

Module Assignment EBB_6_516_2122 Cultural Context 03

Regenerating Societal Belief through Symbolic Activism
The National Memorial for Peace and Justice

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Introduction

This critical analysis on The National Memorial for Peace and Justice evaluates the key decisions implemented into the design process in response to racial injustice explored through the use of Ideological Form alongside Spatial Agency. It will discuss the implementation of a political narrative through symbolic representation in an attempt to reconcile the regeneration of societal belief in the form of activism. Expressing the beliefs of Bryan Stevenson a part of The Equal Justice Initiative in collaboration with MASS Design Group, behind the principles developed addressing the geographical, political, and social aspects. The National Memorial for Peace and Justice does not fit within the conventional category of a museum, which will be explored through a convoluted use of minimalist form, light, and materials to enhance an experience susceptible to interpretation.

While undertaking a complex examination into relevant architectural discourse to explore the successes and failures surrounding the theoretical and philosophical approach embedded by MASS Design Group. In comparison to Adrian Forty 'Words and Buildings' alongside Lebbeus Woods 'Architecture is a Political Act' and Henri Lefebvre 'The Production of Space'. Each articulates through literature providing individual insight towards Spatial Agency and Ideological Form applied to Architecture. Communicating an optimistic perception of society and the fundamental belief that architecture significantly contributes to partaking in societal development. It will explore how The National Memorial addresses the past, present, and future to engage with the historical context and acknowledges racial injustice as an ongoing political issue within the 21st century. Demonstrating an analytical understanding of the vital role theory partakes in architectural decision-making to demonstrate symbolic propaganda, and will address the risks involved when responding to political issues through architectural activism on a scale with a diverse audience where conflict is associated. Further acknowledging a language successfully developed to encourage public dialogue and debate to influence future movements, representing preliminary evidence that racial injustice can be articulated in a form to embolden human perspective.

Racial injustice is a matter of worldwide contention as discussed by Bryan Stevenson, Founder and Executive Director of The Equal Justice Initiative, "The National Memorial for Peace and Justice, which opened to the public on April 26, 2018, is the nation's first memorial dedicated to the legacy of enslaved Black people, people terrorized by lynching, African Americans humiliated by racial segregation... people of color burdened with contemporary presumptions of guilt and police violence." Stevenson, B. (2018). Expressing his belief that the historic events have caused post-traumatic societal deviation following decades of "dehumanizing" corruption as it has "shaped the geographic, political, social, and economic conditions" In an attempt to force "racial hierarchy" acts of domination and intimidation were conducted through lynching, exploitation, and segregation. Accommodating an extremely diverse population, The United States of America comprises a multitude of antagonistic groups such as White Segregationists who performed acts in the form of slavery and racial terrorism. Stevenson concludes that "racially motivated" capital prosecution, "discriminatory" injustice and "uncivilized" crime construct the trauma widely suffered by African Americans. Stevenson, B. (2018).

With the belief that architecture critically contributes to societal development, displaying political narratives and collectively enhancing possibilities, MASS Design Group, Model of Architecture Serving Society, was founded. Behind each project, MASS aims for a result that advocates justice and human dignity implemented through the decision of significant engineered detail. Expressed by Stevenson, "I believe we need to talk about the shame of slavery. We need to talk about the shadows that still haunt us." Stevenson, B. (2018). In endeavoring to acknowledge the demand for reform, MASS Design Group collaborated with The Equal Justice Initiative to produce The National Memorial for Peace and Justice. Internationally perceived as winning the RIBA International Awards for Excellence 2021. A dynamic, momentous approach visually represents the contemptible historic period through symbolic commemoration.

A museum by definition is "a building that demonstrates historical, scientific or cultural artifacts by conserving and exhibiting to public users predominantly aimed to educate." Collins, W. (2021). The National Memorial for Peace and Justice does not fit within the conventional category of a museum, instead, it is a building perceived as a visual representation of an altercation that began historically and unlike most historic events did not end within an era but advanced evolving with generations. Presented through architecture, supported by documentation the aim is to not educate but to embolden societal change through expression and awareness. Extensive investigations were undertaken by The Equal Justice Initiative documenting "more than 4,000 racial terror lynchings in twelve Southern states between Reconstruction and World War II" MASS Design Group. (2018) expressing the defective attempt to recognise the absence of understanding historical trauma imposed on ethnic communities, therefore using the research to guide the narrative for the memorial.

