview process, I started both interviews by making sure the interviewees were clear about the purpose of the oral histories and how the oral histories would be take place. On the latter item, I, for instance, made sure both interviewees knew that their participation was voluntary and that they had the option to stop their participation at any point. Both interviews lasted no more than an hour. To ensure rapport and comfortable interview sessions
clarification questions, to the interviewees to get more general information about the
International Day of Remembrance and the ceremony’s enactment of spatial redress:

1. Describe the International Day of Remembrance and its significance in your own
words.
2. Can you describe how and why you participate in the International Day of
Remembrance?
3. Do you believe that the location of the International Day of Remembrance—
   Buckroe Beach—plays a role in the event?
4. Define “healing.”
5. Do you believe that Black people are in need of your definition of “healing”?
6. Define “memory.”
7. Do you find the process of remembering one’s past and ancestors to be important?

I digitally recorded and transcribed the oral histories.\(^{11}\) After, to reveal evidence of the
manifestation of spatial redress during Remembrance, I engaged in the “pattern matching
technique,” which involves comparing an observed pattern and a theoretical pattern (Stjelja,
n.d.). To perform such a technique, I categorized sections of the transcribed oral histories by
their alignment with one of the three core characteristics of Hartman’s redress (described in “On
‘Redressing’ Buckroe Beach”). Overall, the set of oral histories provided insight on how redress
operates in circumstances involving Black pain encoded in spaces, instead of humans.

**On “Redressing” Buckroe Beach**

In the second chapter of *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in
Nineteenth Century America*, Saidiya Hartman provides a definition of redress. Characterizing
redress while applying the idea to the enslaved Black body, Hartman describes redress as having
three core properties, or objectives. Below, I describe the properties, or objectives, of redress in
relation to the enslaved Black body and, using the oral histories from Interviewee A and

\(^{11}\) I recorded both oral histories with digital equipment protected by a password that only I know. Only myself and
my advisor, Professor Artisia Green, had access to the recordings.
Interviewee B, determine how redress’ pillars can extend to Buckroe Beach and the International Day of Remembrance.

“Recognition and articulation of devastation, captivity, and enslavement”

In antebellum America, a redressive praxis, per Hartman (1997), first engaged in the process of acknowledging the pained, metaphorically “dis-membered” (p. 77) state of the enslaved Black body. This “recognition and articulation of devastation, captivity, and enslavement” (p. 76-77) initiated the “re-membering” (p. 77) of the “segmented” Black body. Identifying the violence inflicted upon the Black body and bearing witness to the body’s need for “pleasure, eros, and sociality” (p. 77) aided in rehumanizing the body, ultimately engendering its “re-membering,” or healing. With its programs that imagine and perceive of Buckroe Beach as a site of Black pain and, thus, treat Buckroe Beach like a site of Black pain, I suggest that Remembrance is redressive as far as being a “re-membering” event that articulates and recognizes the “pained” state of Buckroe Beach.

As discussed in “On Buckroe Beach’s Collection of ‘Narratives,’” Buckroe Beach is a location that is full of unique meanings, including those related to Black degradation. After all, Buckroe Beach is the area that was once home to an all-Black beach—Bay Shore Beach—that Black persons established in response to segregationist philosophies and laws. For the participants of Remembrance, Buckroe is a “dis-membered” body of land and water embedded with memories of Black terror for additional reasons. For one, Remembrance patrons imagine Buckroe Beach as an “affective reservoir” of Black pain because it is situated near the place where America’s first enslaved Africans arrived—Point Comfort, or, as known today, Fort Monroe (Brauchle, 2015; “The First Africans,” n.d.; Klein, 2010). In August of 1619, an English warship named the *White Lion* landed at present-day Fort Monroe with approximately twenty
captured Africans from Angola, initiating the institution of slavery in North America. During the completion of their oral history, Interviewee A referred to the seminal historical event:

> Well, we know that [Fort Monroe] is where [slavery] started. We know that Point Comfort...which is right [near Buckroe Beach], is where it all started. And, frankly, [Fort Monroe] where a lot of the residue of [slavery] still continues. (Interviewee A, interview, March 6, 2017)

