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Heike Raphael-Hernandez
With a Foreword by Paul Gilroy

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Monuments of the Black Atlantic

Slavery Memorials in the United States and the Netherlands

JOHANNA C. KARDUX

In a 1994 interview, Toni Morrison pointed out that the Middle Passage is "violently 'disremembered,' " "a silence within the race": "Millions of people disappeared without a trace, and there is not one monument anywhere to pay homage to them, because they never arrived safely on shore. So it's like a whole nation that is under the sea. A nameless, violent extermination."[1] Morrison's 1987 novel *Beloved*, which is dedicated to the "Sixty million and more" victims of the transatlantic slave trade, and numerous other literary works in which writers in the African diaspora have borne witness to the slavery past, provide a site of mourning and memory for what has controversially been called the "Black Holocaust." Together with a number of related public events—including President Bill Clinton's 1998 visit and apology to Africa, the French parliament's denunciation of the slave trade and slavery as crimes against humanity, and the United Nations conference against racism in Durban in 2001—these paper monuments gave rise to local, national, and transnational movements whose goal has been the construction of slavery memorials of a more material kind, made of stone, granite, or bronze. Two of the memorial projects that came out of the new public awareness of a shared history of slavery, which spread from African America to diasporic communities throughout the Atlantic world, are the Middle Passage Monument of the U.S.-based Homeward Bound

Foundation and the National Monument for the Remembrance of the Slavery Past in the Netherlands.

These two memorial projects exemplify a turn toward memorialization in the late twentieth century that, according to French historian Pierre Nora, is produced by the collapse of a living, collective memory that in earlier times bound diverse individuals and social groups and their competing ideologies together as a nation. "We speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left," Nora writes in his seminal essay, "Between Memory and History" (1989). "The less memory is experienced from the inside," Nora argues, "the more it exists only through its exterior scaffolding and outward signs," such as archives, museums, and monuments.[2] Intended to introduce the theoretical concept of "memory sites" to an international audience, Nora's essay is an adaptation of his introduction to *Les lieux de mémoire*, a multivolume, collaborative history of national memory in France. The nostalgic longing for a more cohesive national past that haunts Nora's essay and the larger historical project of which it is part is not politically innocent. It is precisely in the decade in which the seven volumes of *Les lieux de mémoire* were published—1981 to 1992—that the twin forces of European unification and postcolonial immigration increasingly challenged traditional constructions of national unity, history, and identity in France as well as in other Western European countries.

That Nora's revisionist historical project was partly a response to the transformation of France brought about by postcolonial immigration is suggested only indirectly by two brief references to ethnic minorities in his 1989 essay: Describing decolonization in quasi-Hegelian terms as an unfortunate fall from memory into history,[3] Nora suggests that ethnic minorities formed the vanguard of the modern historical culture he deplores. Having lost access to a repository of shared memory and marginalized in traditional history, these postcolonial subjects were the first to reclaim their buried pasts in search of "roots," soon to be followed by other groups and individuals.[4] Not only does Nora fail to recognize that his notion of collective memory is a romantic construct, but also that it is linked with a concept of national unity that by 1989 had already become obsolete in modern France and other European societies, which increasingly resemble the multiethnic United States. Rather than representing, as Nora would have it, superficial and artificial attempts to recover a lost past, the two memorial projects I will discuss are vital, if conflicted, attempts to redefine and renegotiate national and cultural identities. Rather than reclaiming a lost sense of national unity, these two modern sites of memory reflect a desire to imagine (trans)national and multicultural communities that are more attuned to the exigencies of our postcolonial age.

The Dutch memorial project, which will be my main focus, was partly inspired by a similar initiative undertaken by African American fashion designer Wayne James. Both projects emerged as slave descendants throughout the Atlantic world were preparing for the 1998 celebration of important anniversaries of the abolition of slavery. Claiming to have been inspired by an ancestral presence in a dream, James conceived of the idea to construct a monument to pay tribute to the millions of Africans who died en route to or in slavery. With this purpose in mind, he founded the Homeward Bound Foundation in 1998 on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the abolition of slavery (3 July 1848), in what are now the U.S. Virgin Islands, of which James is a native.[5] With the endorsement of United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan, the Congressional Black Caucus, and Louis Farrakhan, among others, James was successful in raising grassroots support and funds, and within a year the Middle Passage Monument was realized. Designed by a collective of seven metal artists from James's native island of St. Croix, the monument is shaped as a seventeen-foot-wide, twelve-foot high brushed aluminum arch, composed of two halves that symbolize "the need for the past, present, and future to converge in order for cultural identity and pride to be realized."[6] On 3 July 1999, the monument was dedicated during a daylong ceremony in New York City's Riverbank State Park, attended by more than five hundred people. After the monument was blessed, it was placed aboard a replica of a slave vessel and taken to its final destination, 427 kilometers off New York harbor, where it was lowered to the bottom of the ocean. There it is to remain to the end of time, serving "as a grave marker on the world's largest, yet unmarked graveyard, the Atlantic Ocean's infamous Middle Passage" and providing "an opportunity for Black people to collectively begin healing from the atrocities of slavery."[7]

The meaning of the Middle Passage Monument project transcends its commemorative function. Representing a way of imagining a transnational community and a diasporic identity, it can be seen as a postcolonial alternative to the unified nation-state and the traditional concept of national identity whose passing Pierre Nora regrets. Taking the Internet as its main venue of publishing and realizing its goals, the U.S.-based Homeward Bound Foundation successfully called for people from across the African diaspora to support the Middle Passage Monument. The e-mail messages posted on the foundation's website, which were sent by people of African descent throughout the Atlantic world, confirm James's claim in the Homeward Bound Foundation's newsletter that "We have done an excellent job at spreading the word throughout our internet/e-mail communities."[8] The proclaimed long-term purpose of the Homeward Bound