The National Memorial for Peace and Justice



Lewis, B. ed. (2020).
Kwame Akoto-Bamfo's sculpture, dedicated to the memory of the victims of the transatlantic slave trade, stands at the entrance to the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Alabama.



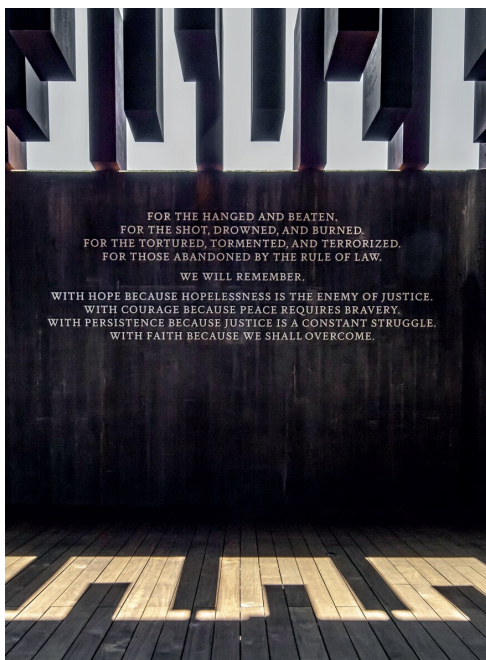
Small Stuff Photography and MASS Design Group. (2018).
The National Memorial for Peace and Justice.

A Vigorously Dynamic Tool

Demonstrated and discussed, The National Memorial has been designed as a vigorously dynamic tool as the Architecture responds to economic, political, and societal demands through the philosophical and fundamental understanding of conceptual perception and expressive representation. Ideology refers to an accumulation of philosophies that influence critical study and through the combined methodical implementation of individuals at organized institutions, MASS Design Group alongside The Equal Justice Initiative, the ideological understanding can be reinterpreted as a form through each specific design decision. Combining a configuration of theory and concept to encourage reflection and stimulate discussion around “a new era of truth and justice that starts with confronting our history of racial injustice”. Stevenson, B. (2018).

Forming historic perception through interpreting architecture, the observation of realization creates a harrowing atmosphere. Replicated horizontally beneath, lies steel monuments awaiting claim by countries willing to display moral culpability, this conceptual design decision implemented by MASS holds key interplay in the memorials' purpose to reconcile and focuses solely on the aim to regenerate societal belief. “For the hanged and beaten. For the shot, drowned, and burned. For the tortured, tormented, and terrorized. For those abandoned by the rule of law. We will remember.” Bey, L. (2018). In an endeavor to accentuate the narrative through user experience, written installations were incorporated. Taken as an example this quote is situated underneath 800 suspended columns, each column portrays a country where abhorrent acts of lynching were performed. Incorporated into the design as a key architectural decision is the use of corten steel, physically, this material choice allows the structure to resist corrosion and abrasion ensuring durability and stability. From a conceptual perspective, the choice of corten steel reinforces the ideology and atmosphere.

In reference to the architectural columns, Kennicott uses specific terminology “coffin” and “open-air morgue” Kennicott, P. (2018) definitive to a morbid analysis displaying an emotional response to the experience as intended. Expressing that although the architecture takes a simplistic form, it inflicts an oppressive experience through symbolic demonstrations and is successful in displaying and fulfilling the architectural narrative.