Interviewee B also referenced the fact that Buckroe is near a region inscribed with a “narrative” involving colonialism, imperialism, enslavement, and, more generally, Black pain:

> [P]art of the reason why I chose Hampton as [the location of Remembrance] is because Point Comfort is the place where slavery [began in Virginia]. Hampton—Fort Monroe—is the place where the idea about freedom came to fruition through the contraband… (Interviewee B, interview, March 14, 2017)

Even while Buckroe Beach is not the exact landing site of America’s first enslaved Africans, those involved with Remembrance “author” Buckroe Beach with Black pain by melding the history of the beach with the history of Fort Monroe. Alongside Remembrance participants reconceptualizing Buckroe Beach as a site of racialized terror because of its proximity to Fort Monroe, Remembrance participants also “author” the beach as a place of extracorporeal Black pain by associating Buckroe Beach with the atrocities of the Middle Passage.

In the Black collective memory, the Middle Passage is often envisaged (in music, visual art, literature, etc.) as a “voyage of death” (Mallipeddi, 2014, p. 236) that facilitated the establishment of “unspeakable or repressed traumatic [Black] memory” (Terry, 2013, p. 477). Because of the disruptive, fracturing impact of the Middle Passage, those in Afro-Diasporic communities have cemented ideas of Black pain to the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Consequently, those within the African Diaspora have also encoded “narratives” of Black pain into the setting of the Middle Passage—the Atlantic Ocean (Mallipeddi, 2014; Terry, 2013). The Atlantic Ocean
is in fact the location where many Black persons at different points of the Middle Passage met the fate of death, making the ocean a Black cemetery of sorts and a repository of Black trauma.

As discussed in “On the International Day of Remembrance,” the Sankofa Projects’ Remembrance ceremony dedicates itself to the cause of acknowledging the persons who unwillingly participated in the Middle Passage and who ultimately found a final resting place in the “cemetery” of the Atlantic Ocean. Interviewee B confirmed that idea:

Remembrance is a community event. It’s a spiritual event. It’s a cultural event. It’s a historical event. Which brings people together to acknowledge a history that has not been told... Remembrance itself is a program that honors the millions of Africans who perished during the Middle Passage. For me, I take it a step further and I acknowledge those who perished en route to the enslavement ships. We’re acknowledging everyone who wound up in the Atlantic Ocean. (Interviewee B, interview, March 14, 2017)

To reverse the erasure of and to showcase reverence toward the unceremoniously buried, Remembrance participants engage in activities that center the body of water that sits along Buckroe Beach—the Chesapeake Bay. Such activities include the already referenced recitation of a “water prayer” and the covering of the Chesapeake Bay with commemorative flowers (Interviewee B, interview, March 14, 2017). Considering the practice of memorializing acts at the Chesapeake Bay and the fact that the Chesapeake Bay is fundamentally a subset of the Atlantic Ocean, the bay comes to bear all of the Atlantic Ocean’s meanings of Black pain. With the Chesapeake Bay also being a part of the physicality of Buckroe Beach, Buckroe, as a result, assumes the “narrative” of Black atrocity “authored” onto the bay and the Atlantic Ocean. Again, while the beach is not the actual site of the extreme violence of the Middle Passage, Buckroe Beach, through Remembrance, becomes a part of the Middle Passage’s geography of suffering. Per Joan M. Gero (1989), one of the key functions of a symbol is to “compress complicated and ambiguous meanings into a specific object” (p. 100). Considering that Remembrance participants wish to grapple with and heal from the enormous and “complicated” history of the Middle
Passage (and other histories of Black brutality), the symbolization of Buckroe Beach into an object of Black pain makes dealing with that Black pain more feasible. In all, the construction of Buckroe Beach by Remembrance patrons into a space of Black trauma signals that Remembrance patrons see the beach as “pained” and “dismembered.”

While Buckroe Beach’s aquatic components may be symbolic regions of Black pain, it is worth acknowledging that throughout the African Diaspora individuals imagine water as having a memory. The idea that water holds vestiges of the past makes Buckroe Beach’s watery areas actual locales of Black torment. For instance, per the work of John Mbiti (1991), different Afro-Diasporic societies believe that the realm of the deceased is in natural sites, such as “the woods, forests, river banks, or hills” (p. 123), instead of somewhere more removed from the plane of the living. Furthermore, Mbiti notes that bodies of water, specifically, are commonly considered throughout the African Diaspora as areas that act as a “meeting-point between the visible and invisible world” (as cited in Wardi, 2012, p. 134). With Mbiti’s work in mind, Buckroe Beach is a real, rather than imagined, place of trauma because its aqueous elements are brimming with the spirits of the victims of the Middle Passage.

