

Denise Ward-Brown

*Home Going* Artist Statement

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*Home Going* stands at the intersection of art, history and cultural/religious practice. The specific locus of this narrative is the Washington Park Cemetery (WPC); its significance as a symbol of the African American Church and as an autonomous institution founded in a segregated society.

*Home Going* is a set of three video documentaries. The first intertwines the images of a concert held at the Asbury United Methodist Church, the singers and their audience, and video images of WPC. The performers offer their renditions of a variety of traditional funeral music selections; both mournful reverie and joyous celebration of life. Providing a vitality and boldness of Black church music, the audio of this video provides a melodic backdrop that permeates throughout the exhibition of photos and the sculptural installation.

The other two documentaries, situated in small alcoves, provide seating and headphones. This setting offers an intimate experience with the video histories of various constituents connected with WPC: the owner, volunteers, visitors, library archivists and family descendants.

I paraphrase James Baldwin, who says, "History is not even principally about the past. It really is about the present, because our frames of references, our aspirations and how we view the world are shaped by history." As a metaphor, we can view WPC as a complicated history of a collection of individual monuments and of a monument to the St. Louis African American community's struggle for self-determination.

WPC is the final resting place of our collective ancestors. With this exhibition, we honor their noble struggle and fight for dignity and we recognize the unfinished mission of a perpetual care cemetery. The 'unfinished work' here is the on-going work to clean up WPC and metaphorically, to finish the ethical fight for equal citizenship.