

“Free Your Mind”⁹: Constructing the Process of Reconciling Irreconcilable Differences

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And the award goes to...

This night has been long awaited, and I am sure that everyone here tonight is on the edge of his or her seat, waiting... This century's nominees made it tough for the judges to decide just who would be worthy enough to receive what we feel is the greatest honor. As the race for excellence and superiority grew tighter, the Nineties have become the decade of deciding factors. The Nineties saw the raise of hate politics and crime, church burnings, gang violence, the L.A. riots, the O.J. Simpson trial, the Hill-Thomas hearings, the Million Man March, the Million Women March, the recent Texas lynching, and "Lord knows what else... As you've probably already guessed by now, this century's MOST OPPRESSED AWARD TROPHY goes to...

Drum roll please !

Yes, yes, yes, you've guessed it, the don't dis' me Mother F'n, Nee..groes, Colored, Blacks, call them what they'd like but don't ever count them out! Yes, the winner is the African American (applause, applause, applause...).

SILENCE!

This project is presented in three parts: the award, the "call," and the "response." Each of them represents a stage in a cultural healing process that attempts to reconcile us with the past and its haunting present/presence. The past is that of the Black Atlantic Slave Trade. The present - is represented in the daily stereotypes of "race and the polarized racial strife. It is also present in the tangible pain of African Americans and their fight to move beyond our own "double consciousness," on the one hand, and the racist institutions that continue to construct us as "a problem," on the other. The award also refers to the reductive American political and popular focus on black-versus-white issues in a country that is much more diverse ethnically than this model allows. It reveals the irony, as it were, of a "competition" of sorts perpetuated among minorities as to who has suffered the most pain in the "land of the free." The call-and- response rhetoric of this part reflects the "call-and-response" oral, spiritual, and performative traditions of African and African-American heritage of active communication. The mission for the next millennium that is called for, then, is to move on with our diverse lives and works and thus, in the words of a spiritual, "FREE YOUR MIND"

Installation at the Avery Research Center in Charleston, South Carolina

REFERENCES

Thompson, Robert Farris, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*. New York: Vintage Books Edition, 1984.