Foundation is "to encourage Black people around the world in taking a more active interest in each other culturally, economically, politically, and socially."[9] In more than one way a kind of latter-day Marcus Garvey, James locates the basis for this sense of community not only in a shared history of slavery and black achievement, but also in a vision of Africa as a homeland. As James explains, "The Homeward Bound Foundation was given its name because of its founding members' desire for Black people to see Africa as home."[10]

The romantic idea of Africa as home central to James's vision of a Black Atlantic community inspired the foundation's next project, the plan to create six identical, on-land Middle Passage memorials. The original design of the on-land memorials consisted of a replica of the arch, to which were to be added statues of an African family in chains and a one hundred-foot granite walkway engraved with African symbols leading from the arch to a female statue, standing with her arms open to welcome her children. The Middle Passage Monument, particularly its sea burial, challenges us to produce our own meanings and to some extent resists being put into narrative, whereas the figurative design of the on-land memorials imposes a narrative, constructing a Black Atlantic identity without leaving space for the viewers to imagine one themselves. Possibly in response to criticism of this kind, the design for the on-land memorials was altered, a slave ship replacing the statues of the slaves and Mother Africa in the initial design. In the new design, the meaning shifts from a homecoming to a symbolic rendering of the history of Africa as well as a therapeutic reliving of the Middle Passage: Visitors entering the memorial are to walk in the footprints of victims of the transatlantic slave trade imprinted on the walkway and thus embark on "a cathartic and cleansing journey."[11]

In accordance with his vision of a transnational black community, James planned to have replicas of this on-land memorial placed in each of the six regions involved in the transatlantic slave trade—Africa, the Caribbean, Central America, Europe, North America, and South, America—between 2000 and 2005. Among the potential sites for an on-land memorial James visited were the Dutch Antillean island Curaçao and the Netherlands, and in June 2000 a bill was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives for a land grant for an on-land memorial in Washington, D.C.[12] However, none of these efforts have so far come to fruition, suggesting that one reason the Middle Passage Monument could be realized so quickly was that it was lowered to the bottom of the ocean in international waters. As might have been expected, to secure land grants in various parts of the world was a different matter altogether, requiring institutional support. After the sea burial of the Middle Passage Monument, the main purpose of the Homeward Bound Foundation seemed fulfilled, and the initiative for constructing slavery memorials was passed on to local and national movements elsewhere in the Atlantic world, which James and his foundation helped inspire.

When Wayne James visited The Hague in December 1999 to discuss the possibility of having a Middle Passage Monument replica placed in the Netherlands, the long overdue confrontation with the Dutch colonial slavery past had only just begun. The Dutch example suggests that the sense of national unity and identity Nora laments as now being lost may have been based not so much on collective memory as on collective forgetfulness. Taking great pride in their "Golden Age," when Holland ruled the waves, the Dutch partly derive their national identity from the collective memory of imperial greatness in the seventeenth century. What has been virtually erased from Dutch public memory, however, precisely because it clashes with the cherished national self-image of tolerance and freedom, is the fact that, from the early seventeenth century on, Dutch slave traders transported about half a million Africans to the Americas, three hundred thousand of whom were taken to the Dutch Caribbean colonies Curaçao and Surinam.[13] A brief survey of six of the history textbook series most frequently used in Dutch schools in the 1990s concluded that only half of them discussed this chapter in Dutch national history in some depth, and two did not mention it at all.[14] Even today, Dutch students are more likely to know something about slavery in the United States than in their own nation's former colonies. This historical amnesia ironically persisted long after the return of the repressed past in the form of a mass migration of eventually four hundred thousand people from Surinam, the Dutch Antilles, and Aruba to the Netherlands, more than half of whom are descendants of slaves.[15] Starting in the mid-1970s, when Surinam became independent, this postcolonial migration continued throughout the 1980s and 1990s as the economic situation in the Dutch Caribbean deteriorated.

Although slavery had also long been, in Morrison's words, "a silence within the race," it began to enter and even dominate public debates about culture and identity in the Dutch black communities in the late 1980s. That this transformation of the slavery past from a source of shame into a source of positive cultural identity was inspired by African America is suggested by the fact that some people of African descent in Surinam and the Netherlands began to adopt the hyphenate ethnic labels *Afro-Surinaams* and *Afro-Nederlands* (Afro-Surinamese and Afro-Dutch).[16] The erasure of slavery from Dutch public memory became the source of frustration and resentment among many members of the Afro-Dutch minority. In order to raise public awareness of the slavery past, in 1993 a group of Afro-Surinamese people in Amsterdam founded the June 30/July 1 Committee. On the occasion of the 130th anniversary of the emancipation of the slaves

in the Dutch West Indies on 1 July 1863, the committee proclaimed June 30 as an annual day of reflection and July 1 as a day to celebrate *Keti Koti*, "Day of Broken Chains," as Emancipation Day is called in Surinam, where July 1 is a national holiday. The organization's chosen name, the June 30/July 1 Committee, left no doubt about its political agenda and was deliberately confrontational: The two dates were obviously meant to call to mind the annual national commemoration of the Jewish and other Dutch victims of World War II on May 4 and the celebration of the nation's liberation from Nazi occupation on May 5. Every year since 1993, the committee has organized a commemorative gathering in Surinam Square in Amsterdam on June 30, and another local Afro-Dutch organization annually organizes a parade in Rotterdam on July 1. Although in the last few years the parade has been a short news item on Dutch national television, it is presented as a (multi)cultural rather than memorial event, and the commemorative gatherings in Surinam Square are reported only in the local and Afro-Dutch media.