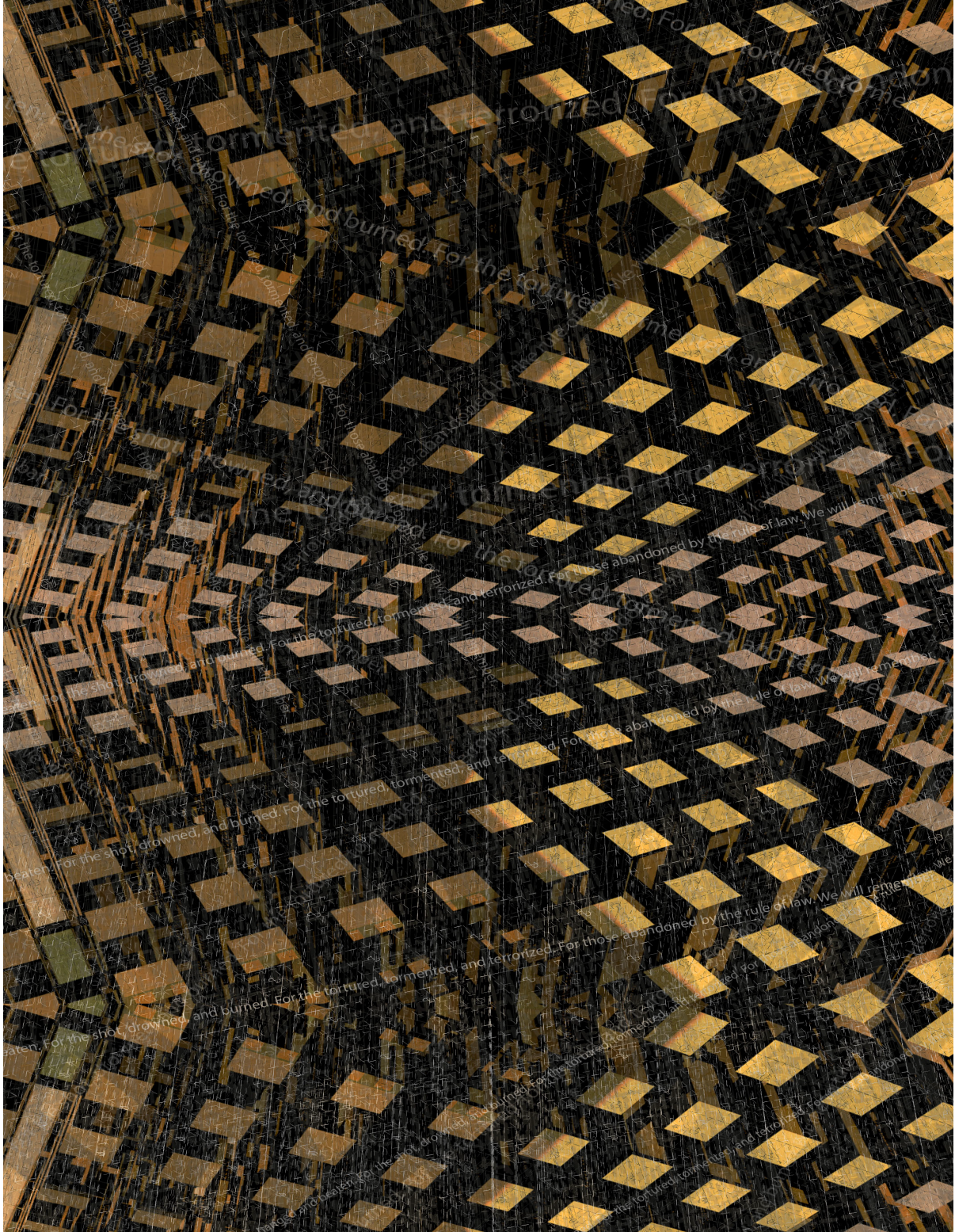
Bey, L. (2018).
An inscription at the memorial site.

