



**NC STATE UNIVERSITY**

# VIRTUAL MLK EXPERIENCE

DIGITAL HUMANITIES PROJECT OF MLK'S "FILL UP THE JAILS" SPEECH

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# Crafting a Necessary Digital Space to Explore Black History and Civic Transformation

## Background and Purpose

Just days after the start of the Greensboro sit-ins In February 1960, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered what would become a widely influential speech titled, “A Creative Protest [Fill up the Jails]” in Durham, North Carolina. Rev. Douglas Moore, organizer of the 1957 sit-in at the Royal Ice Cream Company and a former classmate of Dr. King’s at Boston University, invited Dr. King to the White Rock Baptist Church in Durham, North Carolina to speak out in support of the students in Greensboro. It marked the first time Dr. King publicly encouraged activists -- and promised the full support of the SCLC to those that did so -- to disrupt and break the law through non- violent confrontation even if it meant ‘filling up the jails.’ Despite the historical and rhetorical significance of what is commonly known as the “Fill Up the Jails” speech, the old White Rock sanctuary was razed and there are no known recordings of King's influential speech.

The vMLK project engages individuals and groups in the hermeneutic act of experiencing and interpreting what was, what is, and what has never been in relation to public address and civic transformation. The project features six digitally immersive and custom experiences of King’s 1960 “Fill Up the Jails” speech, including different collective and individual sound perspectives, “walk-in” and walking tour experiences, a Virtual Reality experience, a simulation experience of the sanctuary where King delivered the speech, and a historical experience emphasizing the role of the many individuals who made the movement a reality.

Rev. Dr. King’s speech is significant for understanding his philosophy and methodology of nonviolence and the central role of citizens for enacting social change. In commemoration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of King’s assassination, the Virtual Martin Luther King (vMLK) Project proposes a site-specific museum exhibition where public audiences can experience King’s historic speech in digitally immersive, online and/or material environments. The vMLK project is particularly interested in collaboratively developing a customized experience for the online and/or physical space at one of your planned commemorative events in 2018.

## Audience

The vMLK project seeks to expand and enhance 1) public audiences’ knowledge of civil rights history in North Carolina in relation/juxtaposition to contemporary civic life, 2) appreciation of the scope of civic and political engagement in North Carolina and around the country during the civil rights movement, and 3) public audiences’ understanding of the transformative and affective aspects of public address in relation to King’s 1960 “A Creative Protest [Fill Up the Jails]” address. Audiences will learn, in a manner and to an extent not previously available, how King’s speech text and his delivery served to move people to do something that was unthinkable for them up to this point in history, namely, breaking the law and going to jail to establish their humanity and to gain their rights and freedom. And they are led to consider what this means in light of contemporary political, civic, and social realities.

The vMLK project is targeted toward citizens of North Carolina, the United States and the world. For instance, during the June 2014 speech re-enactment, we engaged with pastoral staff, church deacons and congregation members of White Rock Baptist Church, as well as members of the Durham Ministerial Alliance, Duke University Divinity School faculty, and the surrounding Raleigh and Chapel Hill communities. In September 2016, over three hundred people attended the Experiencing King at NC State University event. In October 2017, thousands of people attended the ACC Smithsonian Creativity and Innovation Festival at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History where the vMLK project was featured next to the 1960 Greensboro Sit-in lunch counter exhibit. In November 2017, an Austrian visitor noted that she learned something different about the struggle for human rights in the United States.

## **Exhibition Components and Interpretative Framework**

The Virtual MLK Project provides six experiences of King's "A Creative Protest ["Fill Up the Jails"]" speech—historical experience, collective sound experience, listening experience, virtual reality experience, simulation experience, and feedback/share your creative protest. Each component of the transmedia format interacts with and complements one another to expand visitors' knowledge of civil rights history in North Carolina in relation to the history and impact of the larger movement, of the scope of civic and political engagement, and of the potentially transformative and affective aspects of public address.

The interpretive framework that informs the vMLK project is based on Kim Gallon's concept of a technology of recovery, a term which describes black digital humanities work that seeks to restore the humanity of black people lost and stolen through systematic global racialization; and public address as experience, a conceptualization which foregrounds rhetoric's materiality through the invention and interpretation of spaces that combine auditory, kinetic, and visually immersive elements to illuminate rhetoric's affective energies.

## **Evaluation**

Our assessment of the project is informed by audience feedback and survey data in relation to the following: 1) Documenting the history and everyday experience of African American/Black life, 2) providing a transformative critique and understanding of race and digital technology by enabling audiences to experience and enact civic and political engagements and 3) innovating the use of digital tools by developing immersive transmedia experiences of civil rights public address that can be experienced both individually and collectively.