Echoing the scholarship of John Mbiti, the Yoruba cosmology—a set of influential cultural practices performed throughout the African Diaspora—suggests that the ocean is “the home of spirits, human and otherwise” (Curry, 1997, p. 76) that is under the authority of the orisha (or deity) Olokun (Coulter & Turner, 2000; Curry, 1997; Padilioni Jr., 2017). Known by many titles, including “Lord of the Great Waters,” “Owner of the Sea,” and “Lord of the Undertow,” Olokun in the Yoruba tradition “holds the key to the mysteries about the history of the cross-Atlantic passage” (Curry, 1997, p. 75). Within a Yoruba context, one could consider

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12 In the Yoruba tradition, Olokun is the ruler of the ocean’s depths while his wife, Yemaya, rules the ocean’s surface (Coulter & Turner, 2000).
Buckroe Beach (or, specifically, the Chesapeake Bay) as being a part of Olokun’s maritime “kingdom” full of tragedy and loss, firmly placing Buckroe Beach in a history of Black pain.

Within the beginning of *Water and African American Memory: An Ecocritical Perspective*, Anissa Janine Wardi (2011) makes an argument that the memory of water is not only metaphysical, but also concrete:

> From a scientific standpoint, there is a molecular interconnectedness between humans and the sea; read through an African American historical prism, humans, who lost their lives in the currents, have, by their very materiality, changed the composition of the waters. Altering the bones that have lain on the ocean floor for centuries, the Atlantic is part of the ancestral past and thus inherent in the collective memory. (p. 7)

Whether perceiving the aquatic regions of Buckroe Beach as composed of the deconstructed bodies of those who perished during the Middle Passage, as a realm where those who died by way of the Middle Passage traverse and explore the afterlife, or as merely symbolic of Black death, those who are a part of Remembrance recognize the “pained,” “dismembered” condition of the beach. Bearing witness to the “pained” state of Buckroe encourages Remembrance patrons to commence the process of “re-membering” the beach by “re-authoring” it with redressive meanings.

**“Redemption of the body as human flesh”**

The second pillar of Hartman’s redress is the “re-authoring” of the Black body as something beyond enslaved, such as “a site of need, desire, and pleasure” (Hartman, 1997, p. 75), to alleviate the agony placed upon the enslaved Black body. Though redress did not fully circumvent the reality of the Black body’s enslaved condition (rendering the act insufficient), redress still offered a short-lived opportunity for the ravished and enslaved body to experience relief. This relief came from the body’s restoration as a site of possibility and, as phrased by Hartman, redemption “as human flesh, not beast of burden” (Hartman, 1997, p. 77). With this
aspect of redress, the pained and enslaved Black body assumed “narratives” that granted a
temporary moment of healing. Considering that pillar of redress within the context of the
International Day of Remembrance and Buckroe Beach, individuals who participate in
Remembrance “rewrite” Buckroe Beach with meanings and memories that rupture the beach’s
histories of Black anguish. Within the cracks produced by the rupture, the possibility of the
beach harboring less horrific meanings becomes available.

While giving their oral histories, both Interviewee A and Interviewee B communicated
that the legacy of enslavement and the Middle Passage is a legacy that evokes sorrow and
discomfort. So much sorrow and discomfort is felt to the point that the legacy feels shameful for
those who must bear it—Black individuals. For example, Interviewee A expressed that the
history of the Middle Passage and American slavery is one that often fails to elicit a sense of
pride: “When we typically think of enslavement, it’s a thing that people typically wanna run
from, look away from, or they have heavy, dark thoughts about it” (Interviewee A, interview,
March 6, 2017). Later in their interview, Interviewee A continued:

