

# REJECTING VIOLENCE ON THE LANDSCAPE IN LAWRENCE, KANSAS\*

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**ABSTRACT.** Lawrence, Kansas, survived a tumultuous beginning. The young town endured attacks twice, in 1856 and 1863. The second raid, by the guerrilla William Quantrill's troop of more than 400 men, resulted in the deaths of 143 citizens. Lawrence serves as an example of how Americans memorialize unconventional warfare, targeted at citizens, in a material and permanent fashion on the landscape. Small and obscurely placed memorials fill the town, to the point that they have become ordinary. The memorialized landscapes of these tragedies thus display ambivalence toward the past and symbolically reject the loss of lives despite this era's high position in the literature and archival history of the town. Additionally, Lawrence has found alternative sources for its historical identity that do not reflect these tragedies but instead celebrate the city's pioneer establishment. In this article I use a set of methods for reading the memorialized landscape that includes archival and landscape analysis and uncovers the processes that have led to this town's understated and ambivalent memorialization and identity. *Keywords:* guerrilla violence, identity, Kansas, landscape, memory, monuments.

Near dawn on 21 August 1863, Missouri "bushwhackers" set ablaze Lawrence, Kansas, a stronghold of regional antislavery sentiments. By ten o'clock 143 citizens—men, children, and freedmen—were dead. News of the attack immediately spread nationwide, and Lawrence became known as an archetype of the worst side of the U.S. Civil War: guerrilla combat. Local and national literature on the town's history reflects a birth through destruction and the deaths of innocents. Despite the national significance placed on the community's violent past, the memories reified in the town's landscape are ambivalent.

Lawrence's memorialization is significant in two respects. First, it offers an example of how American landscape and memory reflect violence against citizens. Second, it exemplifies how selective memory, expressed through the landscape, conflicts with written history. Owen Dwyer argues that "the narrative content of monuments reflects the types of archival materials that survive, the intentions of their producers, and contemporary memory politics" (2004, 422). Lawrence's historians have produced a narrative that contradicts the landscape.

My concern here is the memorialized landscape and its representation of a pair of guerrilla events that shook the early town in 1856 and 1863. Scholars have consistently asserted that the memorialized landscape is a significant reification of collective memory, sense of place, and community identity and values (Lowenthal 1975, 1985; Foote 1997). They have also shown, however, that memorials are fraught with

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