In keeping with these goals, audiences/visitors are encouraged to provide feedback about their experiences of the vMLK project. Using a computer device, or preferably, a tablet device such as an iPad with a stand, visitors can select online survey items and/or provide answers to open ended prompts.

## **Expertise**

Investigators on the Virtual Martin Luther King, Jr. Project began with a digital humanities vision: to develop an immersive recreation (an interactive digitally rendered experience) of MLK's "Fill up the Jails" speech, a historic moment in the US civil rights movement. Phases 1 through 3 (2014-2017) focused on creating multifaceted experiences of the speech and exhibiting those experiences for various publics. The fourth phase of the project focuses on expanding mobile, public exhibitions across the nation, culminating in two significant public commemorations: 50th anniversary of King's assassination (2018) and the 60th anniversary of King's "Fill up the Jails" speech (2020).

Dr. Victoria Gallagher (Ph.D. Northwestern University), director and principal investigator of the vMLK project, is Professor of Communication at NCSU. Dr. Gallagher is preparing a book, "A Necessary Space: The Rhetoric of Civil Rights-related Museums and Memorials" and currently serves on the Advisory Board of the North Carolina Freedom Park Project, a grassroots movement working to site a park featuring significant sculptures and design elements celebrating North Carolina's African American citizens and their contributions to freedom.

Dr. Keon Petteway (Ph.D. North Carolina State University), co-principal investigator of the vMLK project, is an Assistant Professor of Communication at Eastern Michigan University. He holds a Master of Fine Arts in Graphic Design from the School of Art and Design at East Carolina University. Dr. Petteway is preparing a collection of essays on digital aspects of museums spaces and King's global engagement with human rights activism.



# Exhibition Format for Online and Material Spaces

While each exhibition component—historical experience, collective sound experience, listening experience, virtual reality experience, simulation experience, and feedback/share your creative protest—may be experienced individually in online and/or material spaces, they may also be customized a number of different ways for a transmedia experience, including a public performance, walking tour, virtual reality tour, and online exhibition. The vMLK project works with institutions to develop a unique format.

Exhibitions have been featured at a number of online and public spaces across the nation, including the James B. Hunt Library, recipient of the 2016 National Medal for Museum and Library Service. Recently, the vMLK project was invited by the King Institute at Stanford University to exhibit at an event in the city of Palo Alto in April, 2018 to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of King’s assassination.

The selected list of events below provide a sense of how each of the six experiences can be uniquely configured for online and material spaces. After the schedule, descriptions of each exhibition component and several sample configurations are provided.

Oct. 2017 - Washington, DC <b>Smithsonian Museum</b>	<b>Public Sound Performance &amp; VR Tour:</b> Historical Experience, Listening Experience, VR Experience, Simulation Experience, Share Your Creative Protest
Sep. 2017 - NC State University <b>Parents and Families Weekend</b>	<b>Walking Tour:</b> Historical Experience, Listening Experience, VR Experience, Simulation Experience, Share Your Creative Protest
September 2017 - Richmond, Virginia <b>Association for the Study of African American Life and History</b>	<b>Public Sound Performance:</b> Historical Experience and Listening Experience
February 2017 - DePaul University <b>Rhetoric Across Borders Lecture</b>	<b>Public Sound Performance:</b> Historical Experience and Listening Experience
April 2017 - University of Alabama <b>Hidden Humanities Lecture</b>	<b>Public Sound Performance:</b> Historical Experience and Listening Experience
September 2016 - NC State University <b>Experiencing King at NC State</b>	<b>Walking Tour:</b> Historical Experience, Listening Experience, VR Experience, Simulation Experience, Share Your Creative Protest
Fall/Spring 2015, 2016, 2017 - NC State University <b>COM 110 Public Speaking</b>	<b>Walking Tour:</b> Historical Experience and Listening Experience
February 2015 - NC State University <b>50th Anniversary of “Fill Up the Jails”</b>	<b>Public Sound Performance:</b> Historical Experience and Listening Experience
January 2015 - Online Public Exhibition <b>Official launch of <a href="http://vmlk.chass.ncsu.edu">vmlk.chass.ncsu.edu</a></b>	<b>Online Exhibition:</b> Historical Experience and Listening Experience
June 2014 - Durham, NC <b>Speech re-creation event at White Rock Baptist Church</b>	<b>Public Performance:</b> Historical Experience

## EXHIBITION COMPONENTS

### 01. Collective Sound Experience

On June 8, 2014, scholars from NC State University partnered with the White Rock Baptist Church congregation, the Durham Ministerial Alliance, political leaders, and the surrounding communities to stage a public recreation of the speech. The recordings from that event are the basis for the 3D audio-visual installations of the vMLK project.