And I know that a lot of what we’ve been taught in response to slavery—a lot of the
residue of enslavement makes us feel less than. Makes us feel like we need to know our
place. Makes us feel like we need to hold our tongues. Makes us feel like we need to keep
a small profile. (Interviewee A, interview, March 6, 2017)

Despite being conscious of the fact that Black history and present life is inscribed with pain from
the influence of slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, both interviewees discussed the role
of the International Day of Remembrance as a tool for extracting celebration, joy, and pride from
the legacy of enslavement and the Middle Passage instead of grief, sadness, and humiliation.
More specifically, both interview participants noted that Buckroe Beach—the symbolic and
actual site of Black turmoil—adopts novel meanings during Remembrance that make the painful
histories attached to the beach (of the Middle Passage, etc.) more bearable and momentarily erased.

When asked to elucidate the role of memory in Remembrance, Interviewee B meditated on how the Remembrance ceremony makes use of memory to transform the significations of Buckroe Beach for the sake of healing:

I think Remembrance creates—Remembrance takes you on a journey. You know, from the present to the past. It creates new memory. You know, it takes something that was so horrible—you take a space where we weren’t allowed and you create new memories around those experiences. So, we’re talking about the transatlantic enslavement trade, which was horrible. We’re talking about Buckroe, where we weren’t allowed to be. And we’re creating a new experience, a new feeling in those spaces. So, you—it goes from being something horrific to being something that’s celebratory. It goes from being a place where there’s no access to being a sacred space. The new memory around Buckroe for people is not the Jim Crow Buckroe, but a sacred space. (Interviewee B, interview, March 14, 2017)

Here, Interviewee B suggests that through the events of Remembrance—the dancing, the meditating, the praying, etc.—Buckroe, a locale of pain, changes from being just a location of suffering to also being a location of belonging, empowerment, and sacredness. Through Remembrance’s creation of “new memories” at Buckroe Beach, Remembrance encodes Buckroe with “narratives” that turn the beach into a site that can function as more than a repository of trauma. With the “new memories” created at Buckroe, the beach expands from just a site of Black death to also a site of Black vitality. Also in the above quote, Interviewee B notably expresses that Remembrance reworks multiple “stories” of Black pain instead of just one: they mention that the process of memory-making at Buckroe Beach disrupts the idea that Buckroe is solely connected to the history of the Middle Passage and the racist origins of Bay Shore Beach.

Further encapsulating the idea of inscribing geographies with therapeutic significations, Interviewee B detailed the particularities of Remembrance’s Tree of Remembrance ritual:
Part of what was done...[was that] Africans were taken around the Tree of Forgetfulness, because the intention was that Europeans were enslaving them and wanted them to forget where they came from...So, the Tree of Remembrance—we walk around that. (Interviewee B, interview, March 14, 2017)

As described by Interviewee B, each Remembrance ceremony involves participants walking around a tree at Buckroe Beach designated as the Tree of Remembrance. Reversing the historical “ritual of turning slaves around [the Tree of Forgetfulness] to reinforce forgetfulness of their homes” (“Visiting Ouidah,” n.d., para. 4), the practice involving the Tree of Remembrance both coopts old practices for curative purposes and redefines Buckroe’s natural elements (in this case, a tree) for the sake of healing centuries-old Black pain.

As already noted at the beginning of this section, redressive acts are, in the end, insufficient means for healing an “injured” site, regardless of whether that site is of flesh or of land and water. When a distressed space undergoes redefinition by adopting “alternative configurations” (Hartman, 1997, p. 77), the substitute “configurations” only offer temporary relief, especially since the original “configurations” can subsume redefinitions. During a contemplation of the significance of location during Remembrance ceremonies, Interviewee B shared an anecdote that demonstrates the shortcomings of enacting spatial redress:

I went back to Buckroe the day after [an International Day of Remembrance event] to collect the flowers...because, you know, we throw the flowers into the ocean...[T]he tide brings them back in...So, I went back and I was down and I found an area where there was a lot of flowers, and I was kind of gathering them and just having a moment. And this older White gentleman comes up to me with his dog and says, Are you the ones who messed up the beach? Now, mind you, I’m sitting down. Like, kind of in a prayer state with my hands on top of the flowers. Just having a moment. And, I immediately—I said, Excuse me? I said, Messed up? He said, Yeah. You know, you littered the beach. And your definition of litter is? And he said, Well, you know, there’re flowers all over the place. And I’m like, Flowers are biodegradable...We are coming here to honor our ancestors who didn’t make it off the enslavement ships and somehow that is littering the beach? I mean, it was really offensive. And he told me—he was like, You don’t belong here. Like, it felt—it almost felt spiritual. Like it was this spiritual moment. Like, it took me back. So, I was like, okay, I just went back to Jim Crow. Like, I’m not supposed to be here. (Interviewee B, interview, March 14, 2017)
After attempting to “rewrite” and redress Buckroe Beach and multiply the significations and memories of the beach, Interviewee B came to face the fact that redress is a practice that is not permanent and that is easily disrupted by the presence of competing “narrations” of a site. The “older White gentleman” in Interviewee B’s story invoked his idea of what kind of locale Buckroe Beach is—a locale that functions for specific purposes (not involving Remembrance’s flower ritual) for specific demographics (not including Remembrance’s participants)—and he reinstated Buckroe Beach’s past “narratives” related to discrimination and differential belongingness. Through reemphasizing such “narratives,” the stranger that confronted Interviewee B reversed the redressive work of Remembrance and returned Buckroe Beach to a “pained” state (at least from the perspective of Interviewee B).

Regardless of the inadequacy of redress, spatial or otherwise, the process still delivers a modicum of restoration through providing a suffering site a limited window of time during which there is only relief and no pain. Both Interviewee A and Interviewee B acknowledged that the sliver of time when remedy is present and comfort shines through offers a moment to accomplish a number of items. For one, as already briefly touched on, Hartman’s idea of redress that happens during Remembrance allows for Black individuals to expand the meanings associated with the parts of the collective Black past that are hard to confront and look at:

And [enslavement] was a heavy, dark time, but it wasn’t only darkness. It was a time where [our ancestors] showed who they were, and who they were are folks that we can still lean on. Or who we are. What they came from. Even the fact that lives were sacrificed: lives were sacrificed [so] that we might be. So, [Remembrance] is a time for us to acknowledge this darkness. It’s a time for us to acknowledge the light that came from this darkness. (Interviewee A, interview, March 6, 2017)

For Interviewee A, Remembrance encourages individuals to confront the Black past and see that it is not only a depository of agony, but that it also contains “light.” Per Interviewee A, this
“light” takes many shapes and equips Black persons with the necessary tools for spiritual and physical survival and renewal:

So, that empowerment that comes from knowing who I am is healing. So, now as a people, if you ask me, the more we know about ourselves, beyond what we’ve been told about ourselves, and the more we can define ourselves for ourselves, and [not] just with [what] somebody else thinks of us, the more we can access all that is available within us and to us. The more bright we can be as lights...The more we can strengthen. The more wisdom, the more knowledge we can contribute to making this world a better place. Because we’re starting with feeling full. (Interviewee A, interview, March 6, 2017)

According to Interviewee A, the “light” looks like self-love, self-empowerment, and a knowledge of self—items that the Black community can use to help itself and those outside of itself.

Specifically touching on spatial redress, Interviewee B articulated that the praxis of reimagining Buckroe Beach, though momentary and vulnerable to failure, ushers forward the reframing of the beach as a region that is enjoyable for all people and not just some:

I think I’m trying to not transform the history or change the history of Buckroe. I’m trying to give it a new narrative, though. I’m trying to give it a new narrative. I’m trying to shape Buckroe for future generations. (Interviewee B, interview, March 14, 2017)

Despite the limitations of spatial redress and the “inevitability of its failure” (Hartman, 1997, p. 77), the process, as stated by Interviewee B, shifts the symbolic meaning of sites, creating room for meanings that benefit individuals and communities. With that in mind, spatial redress not only affects places, but also people.