The black community's growing interest in the slavery past led to the call for a monument for its remembrance. The June 30/July 1 Committee successfully lobbied with the city council of Amsterdam for a slavery memorial: On 30 June 1999, a small plaque was unveiled in Surinam Square in Amsterdam. The text on the plaque records the city's commitment to placing a more substantial monument there at a later date with the aim of promoting "the emancipation of descendants of the victims of Dutch slavery." This local initiative helped give rise to a plan for a national slavery monument. In the spring of 1998, just as James started his Middle Passage Monument project, the call for a slavery memorial at last entered the national public discourse. In March, Antillean writer Frank Martinus Arion published an article in an influential Dutch opinion magazine in which he proposed that the Dutch government erect a slavery monument as "*un beau geste*" (a gesture of goodwill) to the descendants of slaves.[17] In July, representatives of the Afro-European women's organization Sophiedela offered a petition to the Dutch parliament, requesting the government's acknowledgment of the slavery past and active involvement in efforts to commemorate it. This shrewdly timed grassroots effort succeeded in finally putting the Dutch slavery past on the national political agenda. In the same year that President Clinton offered an apology for slavery to Africa and a bill was proposed in the French legislature declaring the slave trade and slavery a crime against humanity,[18] the Dutch political climate, too, was finally ripe for a formal confrontation with the nation's slavery past. The idea of a national slavery monument was discussed in the Dutch parliament in the fall of 1998, where it met with approbation.[19]

The plan was eagerly taken up by the newly appointed minister of integration and urban policy, Roger van Boxtel, and a two-pronged effort was

immediately launched to mobilize public support for a national monument both within the black communities and in Dutch society at large. Wishing to negotiate with one representative body, the minister asked Sophiedela to form a committee of representatives from the various organizations of slave descendants. Nine (eventually eleven) Surinamese, Antillean, and African organizations in the Netherlands agreed to be represented in this national committee, named *Landelijk Platform Slavernijverleden* (National Platform for the Remembrance of the Slavery Past, hereafter National Platform). The National Platform developed a plan of action. The national slavery memorial was to consist of both a "static" and a "dynamic" element: a monument and an institute dedicated to the study, documentation, and public education of the history of Dutch slavery, modeled on the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Cultures in New York.[20] In the meantime, as articles in support of the monument began to appear in the newspapers, Dutch Caribbean scholar Gert Oostindie compiled a collection of short essays by national and international scholars, writers, and public figures, titled *Het verleden onder ogen* (*Facing up to the Past*), which made a collective plea for a national monument in commemoration of slavery.[21] During the widely publicized presentation of this book on 30 June 1999, Minister van Boxtel formally endorsed the plan. The purpose of a slavery monument, he said in his endorsement speech, is to restore the slavery past to its rightful place in Dutch history and to make sure that it is not forgotten. The endorsement speech had great symbolic significance: For the first time, the Dutch government publicly acknowledged responsibility for its slavery past, thus declaring what Nora calls its "will to remember."[22] Minister van Boxtel appointed a Committee of Recommendation, whose task it was to advise the government, seek popular and institutional support for the monument, and raise public consciousness about the nation's history of slavery. Minister van Boxtel and Deputy Minister of Cultural Affairs Rick van der Ploeg became closely involved with the national monument project, lending it prestige as well as financial support.

It is this institutional support that marks the Dutch memorial's fundamental difference from James's Middle Passage Monument project. Both projects started as black grassroots movements, but whereas James's project was entirely privately funded, seems to have received (and sought) little attention and support outside the black communities, and had transnational rather than national aspirations, the government's support nationalized and politicized the Dutch memorial movement. The National Platform's decision to have the monument funded by the government as a form of reparation meant that the Platform was no longer fully in control of the project and to some extent became dependent on the government. Although the government's entry into the project gave it momentum, it also was the source of conflicts, leading, for instance, to questions about the representative nature

of the National Platform and the position of the Committee of Recommendation.[23] At the same time, it sparked a lively and at times heated public debate about the meaning of the slavery monument, exposing divisions within and among the various groups and institutions involved in the project. Intended to commemorate a shared past in the spirit of reconciliation, the Dutch national slavery memorial project became a site of contestation, an arena for the politics of memory and identity.

Constituting itself a discursive monument to the Dutch slavery past, the public debate about the national slavery monument was conducted in numerous meetings and symposia, as well as in the more than two hundred articles on or related to the monument that appeared in Dutch newspapers, opinion weeklies, and magazines between the spring of 1999 and the late summer of 2002. Among them were a few dozen substantial articles, including cover and front-page stories, editorials, and op-eds. Moreover, the slavery memorial project inspired the editorial boards of the three most widely read Dutch history journals, including that of the national organization of history teachers, to devote a special issue entirely to the history of Dutch colonial slavery, which is bound to have an impact on the way this history will be taught in Dutch schools.[24] Finally, in anticipation of the national slavery institute, as the "dynamic" element of the memorial is generally called, an official Internet site was set up as a source of information about slavery and as a forum of public debate.[25]