The collective sound experience focuses on how sound functions to immerse listeners into a moment in history, providing a sense of how and to what extent an experience of public address is a fully embodied experience. Audiences engage in guided listening of the different sound experiences of King's 1960 speech, "A Creative Protest [Fill up the Jails]."

Technology required: sound system with speakers, preferably able to play 5.1 sound mix. Optionally, large screens are needed for a combined visual and sound performance (preferably able to accommodate up to 280-degree visual surround).



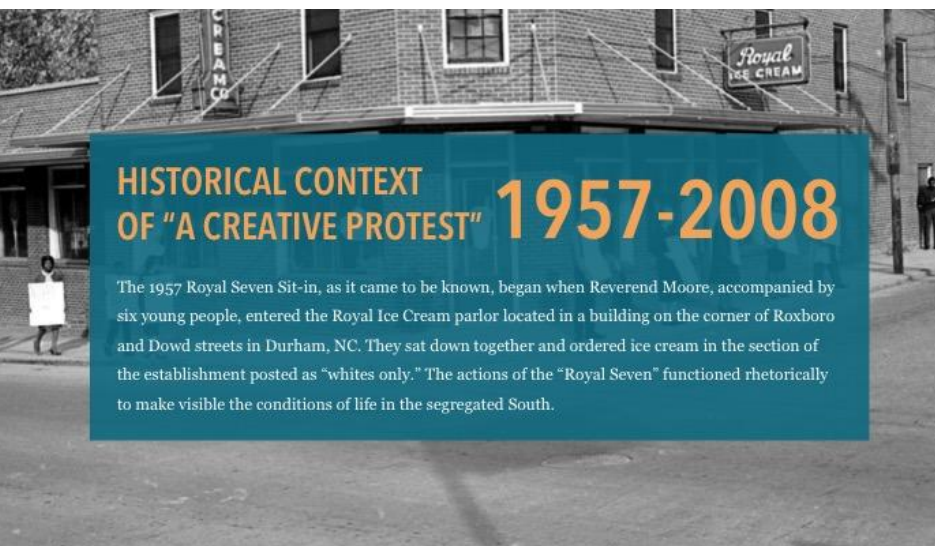
## EXHIBITION COMPONENTS

### 02. Historical Experience

As with many significant events in history, the events that led up to Dr. Martin Luther King's delivery of his speech, "A Creative Protest," in February 1960 are, in some ways, as important as the speech itself. These events help us to understand how this particular speech came to be delivered by this particular person on this particular day in this particular church and city.

Historic archival photographs, research materials and documentaries provide the basis for the visual aspects of the vMLK project. Participants experience a historical timeline for the events leading up to the 1960 speech and its location, a timeline of the development of the vMLK project and an overview of the phases and elements

Technology required: large display screen, directional speakers, computer system (laptop, etc.)



## EXHIBITION COMPONENTS

### 03. Listening Experience

Four professional recordings/sound mixes provide distinct listening experiences of the speech and are helpful for audiences to begin to understand how an individual's position in the room and physical relation to the speaker impacts one's experience of a speech. Additionally, they can view the video of the June 2014 re-enactment given at the new White Rock Baptist Church that is the basis of the project.

Technology required: headphones and computer system (laptop, tablet, mobile device, personal computer, etc.).



## EXHIBITION COMPONENTS

### 04. VR Experience

The Virtual Reality experience provides viewers an embodied sense of what it might have been like to sit, stand, and move around the historic sanctuary, listening to King's speech with others.

Technology required: the VR experience can be made available in two ways: through a mobile device using a VR viewfinder and headphones or through an Oculus Rift headset.



### 05. Simulation Experience

This experience enables viewers to move themselves around the historic sanctuary while listening to the speech using a game controller to do so.

Technology required: gaming computer such as Alienware with headphones (preferably with a game controller).



## EXHIBITION COMPONENTS

## 06. Share Your Creative Protest

Given the multifaceted nature of this project, determination of how to evaluate user experience, particularly successful audience engagement, is also multi-faceted. Audiences/visitors are also encouraged to provide feedback about their experiences of and with the vMLK project by selecting survey items, and/or by providing answers to open ended prompts.

