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# DISCUSSION GUIDE



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The *Sites of Memory* documentary was created to spark dialogue and inspire collective engagement around themes of racial injustice, historical memory, and community healing. The film serves as a powerful tool to reflect on the past while envisioning a more equitable future, and this discussion guide is designed to help groups engage deeply with its messages.

This guide provides a framework for fostering meaningful conversations that encourage participants to explore their own connections to history, memory, and justice. Its contents are thoughtfully curated to support facilitators in guiding discussions that promote understanding, empathy, and action.

Key features of the discussion guide include:

- **About the Film:** An introduction to the documentary and its purpose. This section provides essential context to frame the discussion.
- **Discussion Questions:** Thoughtful prompts designed to encourage reflection and dialogue on key themes, such as lynching and racial violence, education and memorialization, the significance of local histories, and imagining the future.
- **Interactive Activities:** Engaging exercises that invite participants to connect with the film on a deeper level, such as creating personal or collective “memory maps,” sharing stories inspired by the documentary, or developing action plans for community engagement and change.
- **People and Organizations to Know:** Profiles of influential figures and groups featured or referenced in the film.
- **Places to Visit:** A curated list of significant historical sites, memorials, and landmarks visited in the film.

This guide is not just a companion to the film—it’s a catalyst for dialogue and action, encouraging participants to confront the complexities of history and work together toward healing and transformation. Whether used in classrooms, community meetings, or organizational settings, the guide empowers groups to move from reflection to meaningful action.



# ABOUT THE FILM

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*Sites of Memory* follows a diverse community group as they journey together to historical sites of racial violence, reflecting on the enduring impact of racism and envisioning new possibilities for a more equitable future. Through their shared experiences, the film captures deeply personal and collective reflections, exploring how these sites carry the weight of history while offering opportunities for healing and transformation.

Featuring personal interviews, archival footage, and powerful imagery, *Sites of Memory* examines the role of memory in shaping our understanding of systemic inequities and resilience. As participants engage with these spaces, the film highlights the importance of truth-telling, community dialogue, and imagining pathways toward justice and reconciliation.

More than a historical documentary, *Sites of Memory* serves as a call to action, challenging viewers to confront the past, honor the stories of those who endured, and join in building a future rooted in equity and shared humanity.

# NOTE TO FACILITATORS

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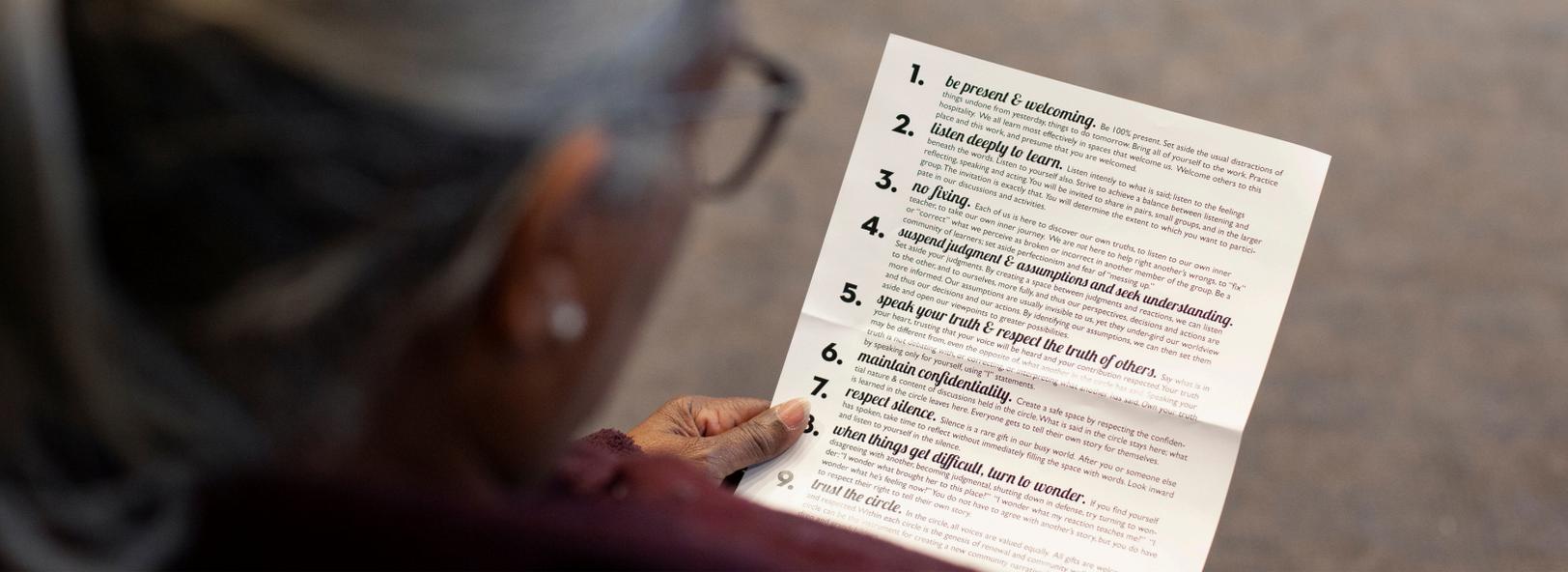
Thank you for choosing to facilitate a conversation inspired by *Sites of Memory*. This film invites communities to reflect on histories of racial violence, resilience, and remembrance. It asks us to look closely at the places where history lives in the land, in memory, and in the people who continue to seek justice and healing.