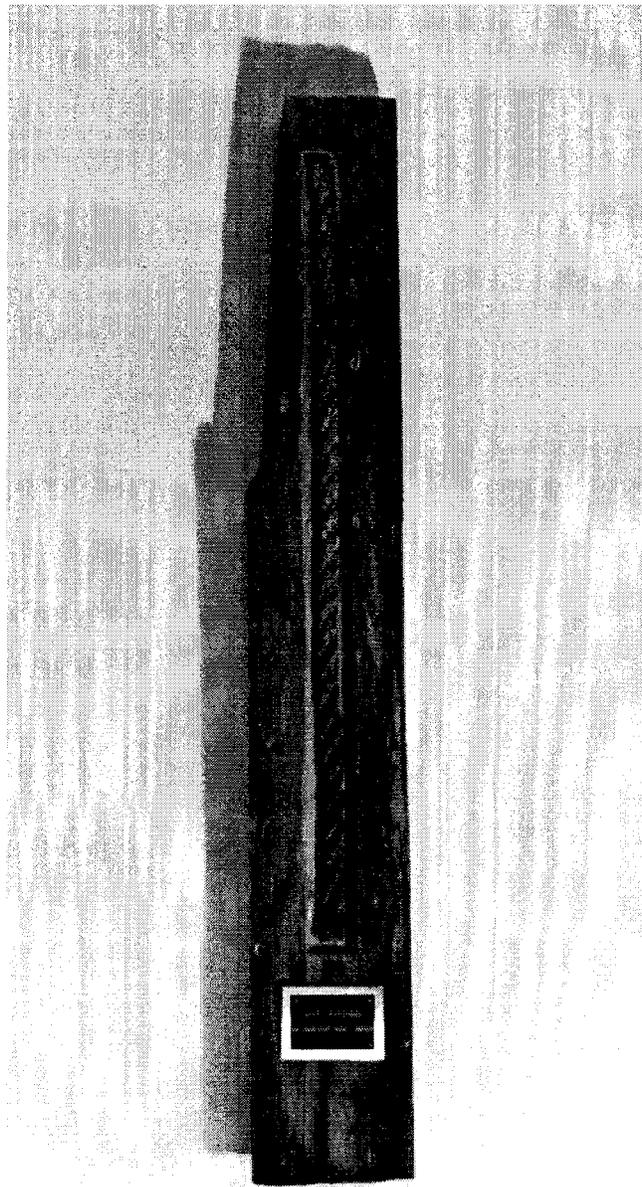


Fig. 1. The trophy is an old rail tie with a brass rope inserted into it. The plaque reads, "THE MOST OPPRESSED: 400 years - Present."

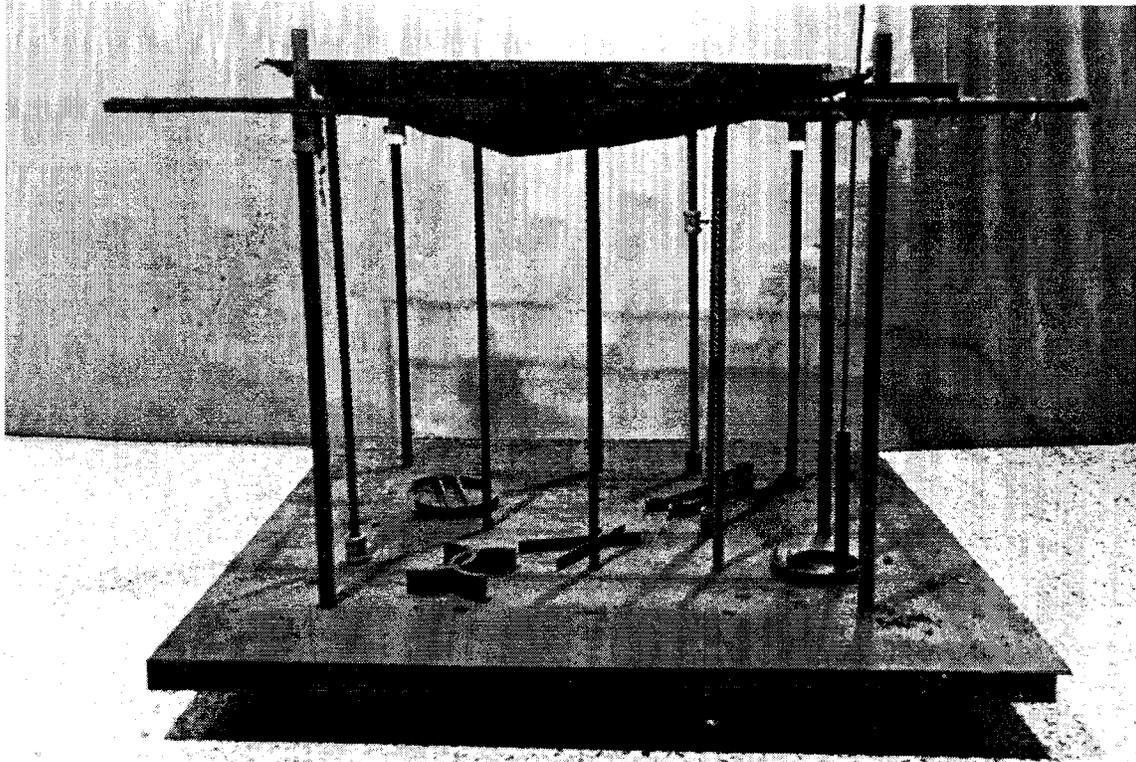


Fig. 2. A table representing the second phase, the "call" (Chair not shown. Inspired by nsibidi symbols of communication)