Although the idea of a national slavery monument was generally well received, from the beginning there was some opposition to the monument among representatives of both the majority population and slave descendants. In an early opinion article in the center-left newspaper *de Volkskrant*, journalist Jeroen Trommelen called the initiative an "empty and meaningless gesture," claiming it would neither raise historical consciousness nor contribute to an understanding of the historical reality of slavery, a view that was shared by some black intellectuals.[26] Both inside and outside the Afro-Dutch community, there were many voices that said the past should be left behind. Others feared that the monument would allow people of African descent to adopt or be pushed into the role of victims, and whites into that of victimizers. Some argued, for instance, that the view of blacks as victims of historical trauma conflicted with the project's avowed goal of furthering black emancipation.[27]

Among the Afro-Dutch opponents to the national monument was, notably, the June 30/July 1 Committee. Protesting against the government's "takeover" of the memorial project, the Amsterdam-based committee refused to join the National Platform. The National Platform and the government were committed to a speedy realization of the national slavery monument, but a spokesman for the committee complained that things were going too

fast: As long as most Dutch people were unaware of their nation's colonial past, a national monument was "untimely" and the government's efforts little more than a "political show."[28] At stake was more than the slavery past, the committee's chairman Winston Kout explained: In acknowledgment of the indissoluble ties between Surinam and the Netherlands, the Dutch government owed an apology and possibly reparation payments to its former colony and the descendants of slaves.[29] Kout's critique of the national memorial project set the tone for the ensuing debate. At various stages in the development of the memorial project—the selection of location, artists, and designs—conflicts erupted, revealing fundamental differences of opinion about the symbolic meaning of the monument.

During a commemorative gathering on 1 July 2000, Minister van Boxtel announced that the "static" monument was to be located in Oosterpark in Amsterdam, a park adjacent to the Royal Tropical Institute. The heated debates that preceded and followed this decision showed that the choice of location had important symbolic implications. Among the contenders for the monument were the city of Middelburg, formerly the Netherlands' main slave trading port, and Amsterdam, in the seventeenth century co-owner of Surinam and now the city with the largest Afro-Dutch population. Although the selection of Middelburg would have made it a Middle Passage monument, the choice of Amsterdam emphasized the symbolic link of the colonial and slavery past with the postcolonial present. The choice of the national capital met with general approval, but many felt that Oosterpark was a second-class location. Apart from the vicinity of the Royal Tropical Institute, the park has no link with the slavery past or the Afro-Dutch community and is not centrally located. Most Afro-Dutch people preferred Dam Square, the site of the National War Monument, where the national commemoration of World War II takes place annually on May 4. A placard carried in the parade that preceded the unveiling ceremony of the national slavery monument captured the general sentiment:

> 5 years of [Nazi] occupation:
> monument on Dam Square!!!
> 400 years of slavery:
> monument in Oosterpark???!!![30]

To many in the Afro-Dutch community, the choice of Oosterpark as the location for the slavery monument was a sign that the government did not take the memorial seriously.

Nine artists from Surinam, the Dutch Antilles and Aruba, West Africa, and the Netherlands were invited to submit designs for the monument. In the spring of 2001, the competing designs were exhibited in the city hall of Amsterdam, and the public were invited to vote on the designs. The

National Platform and about half of the five thousand people who sent in a vote by ballot or e-mail voted for the design by Erwin de Vries, *éminence grise* among Surinam's artists. A committee of art experts appointed by Minister van Boxtel judged none of the designs satisfactory, however, concluding that it was impossible to make a choice. The Committee of Recommendation expressed appreciation for de Vries's design, but preferred the more abstract design of Curaçao artist Nelson Carrilho. Faced with conflicting advice, the minister in effect allowed the public vote to be decisive, motivating his choice for de Vries's design by praising its accessibility to a broad audience.[31]

According to the exhibition brochure for the competing designs, the slavery monument had to "make visible the Dutch slavery past and its continuing impact on the present and future in our multicultural society, and that it represent the struggle for freedom and emancipation of the slaves' descendants." Of the nine competing artists, de Vries, who calls himself a neoexpressionist, took this assignment most literally. The monument he created, which is four meters high and twelve meters long, comprises three parts and combines figurative and abstract elements. The first part, a group of chained slaves, dramatizes the yoke of servitude; the middle part shows the human individual passing under an arch, symbolizing the strength that allows him to cast off his chains and enter into the present; and the third part, an abstract representation of a female figure with spread-out arms, symbolizes the irrepressible urge for liberty and a better future shared by all individuals, or, as de Vries put it, "total freedom" (Figure 5).[32] The middle part may well have been influenced by the arch-shaped Middle Passage Monument, and the Dutch monument's tripartite structure recalls the original design of James's proposed on-land memorials, the allegorical statue of liberty replacing that of Mother Africa.

Journalist Mark Duursma called all nine designs for the national monument pompous and old-fashioned, asserting they did not leave space for the viewer's own imagination.[33] Though a few individuals in the general public expressed similar complaints about de Vries's design, most viewers who commented on their choice of de Vries's design praised it precisely because its message was immediately clear. "It speaks to me," several wrote on the slavery monument website. At issue was more than aesthetics. Memorial art always has a story to tell, but the divergent views of the memorial designs indicate that the various groups involved or interested in the memorial project had different narrative and ideological agendas. Emphasizing the story of oppression, resistance, and emancipation, the grassroots Afro-Dutch groups demanded recognition, respect, and increasingly reparation for what many claim was a "Black Holocaust."[34] Aiming to take public responsibility for a shameful past, the government admitted that slavery was a "black page" in Dutch history, but rejected the notion of a black

Fig. 1 The Netherlands Monument for the Remembrance of Slavery, Amsterdam. Photograph: Eduard van de Bilt.

genocide. Insisting that the monument was to have not only a commemorative function, but also had to have meaning for the nation's present and future, the government gradually shifted its memorial agenda to the ideal of a multicultural society, which is perhaps more difficult to represent in visual narrative.