Before leading your discussion, take time to prepare yourself and your space. Conversations about racial violence and historical injustice can bring up strong emotions and painful truths. Approach the dialogue with care, humility, and readiness to listen. Your role is not to have all the answers, but to help participants engage with one another in ways that honor truth, dignity, and collective learning.

Encourage curiosity, not confrontation. Remind participants that this film is not only about tragedy but also about courage, connection, and the ongoing work of remembrance. The goal of your conversation is to deepen understanding, strengthen relationships, and inspire reflection and action that move your community toward healing.

Most importantly, center well-being. Begin and end with grounding, offer space for silence or emotion, and create agreements that help participants feel seen and safe. This is sacred work, and your care in facilitating makes all the difference.





# COMMUNITY AGREEMENTS

Before beginning your discussion, take time to co-create or review community agreements with participants. These agreements help set a shared foundation for how everyone will show up and engage in the conversation. They remind us that this is a space for learning, listening, and mutual respect.

Below are some sample agreements you can adapt or add to:

- Listen with care. Allow others to speak without interruption and listen to understand, not to respond.
- Speak from your own experience. Use "I" statements and avoid generalizing others' perspectives or experiences.
- Hold space for emotion. These conversations can be deeply personal. Honor the feelings that arise and allow room for silence when needed.
- Acknowledge impact over intent. Words and actions can affect people differently. Be open to feedback and learning when harm is caused.
- Honor confidentiality. Stories shared in the space should stay in the space unless permission is given to share them.
- Expect and accept non-closure. Healing and understanding take time. It is okay to leave with more questions than answers.
- Stay curious and compassionate. Approach difficult topics with openness, humility, and a willingness to grow together.

These agreements are not rules but shared commitments to build trust and safety within the group. Invite participants to suggest additions or changes so that everyone feels ownership of the space you are creating together.



# BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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## **A Brief Overview of Racial Violence**

The history of the United States cannot be fully understood without acknowledging the deep and enduring impact of racial violence. From the era of slavery through Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and into the present day, acts of racial terror have shaped communities, policies, and national identity. These acts, often carried out publicly through lynchings, burnings, and other forms of racial terror, were designed not only to harm individuals but to enforce systems of control and racial hierarchy.

Between the late 19th and mid-20th centuries, thousands of African Americans were lynched across the country, most often in the South but also in states throughout the Midwest and West. These events were frequently sanctioned by silence or active complicity, leaving lasting scars on the social and emotional fabric of communities. The trauma of racial violence has continued through redlining, segregation, police brutality, and other forms of systemic injustice that affect generations long after the original acts occurred.

For many years, these stories were omitted from public education and civic life. The absence of truth-telling has contributed to ongoing misunderstandings about the roots of inequality and the resilience of those who have resisted it. Today, individuals and communities across the nation are working to change that by uncovering buried histories, naming the victims, and creating public spaces for remembrance and reflection.

## Memorialization and Healing

The growing movement to memorialize racial violence seeks to confront these silences with honesty and care. Initiatives such as the National Memorial for Peace and Justice and the Legacy Museum in Montgomery, Alabama, along with hundreds of local community efforts, are helping to restore memory to places where injustice once thrived. By collecting soil from lynching sites, installing historical markers, and gathering descendants and neighbors for remembrance, communities are transforming spaces of pain into sites of truth and healing.