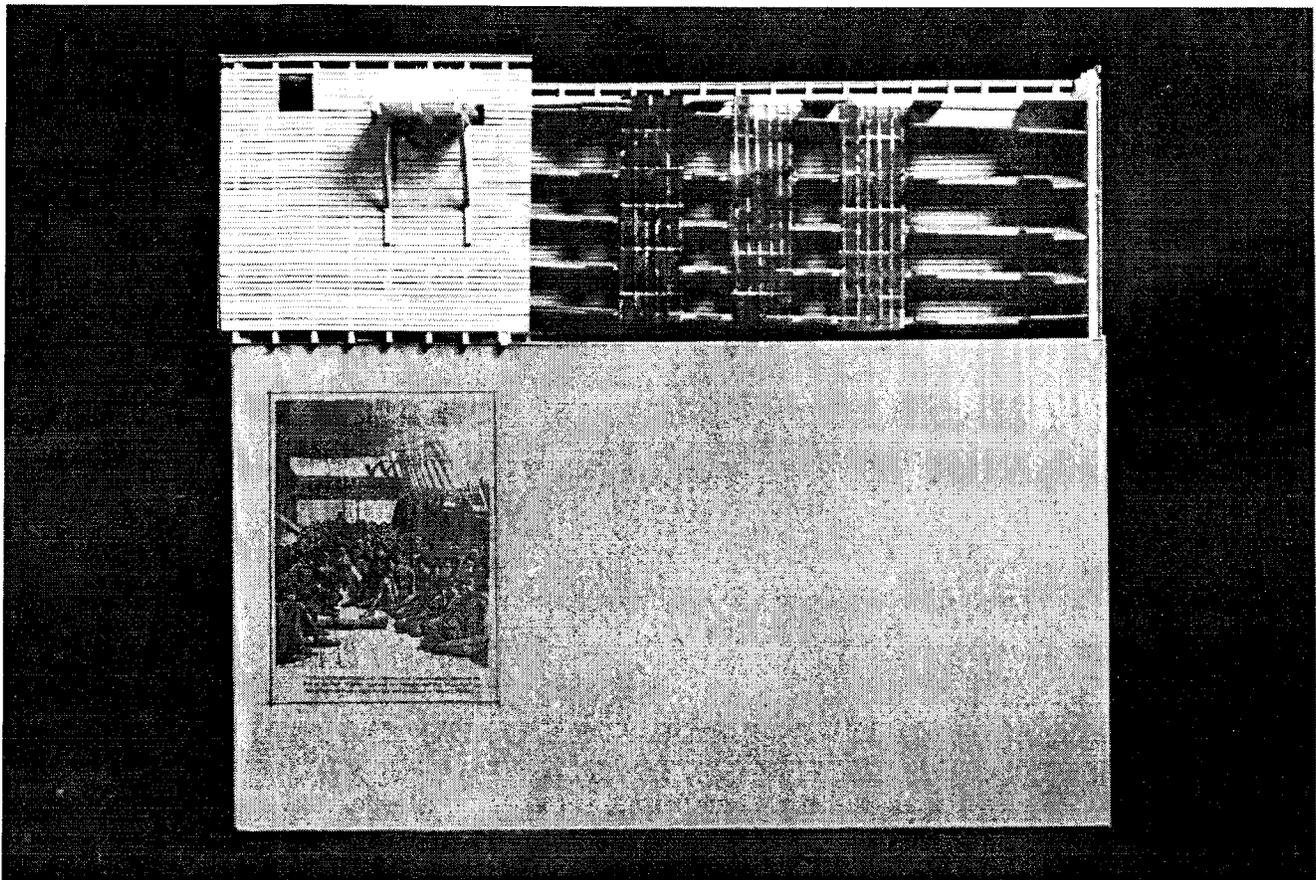


Fig. 3. This elevation represents the third phase, the "response." It is a part of a proposal for an African-American memorial in Charleston, South Carolina