The Dutch slavery monument project thus came to represent conflicting ideas about collective memory and identity. Keeping in close touch with relatives and developments in Surinam or the Antilles, Dutch citizens of African descent, like most postcolonial and economic migrants, almost by definition belong to transnational communities, which partly overlap with the local and national Dutch communities to which they also claim allegiance. For some Afro-Dutch groups, however, the national memorial movement became an occasion to imagine an expanded transnational racial and cultural identity, linking them with other peoples in the African diaspora, living and dead. One of the tasks the National Platform envisions for the national slavery institute, for instance, is that it strengthen an Afro-cultural identity by fostering a sense of connectedness among peoples in the African diaspora.[35] The importance attached to a Black Atlantic identity is further suggested by the participation of a network organization of Ghanese and other Africans living in the Netherlands in the National Platform, as well

as in the National Platform's contacts with Wayne James and his Homeward Bound Foundation. Like James, many Dutch slave descendants regard Africa as home: "When I look into the mirror I see Africa," Platform chair Barryl Biekman said in an interview about the slavery monument, naming Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X, and the black emancipation movement in the United States as her sources of inspiration.[36] That a Black Atlantic identity is imagined across time as well as space is indicated by the Dutch slave descendants' frequent invocation of their slave ancestors and by their use of the word *nazaten* (Dutch for "descendants") as an almost sacral term to refer to themselves.[37] Their use of the word *nazaten*, often coupled with a discourse of trauma, indicates that Dutch people of African descent tend to identify with the victims of slavery, whereas slave descendants in the Antilles and Surinam are more inclined to identify with the slave heroes.[38]

At the same time, the slavery memorial project became enmeshed in a political and cultural debate about Dutch national identity. Responsible for developing policy for the integration of ethnic minorities, Minister Roger van Boxtel used the monument to promote the idea that the Netherlands is a multicultural society, perhaps even an immigration nation—a national self-image that is far more contested in Europe than in the United States, as the French and Dutch national elections of 2002 have shown. This idea is symbolized by the memorial project's official motto, *verbonden door vrijheid*—"joined by freedom." Expanding the monument's meaning by including ethnic minorities who do not share the nation's slavery history, the motto represents a multicultural vision that stresses integration rather than diversity.[39] As the project's website explains, the monument's main purpose is "to ensure that all citizens know that in our society they are joined by freedom. The realization that our past has a continuing impact on today's multicultural society is essential for this sense of connectedness and cooperative shaping of our culture." To be joined by freedom demands "more than equality, tolerance, or respect. It demands that we show interest [in each other's culture and past]."[40] Representing the government's agenda, the motto was controversial among members of the National Platform because it was felt to deflect attention away from the monument's commemorative function.[41] The official poster that announced the unveiling of the monument powerfully reproduced its dual (and conflicted) purpose by juxtaposing a photographic detail of the monument, featuring slaves linked by ropes, with the memorial project's "joined by freedom" vignette: a colorful row of seven human figures, joined at hands and feet like a chain of paper dolls. Although we are obviously invited to make an imaginative leap from the past bonds of slavery to the wished-for bonds of intercultural solidarity, the tumultuous unveiling ceremony suggests that this leap may have been a bridge too far.

The symbolic importance of the national slavery monument was indicated by the attendance of Queen Beatrix, Prime Minister Wim Kok, and other members of the Dutch cabinet at its unveiling, but the security measures their presence required unexpectedly brought the Dutch monument project to a dramatic closure. On the rainy afternoon of 1 July 2002, an estimated seven or eight hundred Afro-Dutch people of all ages, many dressed festively in colorful traditional Surinamese costume, and a much smaller group of white men and women, mostly middle-aged and older, came to the unveiling ceremony of the slavery monument in Amsterdam. Only upon arrival in the park where the monument would be unveiled did the crowd learn that they would not be able to attend the inauguration, but could follow it only on a large video screen that was put up in another section of the park. The secluded memorial site was kept from the public view by means of high fences covered with black plastic and guarded by mounted police and security personnel. Angry but unresisting, most people gathered in groups around the video screen in the drizzling rain. A small group of perhaps two or three dozen people (mostly black women) assembled at the guarded entrance to the memorial site, however, vocally demanding admission to the unveiling ceremony. Although the ceremony proceeded without interruption, speeches alternating with musical performances and libation rituals, neither the invited guests nor the people gathered around the video screen could miss the clamor of protest. While the crowd watching the video screen spontaneously applauded when they heard Minister van Boxtel offer a formal apology for slavery,[42] the more militant people at the entrance shouted their outrage. Intended as a symbolic gesture of inclusion, the inauguration of the national slavery monument was experienced by many in the Afro-Dutch community as a sign of continued exclusion.

When immediately after the unveiling of the monument and the departure of the invited guests the public was allowed to enter the memorial site, the event took the form of a reappropriation ritual. Many people, often in tears, stroked the heads or held the hands of the slave figures in the monument, as if greeting their slave ancestors. After the first emotional encounter with the monument, which was soon covered with flowers, the crowd burst out in song and dance, waving the Surinamese flag and chanting the Surinamese national anthem. The joint singing of the American civil rights movement's freedom song "We Shall Overcome" indicated that the commemoration had assumed the character of a nonviolent protest meeting. Six weeks later, on August 13, a group of about one hundred Afro-Surinamese women from Amsterdam held a silent march to the

monument, symbolically taking repossession of the memorial with a quiet dedication ceremony.