Visitors/audiences to vMLK exhibitions are also invited to share written responses to prompts written in the exhibit space, which include: "A Creative Protest is..." and "An Idea whose time has come...."

Technology required: preferably large whiteboards and markers. Optionally, participants can provide feedback via computer and mobile devices.

## Keep Up with vMLK »

Provide your email address to stay up to date about vMLK events.

## Tell Us About You »

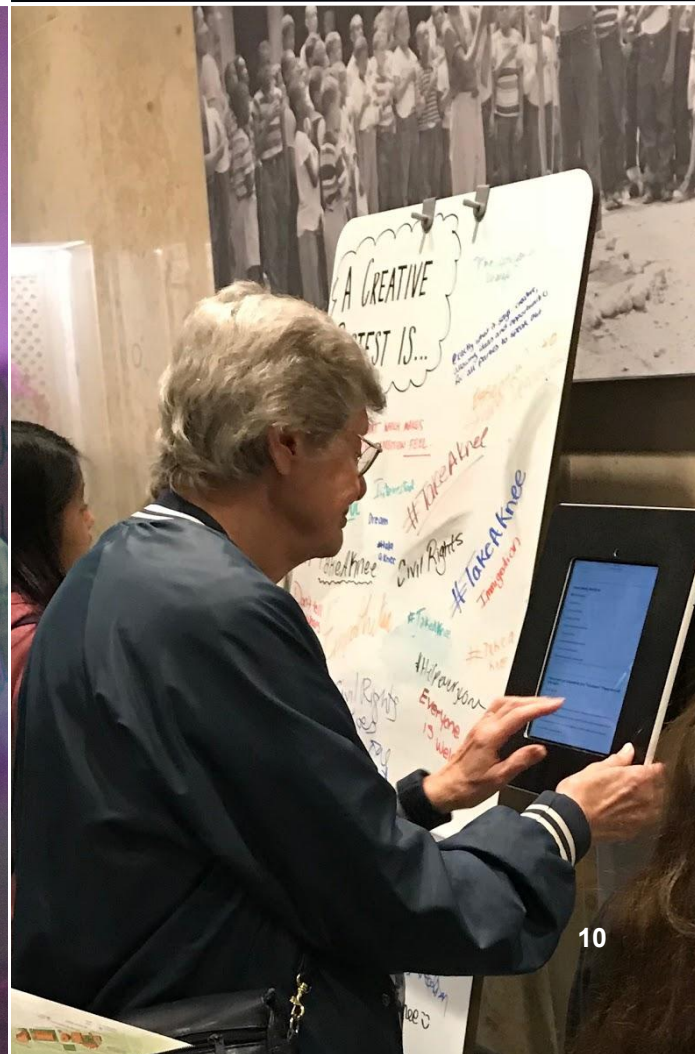
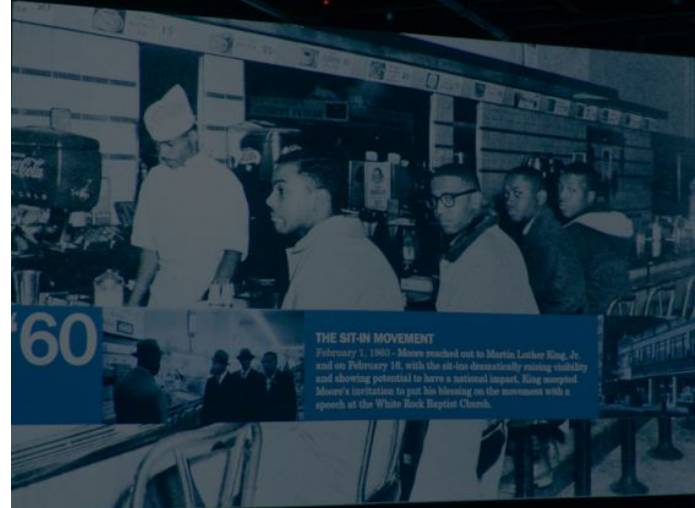
Share information about your background in order to help us understand how to provide immersive experiences of MLK's speech for the public.

## Give Us Feedback »

Tell us what you think about your experience of the vMLK exhibit at the Smithsonian.

## Your Creative Protest »

Share your thoughts on creative and an idea whose time has come.





## VR TOUR & PUBLIC PERFORMANCE

### Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, Washington, D.C.