These efforts show that confronting the past is not about reopening wounds; it is about tending to them. Memorialization invites reflection, dialogue, and connection, allowing people to grapple with the difficult truths of history while envisioning new possibilities for justice and reconciliation.



## Continuing the Work

*Sites of Memory builds upon this work by exploring how collective remembrance can spark transformation. The film brings together people from different backgrounds to visit historical sites and reflect on what it means to acknowledge painful history with openness and care. It emphasizes that healing begins with truth-telling and that memory, when shared collectively, can become a source of strength and unity. By engaging with this history, we not only honor the lives and stories of those who came before us but also affirm our shared responsibility to build a more equitable and humane future.*

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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## ***Lynching and Racial Violence***

- How has the history of lynching shaped racial dynamics in the United States?
- What role does collective memory play in addressing or ignoring the history of lynching and racial violence?
- How do you think the history of lynching affects families and communities today, especially in areas where these events occurred?
- What parallels can you draw between historical lynching and modern forms of racial violence?
- How might the legacy of lynching contribute to ongoing economic, social, or political disparities?
- What does it mean to you to confront "hard history"? How has your perspective on this changed after watching the film?

## ***Education and Memorialization***

- Were there any moments or stories in the film that particularly resonated with you? Why?
- What emotions did you feel while seeing the historical sites in the film? How does your feeling associated with the sites included in the film influence your understanding of the events that took place there?
- What is the significance of memorializing victims of lynching and racial violence? How can this help communities confront their past?
- How do public monuments or historical markers shape our understanding of history? What are our responsibilities in ensuring they reflect an honest and inclusive narrative?
- What are the risks and benefits of engaging in public discussions about lynching and racial violence? How can communities navigate these discussions respectfully?

## ***Emmett Till's Story and Legacy***

- How do you feel when you hear Emmett Till's story? What emotions does it bring up, and why?
- How did the actions of Mamie Till-Mobley, Emmett's mother, influence the way the world learned about his murder?
- Why do you think the story of Emmett Till continues to resonate across generations?
- What role did media coverage play in shaping public awareness of Emmett Till's story? How does this compare to the role of media in racial justice movements today?

## **Sites of the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI)**

- The National Memorial honors over 4,000 lynching victims. How do these sites challenge traditional narratives about American history, particularly regarding racial violence and injustice?
- How do the issues highlighted at the EJI sites, like racial violence, discrimination, and mass incarceration, manifest in today's society?

## **Significance of Local Histories**

- Are there historical sites in your community that reflect stories of racial violence, resistance, or resilience?
- What do you know about their history, and how are they recognized or preserved today?
- What does the presence or absence of historical markers in your community say about how history is remembered?
- Who tells the stories of your community's past? How does this influence which histories are elevated and which are forgotten?

## **Imagining the Future**

- How can communities use historical sites as spaces for healing and justice? What are some actions we can take individually or collectively to ensure these stories are not forgotten?
- If you were tasked with preserving or memorializing a site in your community, what spaces would you preserve? What stories would you want the sites to tell?
- How might acknowledging the legacy of lynching and racial violence serve as a foundation for building a more just society?
- What does a just and equitable future look like to you?
- What does healing from the legacy of lynching and racial violence look like for individuals, communities, and the nation?



# INTERACTIVE ACTIVITIES

## ***Mapping Memory***

Objective: Explore the historical significance of places in the participants' communities.

### Activity

- Provide a large map or individual printed maps of the community.
- Invite participants to identify and mark locations in their own communities with historical significance. Discuss the stories tied to these places.

### Reflection Questions

1. What emotions or thoughts arise when considering these sites?
2. How are these places recognized (or not) today?



## ***Research and Local Exploration***

Objective: foster a deeper understanding of the history and legacy of lynchings and racial violence within participants' local communities

### Activity

- Provide participants with resources such as the Equal Justice Initiative's *Lynching in America* database, local archives, historical societies, and news sources.
- Break participants into small groups to:
  - Identifying documented lynchings or racial violence events.
  - Exploring local community responses to these events (e.g., protests, silence, media coverage).
  - Uncovering any memorials, markers, or grassroots efforts to address this history.

### Reflection Questions

1. What surprised you most about the history of lynching and racial violence in your local community?
2. In what ways do you see the legacy of these events still present in your community today?

## **Site Advocacy Plan**

Objective: Empower participants to take action to preserve and recognize historical sites in their community.