The unveiling ceremony, which received extensive news coverage, deepened splits among the various groups involved in the memorial project, leading to mutual accusations and nonconclusive official reports about who was responsible for failing to inform the public in advance about the security measures. If the monument's dramatic inauguration and the debates that preceded and followed it prove anything, however, it is the vitality of the Dutch slavery memorial project, thus refuting Pierre Nora's representation of modern memorial culture as artificial and "dead," as opposed to the putatively "living" national memory of the past. As Alex van Stipriaan argues, the commotion surrounding the unveiling is a sign that the Dutch memorial project has served its function of putting in motion the painful process of working through the legacy of a traumatic past, whose wounds have not yet healed.[43] Moreover, for the white participants, the public debate about the slavery memorial derives much of its emotional intensity or moral urgency from its being linked with the very much living and conflicted memory of World War II. The strategic use of phrases such as "black Holocaust," *Wiedergutmachung*, and "never again" by some black participants in the memorial debate was vehemently contested partly because it undermined another cherished national self-image, that of the nation's united resistance to Nazi occupation. This self-image became tarnished in the 1990s as the Netherlands was beginning to come to terms with a silenced chapter of its more recent history: the widespread passivity and indifference that, besides active collaboration, made possible the deportation of more than a hundred thousand Jews from the Netherlands to Nazi Germany. Among the mixed motives for white public and institutional support for the slavery monument may well have been the desire vicariously to do penance for the failure to prevent the deportation of Dutch Jews—or more recently, for the Dutch U.N. troops' failure to prevent the deportation and massacre of thousands of Bosnian Muslim men during the fall of Srebrenica in July 1995. Nevertheless, the suggestion that slave descendants might be just as entitled to financial reparation as Dutch Jews was unacceptable to the Dutch government as well as to most white contributors to the debate.

At the same time, the Dutch slavery debate coincided and became linked with an equally urgent and contentious debate about multiculturalism. The multicultural debate started early in 2000 with the publication of a polemical essay by Paul Scheffer, in which the author argued that the government's social integration policy for ethnic minorities had failed, resulting in the presence of an immigrant underclass in Dutch society and the emergence in the large cities of "black" schools, in which the majority of children belong to ethnic minorities.[44] While the professedly liberal Scheffer

called the government's ideal of a multicultural society an illusion, voices on the conservative side of the debate rejected the idea of a multicultural society altogether. The multicultural debate came to a climax in the fall of 2001 with the meteoric rise of the populist political leader Pim Fortuyn. Fortuyn's anti-immigration platform made immigration, coupled with security, the main issue in the national election campaign of 2002. In his campaign book, Fortuyn ridiculed the idea of reparation for slavery, writing that "those who still suffer from their ancestors' enslavement" should seek psychiatric treatment rather than financial compensation.[45] In the context of these political developments in the first two years of the new millennium, the national slavery monument project became an important platform for the Dutch government to communicate and defend its increasingly beleaguered multicultural vision. The brutal murder of Fortuyn nine days before the May 2002 national elections, the first political assassination in the Netherlands since 1672, sent shock waves through Dutch society, leading to a political revolution. All three political parties that had been in the government coalition since the memorial project's inception lost dramatically during the 2002 elections, and Fortuyn's three-month-old party (Lijst Pim Fortuyn) became the second largest party in the country, receiving 17 percent of the vote. The new conservative government—a coalition of Christian Democrats, Fortuyn's party, and Conservative Democrats—fell less than three months after its installation. However, the fact that almost all Dutch political parties have now taken over Fortuyn's anti-immigration agenda and repressive integration policy bodes ill for the future of the multicultural ideal that was a central impulse behind the conception of the Dutch national slavery memorial.

Nevertheless, the slavery memorial project has put an end to what Alex van Stipriaan has called the "crashing silence" over the Dutch slavery past.[46] That the sometimes acrimonious public debates about the monument tended to turn on the politics of racial and national identity and memory was, I would argue, an inevitable stage in the process of reconciliation with a painful and shameful past that had too long been repressed. In fact, these debates in the media, in forum discussions, and on Internet discussion boards have themselves been a form of modern memorial activism. In the end, the best memorial to Dutch slavery may not be the Dutch national slavery monument and institute themselves, but, to borrow James Young's words, "the never-to-be-resolved debate over which kind of memory to preserve, how to do it, in whose name, and to what end" to which they gave rise. Breaking down the concept of collective memory in which Nora grounds a sense of national unity, this dialectical model for modern memory work proposes the alternative concept of what Young calls "collected memory,"[47] a concept that more adequately accommodates

the diversity of today's postcolonial and multiethnic societies without relinquishing the ideal of social integration, based on equal rights, that is perhaps the American civil rights movement's most important legacy to the modern world. Thus, the Netherlands' national slavery monument and institute may serve as a site where ethnically and culturally diverse groups and individuals can gather to collect their memories of the past and reflect on their connections to both the national and transnational communities to which they belong.

