

**THE BONFIRE MEMORIAL EXPERIENCE:
AN EXPLORATION OF THE MOTIVATIONS, AFFECTS AND
EXPERIENCES OF SITE VISITORS**

A Senior Scholars Thesis

by

MICHELLE NICOLE CHILES

Submitted to the Office of Undergraduate Research
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the designation as

UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOLAR

April 2010

Major: Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences

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Approved by:

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ABSTRACT

The Bonfire Memorial Experience: An Exploration of the Motivations, Affects and Experiences of Site Visitors. (April 2010)

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Although there has been a large focus on dark tourism in recent times, there is still limited information on the motivation of consumption and the type of experience that is derived from the visit to a dark tourism site. Existing literature lacks a strong theory on why there is a strong draw towards sites of death and destruction. This thesis seeks to add to the literature that is already present on the subject of dark tourism motivations and experiences. It explores the experiences of visitors at the Bonfire Memorial at Texas A&M University and the motivations they have to visit the site. This data will be compared with data collected at the Alamo in San Antonio, TX to draw conclusions about motivations for two different dark tourism sites. There was a theme of wanting to be part of the Texas A&M University community and the desire to feel a connection to the victims that emerged from the Bonfire Memorial interviews. As a result, the Bonfire Memorial led to very different reactions than the Alamo when observed and visited. At the Bonfire Memorial, visitors were silent and observant, while the Alamo visit was social and involved conversations, the consumption of interpretive tours and shopping

for souvenirs. Also, more emotional responses were given to describe experiences at the Bonfire Memorial than were given at the Alamo. The Alamo did not provide as much of a connection for visitors, which is likely due to the “time gap” between the disaster and the visitor experience as well as the difference in motivations to visit the memorial.

From these results, the thesis presents new insights to inform a theory of dark tourism activity motivations that includes a feeling of community and acknowledges the importance of a “time gap” in the experiences of guests and the actual events on which the site is based. The research is set to be used in the consideration of future bonfires to be held on campus with the memory of the victims of the tragedy in mind. It also informs the design and management of memorial sites.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this piece of work to all of those who lost their lives and were injured in the bonfire tragedy. This research has been done to keep the victims and their families in mind when considering the future of bonfire on campus.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge my research advisor, Dr. Ulrike Gretzel, without whom I would have not been able to complete this research process. I would also like to acknowledge my family for the support they provided throughout all of the research that was conducted.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Problem definition

Dark tourism, the presentation and consumption of real and commodified death or destruction (Stone & Sharpley 2008), is becoming a common practice. Although not a new phenomenon, there have been an increasing number of tourists who seek out such experiences, and a growing number of sites and attractions that support this form of tourism have been developed, especially in recent years. This makes this form of tourism an important phenomenon to investigate. Explanations given for the visit of such sites range from, “to pay respects to a loved one who died; to connect to an event that touched them through media coverage or family stories; to learn more about what happened; or simply out of curiosity” (New Scientist 2007). This suggests that visitors have very different reasons to engage in dark tourism and, thus, likely experience dark tourism sites in different ways. Although conclusions have been drawn, there is still very little research and literature on dark tourism motivations. Many different theories have been presented regarding the public’s interest in dark tourism sites but these cannot be applied the same way to all sites regarding death and destruction.

This thesis follows the style of *Journal of Heritage Tourism*.

When faced with large misfortune, commonly a memorial will be constructed to honor those fallen and to respectfully remind visitors of the unfortunate events that took place. Visits to such memorials are an important form of dark tourism. The Bonfire Memorial at Texas A&M University is an example of a frequently visited dark tourism site. My study of the Bonfire Memorial seeks to identify motivations to visit the site. In addition, it also inquires into what role the site has in the life of the visitor through the experience it provides them while visiting, and what effects that has on their attitude, demeanor, and understanding of the history of not only the Bonfire but also of Texas A&M and the Aggie Spirit. Further, it seeks to compare and contrast the Bonfire Memorial visitation experience with the experiences visitors have at the Alamo in San Antonio, TX.

By developing a case study on a dark tourism site, the Bonfire Memorial at Texas A&M University and comparing it to a different type of memorial, the Alamo in San Antonio, TX, a glimpse into the motivations and experiences of tourists that visit dark tourism sites can be provided. Specifically, this study hypothesizes that there are a vast array of motivations that visitors have to visit dark tourism destinations; each site presents different experiences for different people; and, each experience has its own effect on the visitor.

Therefore, the objectives of the study will be to:

- Identify the motivations of the visitors to the Bonfire Memorial
- Identify what the visitors experienced while at the memorial
- Determine if their motivations shaped their experience
- Recognize the emotional and cognitive effects that their experience has on them
- Examine whether the Bonfire Memorial experience is different from a visit to a memorial that represents a more distant event, both in time and space.

The findings obtained through this study will offer insights into the popularity of the Bonfire Memorial and provide an understanding of what it is that visitors experience and take away from their visits. During recent times, with the talk of bringing the Aggie Bonfire back to campus, the research done surrounding the tragedy and the effects it had on people has become very influential. My goal for this study of motivations to visit the memorial as well as the experiences that are taken away from the site is to show the significance the Bonfire Memorial has for Texas A&M University. Considerations for another on-campus bonfire need to include the effects that it will have on the integrity of the memorial as well as the experiences and emotions held by all of the visitors. The study will also be beneficial to Texas A&M University in its efforts to market and manage the memorial site. Further, the study findings will inform the creation and management of dark tourism sites in general, and memorial sites in particular. Most importantly, the results of the study will contribute to the existing literature on dark tourism and help support current theories as well as the development of new ones.