“Articulation of needs and desires and the endeavor to meet them”

Alongside bearing witness to the violated condition of the enslaved Black body and working to counterinvest in the enslaved Black body as a site of something opposed to enslavement, the third pillar of redress concerns articulating the “needs and desires [of the enslaved body] and the endeavor to meet them” (Hartman, 1997, p. 77). With this final
characteristic of redress, an individual who engaged in a redressive action first acknowledged the necessities and wants of the Black pained body—maybe pleasure, a renewed sense of humanity, etc.—and then manifested those necessities and satiated those wants. Relating this last characteristic of Hartman’s redress to Remembrance and Buckroe Beach, Interviewee A discussed the overarching goal (or “needs and desires”) that all Remembrance participants are ultimately aiming to realize:

We are redirecting what [the Middle Passage] was for us. We’re redefining what this experience means to us as a people, and in doing that we take off the emotional and mental shackles of it. And strengthen ourselves. We have nothing to be ashamed of. (Interviewee A, interview, March 6, 2017)

According to Interviewee A, the whole of Remembrance is about redefinition: redefining past histories, redefining encounters with past histories, redefining people, and, relating to the concerns of this paper, redefining spaces. Redefinition, per Interviewee A, is necessary for the objective of shifting from pain and trauma—from “emotional and mental shackles”—to release and therapeutic liberation. Interviewee A discussed in their oral history how redefinition starts with choosing to engage with the history, people, space, etc. that need redefinition from a specific mentality:

Look, the majority of us don’t even know we need to heal from what we’ve encountered because it’s been delivered in such a way that is so systemic. And we need to heal beyond being angry. Because anger makes us—I mean, it’s worthy of anger, but it’s—it’s immobilizing. It’s crippling to just be angry. Let that motivate you to get to the other side. I choose joy. I choose love. No matter what, because that’s what I deserve. (Interviewee A, interview, March 6, 2017)

Above all, Hartman’s redress deals with constantly trying to get to the “other side” to help alleviate persistent pain and suffering inflicted upon the body. In the context of Remembrance, getting to the “other side,” per Interviewee A, is only possible when one engages with painful histories, sites, etc. from a place of “joy” and “love.” As suggested throughout this chapter, the
activities of Remembrance work to achieve the necessity of redefinition by producing joy and showing love toward those living in the present and those of the ancestral past.
Chapter 4: Conclusions, Implications, and Future Directions

Figure 4: Personal image of Buckroe Beach taken on March 6, 2017 (Personal Image of Buckroe 3, 2017)

On Final Thoughts

A part of what makes Hartman’s redress curative is redress’ reinvestment in the enslaved Black body. As slavery imbued the Black body with “narratives” related to, for example, objectification and animality, redress created alternative “narratives” that counterinvested in the enslaved Black body as a site of humanity, emotionality, subjectivity, and agency. In the language of Lisa Lowe (2015), redressive actions “rewrote” the enslaved Black body and considered it via the “past conditional temporality”—a mentality that considers the “‘what could have been’” (p. 40). While the enslaved body often never escaped the painful condition of enslavement, redressive actions provided healing by tapping into the potential of the enslaved body and expanding the body’s meanings. Redress considered what the Black body “could have been” outside of America’s “peculiar institution.” Similarly, with Buckroe Beach during the International Day of Remembrance, the process of tapping into the potential of “pained”
waterscapes and landscapes and expanding their definitions takes place. The case of Remembrance suggests that Hartman’s redress can occur when it comes to spatialized Black pain.

As discussed throughout this paper, the International Day of Remembrance is an annual event that takes place in Hampton, Virginia to commemorate the Black lives lost during the Middle Passage. The site of the yearly event is Buckroe Beach. The setting is a vessel of both real and imagined Black violation: the beach is near the place where America’s first enslaved Blacks arrived; the beach is along a body of water (the Chesapeake Bay) that eventually opens to the Atlantic Ocean, the stage of the Transatlantic Slave Trade; and Buckroe is the location where racist norms and mores prompted the establishment of the once-standing all-Black Bay Shore Beach. After perceiving Buckroe Beach as a “pained” site, the patrons of Remembrance engage in practices (e.g. water prayers, etc.) that transform Buckroe Beach into an area that is full of meanings that run counter to meanings of Black debasement. Those meanings include ones of Black joy, Black remembrance, and even Black community-building. Through Remembrance, the storehouse of collective memories associated with Buckroe becomes expanded, allowing for the investment in Buckroe Beach as something more than solely a region of Black pain. Though this reinvestment is sometimes disrupted, the reinvestment aids in bringing a sense of realignment and, overall, healing to Buckroe. In all, with the recognition that disembodied Black pain needs the same healing as embodied Black pain, Hartman’s redress serves as an effective tool with which to imagine and enact the remedying of spatialized Black pain.