Resting on the ocean floor, the Middle Passage Monument obviously cannot serve as a place where people can gather. In this respect, it resembles some of the German countermonuments Young describes in his study of Holocaust memorials. Like Jochen and Esther Gerz's *Monument against Fascism*, which was designed to sink gradually into the ground after its dedication in 1986, the Middle Passage Monument, once vanished into the sea, "leaves behind only the rememberer and the memory of a memorial."[48] The burden of what Young calls the "memory-work"—recalling the victims of the Middle Passage—is turned over not only to the relatively few who witnessed the dedication or lowering of the monument, but also to those who have read or heard about the monument. Monuments of the Black Atlantic, both the Middle Passage Monument and the National Monument for the Remembrance of Slavery in Amsterdam, provoke us actively to engage with the slavery past and explore its meaning for the present and the future.

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Notes

1. Angels Carabi, "Conversation with Toni Morrison," *Belles Lettres* 9, no. 3 (1994): 38.
2. Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*," trans. Marc Roudebush, *Representations* 26 (1989): 7, 13.
3. At the outset of his essay, Nora writes, "Among new nations, independence has swept into history societies newly awakened from their ethnological slumbers by colonial violation. Similarly, a process of interior decolonisation has affected ethnic minorities, families, and groups that until now have possessed reserves of memory but little or no historical capital" (7). For this insight into Nora's Eurocentrism, I am indebted to Hue-Tam Ho Tai's review, "Remembered Realms: Pierre Nora and French National Memory," *American Historical Review* 106 (2001): 915.
4. Nora, "Between Memory and History," 7, 15.

5. James discussed his calling in an interview with Clarence Williams, "Sea Monument for Forgotten Slaves," *Washington Times*, 24 June 1999, C8. All other information about and quotes related to the Middle Passage Monument are taken from the Homeward Bound Foundation's website: http://middlepassage.org (last updated October 2002). I last retrieved the website on 20 December 2002. Since then it has been removed and the domain name *middlepassage.org* is offered for sale.
6. Homeward Bound Foundation, middlepassage.org/monument.htm (20 December 2002).
7. Homeward Bound Foundation, middlepassage.org/middlepassage.htm (20 December 2002). On this webpage James also explains that the number of kilometers was chosen to honor the 427 human remains that were unearthed in 1991 in New York City at a site where throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries African Americans were buried.
8. Homeward Bound Foundation, middlepassage.org/rites1–72199.htm (20 December 2002).
9. Homeward Bound Foundation, middlepassage.org/foundation.htm (20 December 2002).
10. Homeward Bound Foundation, middlepassage.org/rites31099.htm (20 December 2002).
11. I found the description of the original design of the on-land monuments on the Homeward Bound Foundation's website when I started my research for this article in spring 2000. It was later replaced by a drawing and description of the new design: middlepassage.org/landmonuments.htm (20 December 2002).
12. Homeward Bound Foundation, middlepassage.org/update.htm (20 December 2002). For newspaper reports of James's visit to Curaçao and the Netherlands, see *Amigoe*, 12 October 1999, 4, and *Financieel Dagblad*, 24 December 1999, n.p. respectively.
13. The Dutch were responsible for about 5 percent of the total slave trade. P. C. Emmer, *De Nederlandse slavenhandel, 1500–1850* (Amsterdam: Arbeiderspers, 2000), 229. See also Johannes M. Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1600–1815* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
14. Alex van Stipriaan, *1 Juli: Tussen symbool en actualiteit* (Rotterdam: Landelijk Bureau ter Bestrijding van Rassendiscriminatie, 1999), 11–12.
15. Gert Oostindie, ed., *Het verleden onder ogen: Herdenking van de slavernij* (The Hague: Arena/Prins Claus Fonds, 1999), 11.
16. See Humphrey E. Lamur, "The Evolution of Afro-Surinamese National Movements," *Transforming Anthropology* 10 (2001): 18, 21. Only slightly more than a third of Surinam's multiethnic population consists of slave descendants, including Maroons, descendants of slaves who escaped during slavery and settled in the interior. With the Hindoestani and Javanese, descendants of indentured laborers from India and Indonesia who constitute about 30 and 25 percent of the population, respectively, the Afro-Surinamese form the three largest ethnic groups in Surinam (18).
17. Frank Martinus Arion, "Een 'beau geste,'" *De Groene Amsterdammer*, 11 March 1998. Reported in Oostindie, ed., *Verleden*, 19–23.
18. Proposed by Christiane Taubira, a black representative from French Guiana, in December 1998, this bill was enacted in 2001. See Louis Sala-Molins, "Devoir de réparation? La France ne veut rien savoir" in a special issue on "L'Esclavage: Un tabou français enfin levé," *Historia Thématique* 80 (November–December 2002): 68–74.
19. Wouter Gortzak, "Bij de herdenking van het slavernijverleden," *Socialisme en Democratie* 9 (2000): 413–14.
20. *Van monument tot instituut: Een schets op hoofdlijnen*, unpublished report presented to Minister van Boxtel by the National Platform for the Remembrance of the Slavery Past, August 1999, 14–16.
21. In 2001, a revised edition of the book was published in English translation: *Facing up to the Past: Perspectives on the Commemoration of Slavery from Africa, the Americas and Europe*, comp. and ed. Gert Oostindie (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle, 2001).
22. Nora, "Between Memory and History," 19.
23. Alex van Stipriaan, a white historian and independent member of the National Platform, has argued that the Committee of Recommendation increasingly became a buffer between the government and the Platform. Attempting to contain the more radical forces in the organizations of slave descendants, the multicolored committee may have contributed to a "whitening" of the memorial project. Van Stipriaan, "The Long Road to a Monument," in Oostindie, *Facing up to the Past*, 120–21.