### Activity

- Work in groups to identify a local site that could benefit from preservation or awareness efforts.
- Develop an action plan, including:
  - Researching the site's history.
  - Creating educational materials (e.g., brochures or videos).
  - Organizing a community event to highlight its significance.

### Reflection Questions

1. What challenges might arise in preserving historical sites?
2. How can community members work together to overcome these challenges?

## **Story Circle**

Objective: Share and reflect on personal or community stories connected to local history.

### Activity

- Divide participants into small groups.
- Encourage each person to share a story about a place in their community with historical or personal significance. This could be a family home, a local landmark, or a site tied to a broader social movement.
- Afterward, discuss common themes and differences across the stories.

### Reflection Questions

1. How does sharing stories deepen our connection to history?
2. What do these stories reveal about the lasting impact of racism or resilience in our communities?

## **Reflection Journal**

Objective: Foster deeper personal engagement with the film's themes.

### Activity

- Provide participants with a journal or digital prompt to record their thoughts on:
  - A quote or moment from the film that resonated most with them.
  - A site they'd like to visit in their community and why.
  - How they plan to take action after engaging with the film.

### Reflection Questions

1. How do your reflections connect the past to the present?
2. What steps can you take to turn reflection into action?

# PEOPLE AND ORGANIZATIONS TO KNOW

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## Emmett Till

A 14-year-old boy from Chicago who was kidnapped and brutally murdered in Mississippi in the summer of 1955 by Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam. It was his murder that brought nationwide attention to the racial violence and injustice prevalent in Mississippi. After murdering young Emmett, his body was dumped in the Tallahatchie River. The funeral was open casket, by order of his mother, Mammie Till, so the "world could see what they had done to her son". Bryant and Milam were acquitted in a quick trial.

## Equal Justice Initiative (EJI)

A nonprofit organization committed to challenging racial and economic injustice, ending mass incarceration, and protecting the rights of marginalized communities. Founded by Bryan Stevenson in Montgomery, Alabama, EJI is renowned for its groundbreaking work in advocating for criminal justice reform and memorializing the history of racial violence in the United States. EJI established the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, the nation's first memorial dedicated to victims of lynching, and the Legacy Museum, which explores the connections between slavery, segregation, and mass incarceration. Through education, legal advocacy, and public engagement, EJI strives to foster truth-telling, healing, and systemic change.



## Lafayette Community Remembrance Project

A grassroots coalition dedicated to uncovering and preserving the history of racial violence in Lafayette County, Mississippi. Since its inception in 2016, the project has worked to honor the lives of those lost to lynching and racial injustice, fostering dialogue and education around this painful legacy. Through community events, historical markers, and partnerships with organizations like the Equal Justice Initiative, the project seeks to promote truth-telling, racial healing, and collective reflection. Central to its mission is the belief that acknowledging the past is essential for building a more equitable and just future.



## The Alluvial Collective

A nonprofit organization dedicated to fostering racial equity, community healing, and social justice in the American South. Based in Mississippi, the collective engages in community-centered initiatives that address systemic inequalities and amplify marginalized voices. Through storytelling, education, and relationship-building, the organization seeks to uncover neglected histories and promote reconciliation.



## Emmett Till Memorial Commission

A group of community representatives based in Tallahatchie County, Mississippi, dedicated to preserving the legacy of Emmett Till and promoting racial healing. Established in response to the enduring impact of Till's 1955 lynching and the subsequent miscarriage of justice, the ETMC works to confront the county's painful history and foster reconciliation. The commission spearheaded efforts such as the issuance of a public apology to the Till family, the preservation of key historical sites, and the installation of markers along the Emmett Till Memory Trail. Through education, commemoration, and community engagement, the ETMC worked to ensure that Till's story continues to inspire a commitment to justice and equality.



**May we never forget all those who suffered  
and died because they asserted  
their basic human right to be free.**



# PLACES TO VISIT

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## **Burns-Belfry Museum & Multicultural Center**

710 E Jackson Ave, Oxford, MS 38655

## **Emmett Till Interpretive Center**

158 N Court St, Sumner, MS 38957

## **Legacy Museum**

400 N Court St, Montgomery, AL 36104

## **Mound Bayou Museum for African American Culture and History**

200 Roosevelt St, Mound Bayou, MS 38762

## **National Memorial for Peace and Justice**

417 Caroline St, Montgomery, AL 36104