Spatial Mechanics: Words and Buildings

By applying ideological form to architectural context through spatial mechanics introduces science. The configuration of both disciplines encourages an intellectual and pragmatic approach to analyse design decisions on The National Memorial, enabling an understanding from a conceptual but also practical process. Adrian Forty evaluates this philosophy within his literary treatise 'Words and Buildings' connecting the practice of science and architectural compositions through conventional terminology and understanding. "It is in the nature of metaphors that they allow one to be precise about some things while remaining vague about others: 'circulation' was precise about presenting an aspect of architecture as a discrete system, but vague about what flowed around that system" Forty, 2000 (P.92), he considers the possibility of architecture being perceived individually insisting that although circulation is a systematic approach to influence movement, spatial interpretation is determined by one's cognitive analysis of their surroundings. "The National Memorial for Peace and Justice is site-specific, historically the grounds accommodated the function of enslavement to hold men and women awaiting transportation to auction, located central between the Alabama River Port and Court Square." Cotter, H. (2018). With ridicule intent to expose the historic medium, the chosen site contributes to the narrative and experience expressed through the conceptual scope by reinforcing the site context, as grounds being used to transport enslaved men and women.

Space is a descriptive concept extensively open to interpretation within the architectural context, recognised as a physical element or an intangible element. As a key design decision MASS combined both aspects, through manipulation constructing a form of spatial expression to provide a conceptual itinerary through The National Memorial. Beginning at the entrance to the site, the user is directed through six acres of landscaped zones arriving central at the monument building. Specifically designed with the objective to stimulate "feelings of deep unease, remorse, and loss" Royal Institute of British Architects. (2021). In response to acknowledging the calamity caused and the victims who suffered, and continue to suffer, raising awareness through subconscious involvement of symbolic space. By applying a combinative approach to landscape and architectural design, including graphic and art media, the two spaces connect through a convoluted use of minimalist form, natural light, and materials to guide and influence movement. Taking a pragmatic approach to the decision influencing the design, each element had to conform "with the dominant abstract classical forms and brutalist materials in the architecture" Miorelli, S. (2020). Miorelli states the importance of ensuring detail included should complement the narrative and not divert the attention from the message being portrayed in an endeavor to achieve complexity through spatial expression.

Conceptual Drawing: Atmospheric Visual Representation



Political Affairs: Architecture is a Political Act

Architectural deliberation accentuates the potential impact on political capabilities, as a conspicuous subject worldwide many practicing architects explore the influential philosophy with the ambition to counterbalance societal concerns of political affairs. Implementing a narrative that responds to the preceding through symbolic representation and documented detail encourages the public users to question the decisions displaying historic context, enforcing emotion and realization on the act. Expressed by Lebbeus Woods in an interview discussing the ideology behind his acclaimed literary treatise 'Architecture is a Political Act', Woods was a renowned architect, predominantly recognised by his philosophical concepts exploring architecture as a political act presented through both written discourse and expressive drawings. "I think, you know, architecture should not just be something that follows up on events but be a leader of events ... by implementing an architectural action, you actually are making a transformation in the social fabric and in the political fabric. Architecture becomes an instigator." Woods, L. (2017). Prosperously demonstrating the same ideological principles The National Memorial promotes the political cause to contextualize racial terror and stands unprecedented. Achieved successfully through architectural decision within detail accomplishing a comprehensive monument imposing honest reflection. The process and ideology behind local communities contributing to a physical monument as a representation of their historic involvement to encourage unity through an exceedingly powerful act of morality.

Woods explains within 'Architecture is a Political Act' that it is important to acknowledge the participating role the architect contributes to conveying change, stating "The architect is not, in this case, a detached professional, upholding timeless values, but an instigator, an agitator, an active participant" Woods, L. (1992). Expressing that societal demands are continuously changing increasing political affairs, architecture as a form of symbolic activism is performed by the architect through the creation of space as democratic participation. Demonstrated through the memorial, the message perceived through experience intended by the architect, MASS Design Group, inflicts thought and reflection providing the public user with the power to make political decisions enforcing innovation. Explored through the creation of conceptual networking The National Memorial was inspired by "Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg, South Africa, the Kigali Genocide Memorial in Rwanda, and the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin" Marcoux, S. (2020). Following the same key design principles manipulating form and materiality, each memorial confronts the historical context that caused contention.