24. *Spiegel Historiael*, June 2000; *Kleio*, June/August 2001; and *Historisch Nieuwsblad*, June 2002. Among other educational projects that have been set up are a series of exhibits on the slave trade in the Amsterdam Maritime Museum and a documentary series on slavery for Dutch school children scheduled to be televised in 2003.
25. The official website's URL is www.slavernijmonument.nl. The National Platform set up its own website: www.platformslavernij.nl.
26. Jeroen Trommelen, "Slavernijmonument leeg en zinloos initiatief," *Volkskrant*, 13 July 1999, 9.
27. See Guno Jones, "Het belang van een gedenkteken," *Kleio* 42, no. 5 (2001), 7:12.
28. Janna van Veen, "De tijd is nog niet rijp," *Contrast*, 27 January 2000, 4.
29. Mark Duursma, "De discussie over het Nederlands slavernijmonument," *NRC Handelsblad*, 28 July 2000, 19. The call for reparation payments was also heard within the National Platform: One of the Platform's member organizations, the Stichting Eer en Herstel Betalingen, was even founded with this goal in mind, calling for a Marshall plan for Surinam (*Van monument tot instituut*, 21). This position seems close to that of the Surinamese government: Speaking as the official representative of the Surinamese government during the inauguration of the national slavery monument, Minister Romeo van Russel asked the Dutch government to give more money for the economic development of his country, suggesting that a monument offered inadequate compensation. This speech was reported and endorsed in an editorial in the Surinamese newspaper *De Ware Tijd*, 2 July 2002.
30. My translation. A photograph of the placard, made by Irene Rolfes, can be found among a small collection of photographs of the unveiling ceremony at the Royal Institute of Linguistics and Anthropology in Leiden.
31. www.slavernijmonument.nl/SA105002.htm (15 August 2002). My account of the selection proceedings is based on personal communication with Gert Oostindie, who has been actively involved in the monument project as a member of the Committee of Recommendation.
32. The interpretation of the monument is de Vries's own, summarized by me from his comments in interviews (*Trouw*, 20 June 2002, 2, and *Contrast*, 27 June 2002, 18–19) and in the television documentary *Totale Vrijheid*, directed by Annemarie van Zweeden and Liesbeth Babel (IKON, 2002).
33. Mark Duursma, "De ontwerpen voor het slavernijmonument: Negen keer lelijk," *NRC Handelsblad*, 29 June 2001, 24.
34. "Our holocaust lasted 350 years," said National Platform Chair Barryl Biekman, for instance, in an interview on the eve of the unveiling of the monument (*NRC Handelsblad*, 11 June 2002, 7). Until recently, an inscription on a memorial stone in the slavery museum Kura Hulanda in Curaçao quoted Martin Luther King Jr. as having called the "genocide of 50–100 million African[s]" the "Black Holocaust." This may explain why in Dutch publications the term "Black Holocaust" is frequently attributed to Dr. King. Although King used the term "holocaust" a few times with reference to the economic condition of African Americans in the 1960s, I have been unable to find any evidence in King's papers that he compared the slave trade and slavery with a "Black Holocaust."
35. *Van monument tot instituut*, 14.
36. Duursma, "Discussie," 19.
37. *Nazaten* is a somewhat archaic Dutch word for "descendants," which is now almost exclusively used for (and by) descendants of slaves, the more common words being *afstammelingen* or *nakomelingen*.
38. The slavery memorial *Desenkadena* that was erected in Curaçao in 1998, for instance, commemorates the 1795 slave revolt rather than the slaves' suffering or emancipation.
39. The emphasis on integration is, for instance, clear in an early speech by Minister van Boxtel: "The denial of historical injustice makes those who identify with the victims of slavery feel excluded from, and therefore unsafe in, society; as a token of recognition, the slavery monument aims to give them a sense of belonging to Dutch society" (speech delivered on 14 December 1999; copy in my possession; my translation). In the minister's later speeches, the monument's integration symbolism is extended to other ethnic groups, reflecting a shift in the Dutch multiculturalism debate toward the integration of Islamic minorities, a topic that gained in importance after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001.
40. "Thema: Verbonden door Vrijheid," www.slavernijmonument.nl/SA3050000.htm (26 June 2002).

41. Gert Oostindie, "Slavernijmonument ontbeert brede discussie," *Contrast*, 27 June 2002, 17.
42. In September 2001, Minister van Boxtel had already publicly expressed the Dutch government's "deep remorse" over slavery, first during the U.N. conference against racism in Durban and a week later during a visit to Surinam. In April 2002, a few weeks before the unveiling of the slavery monument, Queen Beatrix's eldest son, Willem Alexander, also briefly expressed remorse about the slave trade during a formal visit to the former Dutch slave fortress Elmina in Ghana. Mark Duursma, "Wroeging in een oud Ghanees fort," *NRC Handelsblad*, 16 April 2002, 2.
43. Alex van Stipriaan, "Erfenissen van het slavernijverleden," *Allochtonenkrant*, 17 June 2002, 4.
44. Paul Scheffer, "Het multiculturele drama," *NRC Handelsblad*, 29 January 2000, 6.
45. Pim Fortuyn, *De Puinhopen van acht jaar Paars* (Uithoorn: Karakter, 2002), 158.
46. Alex van Stipriaan, "Hunne vrijmaking zou zoo veel geld kosten," *Trouw*, 31 March 2001, 49–50.
47. James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 81, xi.
48. Ibid., 30–31.