The coastal cities in the United States along the Atlantic seaboard and the Gulf of Mexico were deeply implicated in the horrors of the transatlantic African slave trade and the enslavement of African peoples. This paper explores the growing crescendo of efforts to memorialize these unquiet spaces through public and private monuments, establishment of heritage signage, recovery of burial grounds, and even guerilla efforts to tag, at least temporarily, dwellings associated with slavery. From the early 1970s to the present, Black efforts to honor the ancestors have been intertwined with contemporary political and economic struggles, from dismantling segregation to Black Lives Matter. Although popular memory situates the history of slavery in rural America, cities like Portsmouth, New York, Annapolis, Charleston, and New Orleans served as ports of arrival and loci of suffering. Efforts to commemorate enslavement, however, clash with upscale residential enclaves and gentrification of once Black (or at least multiracial) neighborhoods. The
sites included in this study range from the once rural but now urban Royall House and Slave Quarters in Medford, Massachusetts, to the French Quarter of New Orleans. They range in scale from the African Burial Ground Memorial in New York City, to a road sign in Savannah, Georgia, that memorializes “the weeping time” when 436 enslaved Africans were sold in two days to expunge their enslaver’s debts. Included also are museums such as the new National Museum of African American History in Washington, D.C., but, more importantly, place-based museums focusing on the Diasporic experience of African peoples such as the APEX Museum (Atlanta), National Great Blacks in Wax (Baltimore), and the Natchez (Mississippi) Museum of African American History and Culture.

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