On Future Directions

Etymologically, the word “ecology” is related to the word “home,” and the word “human” is related to the word “soil” (“ecology (n.),” n.d.; “human (adj.),” n.d.). The stories
behind the terms “human” and “ecology” speak to the idea that humans are not distinct from the earth but, rather, humans are intrinsically a part of the natural world. Supporting this notion that humans are intimately tied to nature, some scholars suggest that humans are nothing more than a collection of miniscule elements that blend seamlessly with the diminutive elements of the non-human world (Allewaert, 2013). As Jayna Brown (2015) suggests in “Being Cellular: Race, the Inhuman, and the Plasticity of Life,” “Situating ourselves at the cellular levels shows us that our supposedly discrete bodies are actually complex ecosystems of cells, bacteria, and other organisms, which challenges our notion of individuality and sovereignty” (p. 326). Such an oppositional account of the body leaves room open for exploring the idea that the human body and the environmental body are one whole body. Within many Black traditions of thought, such an idea already exists.

Per John Mbiti, some religions in the African continent view “the earth as a ‘living being’” (as cited in Pinn, 2009, p. 492) with divine entities and spirits who require care. The entities and spirits’ need for maintenance establishes an “obligation for blacks to take care of the earth” (as cited in Pinn, 2009, p. 492). According to Mbiti, as individuals in certain African religious cosmologies care for the earth and, by consequence, the deities that reside in the earth, said individuals ultimately maintain a “natural and moral order” (as cited in Pinn, 2009, p. 492) that benefits them. This lack of separation between caring for oneself and caring for the natural world that is also found in many Afro-Diasporic “botanico-religious cosmologies like Obeah, Vodou, and Santeria” (Allewaert, 2013, p. 7) creates a lack of distinction between human flesh and earthly flesh. In the essay, “Everything is a Human Being” (here, the title already communicates a sense of collapse between human and non-human entities), Alice Walker writes, “The earth on which we live is the body of God. All people and living things are the body and
soul of God” (as cited in Simcikova, 2007, p. 87). With that quote, Walker echoes Mbiti by implying that there is continuity between humans and Earth.

Inspired by the writings of Alice Walker, contemporary “ecowomanism”—an approach to environmental justice that “centers the voices, experiences, theological, and ethical worldviews of women of color and women of African descent” (Harris, 2006, p. 31)—continues to elucidate the idea that there is minor difference between the human body and bodies of land and water. For instance, the thesis of Delores S. Williams’ ecowomanist text, “Sin, Nature and Black Women’s Bodies,” argues that there is a “relation between the defilement of earth’s body and the defilement of black women’s bodies” (as cited in Harris, 2006, p. 35). In all, with there being some scholarship that speaks to the Black body being one with the earthly body, there is the potential to consider how moments of spatial redress that deal with disembodied Black pain are nothing more than moments of Hartman’s redress that deal with embodied Black pain. With further research that would unpack the connection between the Black body and the natural realm, there is, for example, the possibility of reconsidering notions of environmental justice and Black social justice; of what qualifies as brutality against the “Black body”; and even of how to characterize the environment and the Black body.

In addition, I mentioned in “On Methods and Methodologies” that it is difficult to produce generalizable conclusions from a single case study because the specificities of one instance cannot be solidly applied to other instances. Therefore, for the sake of data triangulation, another possible future direction could be the performance of more case studies that consider whether or not Hartman’s redress is applicable in instances of landscapes and waterscapes tinged with Black pain. If I pursue this future direction, I will conduct a wide range of case studies: case studies in different areas in the United States and abroad, case studies of
instances where I initially believe spatial redress does not occur, etc. More case studies would either robustly support the findings presented in this paper, completely refute the findings, or offer me the opportunity to manipulate my current conclusions into something more fine-tuned. Lastly, I am interested in conceptualizing spatial redress beyond natural, outdoor contexts. Considering how Black pain can exist in any general space (e.g. in built landscapes via urban decay, etc.), further scholarship could extend the idea of spatial redress beyond the natural realm.
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