A Synergistic Approach: The Production of Space

In conjunction, undertaking an extensive analysis on the architectural discourse *The Production of Space* the subject proposes a complex insight to architecture as a process not product, examining the possibilities of a synergistic approach between how we construe 'space' with 'agency', a term representing social and political theory. Translating the concept of process not product is articulated by Henri Lefebvre within his literary "work has something irreplaceable and unique about it, a product can be reproduced exactly, and is in fact the result of repetitive acts and gestures." Lefebvre, 1991 (P.70) When referring to 'work' in context he defines architecture as singular but authoritative, in the philosophical sense that it can not be duplicated therefore invaluable.

Combining both theories *The National Memorial* transmits a narrative as a political act using gestures of space and form to enact acknowledgment and reconciliation, "The people who carried out this violence could have just shot people and buried them in the ground, but they didn't want it to be a secret, they didn't want it hidden, ... they wanted to terrorize. They wanted the entire community to see it." Kennicott, P. (2018) In relation to the manner in which racial terrorism was conducted as a 'gesture' *The National Memorial* applies the approach to the prelude design process of soil collection. In commemoration soil was collected from sites previously accommodating lynchings by community volunteers, each soil jar documents lynchings, exhibiting the name and date of the victim, some marked unknown, and the community responsible. The process of collection was an act of symbolic propaganda, described as "soil ceremonies" First-Arai, L. (2019) within a magazine article review written by Leanna First-Arai, most acclaimed for raising awareness through a literary treatise on political subjects including racial injustice. The article is primarily oriented around the ideological process, the vocabulary chosen to describe the soil collection expresses the emotion connected to the experience intended, "an urn with ashes", "funeral" and "sacred", definitive words chosen through remorse.



Melton, A. (2018).

Hundreds of jars of soil from the sites of documented lynchings, collected by families of victims or community volunteers, are on display at the museum.

A Diverse Audience

The National Memorial for Peace and Justice is formed by the interplay between Ideological Form and Spatial Agency, through the exploration of each perspective incorporated by MASS Design Group the memorial demonstrates clear successes and failures within each architectural decision.

The use of the Ideological Form within The National Memorial highlights historical perception enforcing an emotional response to the architecture conforming societal belief. MASS developed the design decision for ideological concerns through reinforcing spatial agency demonstrated by the atmosphere intended to communicate the political narrative through symbolic representation. The decision to create a harrowing atmosphere was therefore successful however responding to historic trauma has implications associated as The National Memorial provokes unresolved grief and psychological distress in which the human response varies. Inviting the public users to scrutinize acts of racial terror, such as over 4,000 counts of lynching on human beings forces a new perspective that photographs and book contents can not provide. The memorial, therefore, stands as a dominant leader representing the racial past causing emotionally charged public debate and conflict regarding the past and present forms of racial terrorism.

Therefore, the memorial suffered greatly from critical reviews, highlighting one key failure within the design process, the incapability to consider the diversity within the audience. When responding to political issues there is a substantial risk involved, not all members of the public audience will share the belief that racial injustice is a political issue that has caused societal devastation, and not all that do share this belief will agree historic events should be re-addressed in the present. "It's going to cause an uproar and open old wounds," and "It keeps putting the emphasis on discrimination and cruelty," Levin, S. (2018). It is within the role of the Architect, MASS Design Group, as an activist to comprehend the weakness in conflict. Particularly for African-Americans, within the 21st century, the physiological despair remains substantial surrounding liberation and equality. "In 2020, there were 3,915 victims of anti-Black or African American hate crimes in the United States, making it the racially-motivated hate crime with the most victims in that year." Evaluated further, "1,577 victims" experienced "intimidation hate crimes" and "A further 660 people were the victims of anti-Black or African American simple assault hate crimes in that year." FBI (2021). As documented racism is a continuing societal affair, development is perceived by some as illusory as it is not due to a lack of awareness but merely unwillingness. Racism is an extremely complex behavior typically hereditary, MASS Design Group represented a methodical approach for understanding the continuous acts of racially motivated terrorism still present. However, the critical response to the memorial voiced the concern that it is counterproductive to interject continuous racial debate in Alabama as it is an ongoing political issue.