On October 13-15, 2017, the vMLK Project was featured as part of the ACCcelerate: ACC Smithsonian Creativity and Innovation Festival at the National Museum of American History in Washington, D.C. Through the stations of the vMLK exhibit, publics experienced and interpreted what was, what is, and what has never been in relation to the struggle for full

civic integration and freedom as it unfolded in North Carolina during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 60s. The vMLK Project was located in the Civic Engagement area of the National Museum of American History near the Greensboro Sit-In lunch counter exhibit. Multifaceted experiences included the following: virtual reality headset to see/hear the speech in 3-D, historical timeline, documentaries and archival images about the speech context, listening stations featuring the speech experienced from different auditory perspectives, gaming simulation for digitally moving around the sanctuary while listening to the speech, response and feedback system featuring whiteboards and online surveys.



## WALKING TOUR

# Experiencing King at NC State University

On September 16-17, 2016, Rev. Dr. King's extraordinary impact on the state of North Carolina and our nation's struggle for civil rights was experienced and understood anew at NC State University. The event featured a series of public events, including a Friday evening performance by renowned actors Danny Glover and Felix Justice—as Dr. King and Harlem Renaissance poet Langston Hughes. The event also showcased a conversation with Pulitzer Prize-winner David Garrow, and art work by Synthia SAINT JAMES.

The vMLK project was featured as an immersive, guided and self-guided walking tour at the award-winning James B. Hunt Jr. Library alongside Dr. Jason Miller's documentary film *Origin of the Dream* and audio restoration project *King's First Dream*. Over three hundred people engaged in different visualization stations that included all seven experiences offered by the vMLK project.

The welcome station (Art Wall) included historic photographs of Rev. King speaking in Durham, Raleigh, and Rocky Mount, North Carolina. Using documentary film, the second station (iPearl Immersion Theater) introduced participants to vMLK project, media coverage of Dr. Miller's "Origins of the Dream" scholarship, and the Royal Ice Cream sit-in that took place in Durham, NC. The third station (Game Lab) featured a game-based experience and historical architectural overview of a rich spatial, visual, and audio environment of White Rock Baptist Church where Dr. King delivered "Fill Up the Jails." Outside the Game Lab, participants experienced the same speech through Virtual Reality headsets.

The fourth station (Commons Wall) provided speech text from King's 1960 "Fill Up the Jails" and 1962 "Facing the Challenge of the New Age" speeches. The fifth (Visualization Wall) and sixth (Teaching and Visualization Lab) stations provided an immersive, walk-in, collective experience of King's "Fill Up the Jails" speech. The seventh station (Creativity Studio) provided the historical context and a contemporary timeline of King's speeches and two innovative projects at NC State University. Participants also wrote ideas about their dream and a creative protest.



## PUBLIC PERFORMANCE

# Commemoration of the 55<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Fill Up the Jails" Speech

On February 23, 2015, the vMLK project commemorated the 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s influential "Fill Up the Jails" speech with an immersive audio and historical experience at the James B. Hunt Library. The commemoration honored the legacy, courage, and determination of North Carolinians, especially citizens and activists involved in the Royal Ice Cream sit-in who shaped the context of Dr. King's influential speech. The event featured a demonstration of the second phase of the vMLK project: an interactive website, including audio files and images created from the June 8, 2014 re-enactment of the speech in Durham's White Rock Baptist Church and archival material related to the historical contexts of the speech.





## INTERACTIVE ONLINE EXHIBITION Public Installation at [vmlk.chass.ncsu.edu](http://vmlk.chass.ncsu.edu)

On June 8, 2014, scholars from NC State University partnered with the White Rock Baptist Church congregation, the Durham Ministerial Alliance, political leaders, and the surrounding communities to stage a public recreation of the speech performed by voice actor Mr. Marvin Blanks (who specializes in performing Martin Luther King's speeches). Over 200 people attended the live re-enactment at the new White Rock Baptist Church in Durham, including 10 individuals who were in attendance at the 1960 original speech.

The sound director for the vMLK project captured multiple sound recordings—historical perspective, speaker's perspective from the podium, audience's perspective from the floor, audience's perspective from the balcony, and the reenactment at White Rock Baptist Church—on the day of the event. Additionally, ambient sounds were recorded prior the event and vintage sounds on a historical mic were recorded in a studio the day after the public event. The interactive online public exhibition included the sound recordings, as well as 1) multimedia archive of artifacts important to the locality and narrative of how the speech served as a response to a particular rhetorical problem, 2) contextual history and events that led up to Dr. Martin Luther King's delivery of his speech, 3) and a set of assignments and curricular suggestions for how to incorporate the vMLK Project into classroom instruction.