Symbolic Activism

Spatial interpretation successfully enforces symbolic activism through the decision to implement a form of circulation that encourages users to analyse their surroundings and interpret individually. However, recognising that forming a convoluted relationship between Ideological Form and Spatial Agency contradicts the spacio-political expressions of the memorial as it enables ambiguity that allows conflict. Providing the user with the power to interpret encounters risk as perception is individual, one user will acknowledge different aspects of the architecture and design details compared to another and each will have varied focus points depending on which elements trigger their emotions. Therefore the ability to manipulate emotions through symbolism is a language of architectural design that should be avoided when attempting to address significant political acts in order to prevent misinterpretation and societal offense.

The political narrative is expressed through the decision to incorporate the gesture of reconciliation to commemorate through claiming columns. A design decision-oriented around spatial agency complimenting ideological form as an experience specifically intended to evoke an emotion of unease. The connection between both perspectives includes a theoretical and philosophical approach to addressing racial injustice through key architectural decisions embedded into The National Memorial, communicating a vision of societal change that can be understood. As discussed previously, through the development of conceptual networking there are a number of key spaces that argumentatively display similar narratives through respecting design decisions. Exposing the scale of racial terrorism within America's history is the steel monuments still awaiting claim by local communities not willing to participate with an aim to regenerate societal belief.



Burnham, M. (2018).
Lynching Memorial Forces Us To Confront Our Racist Past — And Present.

Conclusion

Critically responding to significant historical context through principle elements of The National Memorial for Peace and Justice endeavored to reconstruct societal belief, MASS Design Group accurately displayed documented detail surrounding racial injustice to enforce emotion. Recognised as a culminating feature of communal awakening, demonstrating awareness through reconciliation as a symbolic gesture representing local consciousness.

By analysing The National Memorial for Peace and Justice through the perspectives of Ideological Form and Spatial Agency enabling an understanding surrounding each key decision made by both MASS Design Group and The Equal Justice Initiative. Clearly exhibiting a forceful narrative the memorial prosperously raises political awareness through participation, although historic events are immovable racial injustice remains a critical issue within the 21st century. Answers can not be provided and political issues on such a scale can not be detached from society however through the architectural activism successfully demonstrated throughout the memorial enables power in acknowledgment, voicing victims of the past and present.

It became apparent that the most influential architectural aspect of the memorial is the 800 suspended columns displaying an intricate use of minimalist form incorporated with corten steel. Attracting significant attention through the atmosphere created by the presence of each column. The intention is not to provide comfort or space to reflect in healing, the observation of realization successfully enforces an emotionally charged response by the narrative displayed. Manipulating emotion to illustrate historic context is a constructive method to harness targeted animosity demonstrated through the network of memorials, space specifically designed through key architectural detail for the premeditated act of democratic participation.

Evaluating the pivotal role of key philosophers responding to both Ideological Form and Spatial Agency. How it is reflected within The National Memorial and influenced by the historical context of racial injustice through geographical, political, and social aspects. Through the perspective of each philosophy, although the literature is communicated and portrayed individually, the concept remains mutual, to amplify an optimistic perception of society and the fundamental belief that architecture significantly contributes to societal development. Combining both an intellectual and pragmatic approach to the key principles incorporated, the political narrative is successfully expressed through the conceptual scope of perception and expressive representation. Collectively interlocking past, present, and future The National Memorial demonstrates the unity of national consciousness representing preliminary evidence that racial injustice can be articulated in a form to embolden human perspective.

Furthermore, by combining the specific design elements implemented to approach both Ideological Form and Spatial Agency has developed a modernized architectural language to engage with public dialogue to communicate the intersectional relationship within racial injustice. The National Memorial as a whole stands to protest successfully portraying social and political ideology through the symbolism of space encouraging political discussion influencing future movements. Partaking in societal development through activism is a significant factor considered within the architectural design by addressing complex issues and inflicting thought encouraging debate and reflection expressed by public advocacy. Combining interpretation and representation, the experience intended by the Architects of The National Memorial successfully demonstrates a visual response to a democratic speech, although not spoken but presented through narrative.

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