Literature review

Dark tourism has taken place over many centuries, although never labeled as such until more recent times. According to Stone and Sharpley (2008, p. 574), “People have long been drawn purposefully or otherwise, towards sites, attractions or events linked in one way or another with death, suffering, violence or disaster.” Pilgrimages to battle grounds of the first millennium, gladiatorial games and public executions are all reflections of the human want to see displays of torture or despair. These practices have been going on for centuries but because of a change in how death and disaster are handled today (Lennon & Foley, 2000), they are being used more for personal entertainment. Tourists of today have complex motivations for travel, many looking more for the ‘visual’ rather than the ‘authentic’ experiences (Muzaini, Teo & Yeoh, 2007). Boundaries between the message in education and politics and commercialization as tourism products are being blurred (Stone & Sharpley, 2008). That is not to say that the meanings of these visits are not present, but in today's post modern culture, “death has become a commodity for consumption in a global communications market” (Lennon & Foley, 2000, p. 5). The fascination that people hold with death whether through morbid curiosity or out of respect is the factor that brought out the commercialization and exploitation of the seemingly disastrous and distressful events (Stone, 2005b).

Definition of dark tourism

This chapter introduces the subject of ‘dark tourism’, defined by Stone and Sharpley (2008, p. 577) as “the presentation and consumption (by visitors) of real and commodified death and disaster sites.” It has been labeled as a Western phenomenon that has started to occur recently based on unintentional visits due to serendipity and itineraries of tourism companies (Stone & Sharpley, 2008). The term is extremely broad and includes a wide variety of activities, all surrounding the main subject of death or disaster creating a difficulty in pin-pointing what is acceptable and what has become exploited. Sites of war constitute one of the largest categories of tourist attractions in the world. Graveyards, Holocaust sites, prisons, slavery-heritage sites, memorials, etc., are also included in the diverse range of dark tourism attractions (Stone & Sharpley, 2008). Rojek (1993), as cited by Stone and Sharpley (2008, p.578) refers to these dark attractions as “Black Spots” meaning “the commercial development of grave sites and sites in which celebrities or large numbers of people have met with sudden and violent death.” Although these are very sad events and there is grief shared by family and friends for the victims, the Western model of capitalism looks to be the driving force for this commercial development of dark tourism sites.

Types and shades of dark tourism

Dark tourism can be expressed in many different ways, coined as thanatourism (Seaton, 1996), morbid (Blom, 2000), black-spots as referred to by Rojek (1993), as well as ‘milking the macabre’ (Dann, 1998). Thanatourism is the travel form of thanatopsis

meaning, “travel to a location wholly, or partially, motivated by the desire for actual or symbolic encounters with death, particularly, but not excessively, violent death” (Seaton as cited by Stone & Sharpley, 2008, p. 578). There is a range that these visits fall on; the more distance there is between the subjects and victims of the disaster, the purer the form of thanatourism. Referring to Ground Zero, a complete stranger to the World Trade Center area visiting this disaster site and resting ground of the victims is a purer thanatourist compared to a resident of Manhattan who did not know any of the victims of the accident or work in the World Trade Center itself. The resident is tied closer to the victims of the terrorist attack because of the link of the city they lived in together, therefore residents are seen as not visiting completely for the sole purpose of encountering death. It is assumed that a complete stranger would not have any more of a reason to visit without the connection except to symbolically encounter death. As you take another step closer, a family member visiting the Ground Zero would be a less pure form of thanatourism because of the entrance of more emotions, memories and ties they hold with their sons/daughters, brothers/sisters, etc. Seaton (1996) also claims that there are five categories of dark travel activity: (1) for public enactments of death, (2) sites of individual or mass deaths, (3) memorials or internment sites, (4) for symbolic representations of death, and (5) to witness re-enactments. These help to develop reasons for visitation to sites but still do not answer why people are drawn to such events or places. Miles (2002) works to make a little more sense of these actions of visitors by outlining different intensities that can be found in these dark tourism sites. He proposes there are ‘dark’ and ‘darker’ tourism experiences depending on the location of the site,

claiming there are differences between separate sights of death and disaster (Miles, 2002). A visit to the Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C. is just a dark tourism experience when compared to actually visiting Auschwitz-Birkenau. The latter can be viewed as a 'darker' tourism experience because of its relation to the actual event. 'Darkest' tourism takes place according to the recentness of the event to when it was visited or "where past events are transported in live memory through technology" (Miles as cited by Stone & Sharpley, 2008, p. 578). Sharpley (2005) also presents different 'Shades of Darkness' that are dependent on a tourist's interest in death and how the attraction is developed, whether to emphasize the death or emphasize the victim or subject. These two factors work hand in hand to develop the experience of the visitor, the blackest form being an attraction that plays off of the fascination the visitor has for death by putting together a set of experiences that satisfy this interest (Stone & Sharpley, 2008). This experience is a completely commercialized one, no longer holding any meaning or space for one to reflect and determine feelings on one's own.

Influence of technology

Technology has been a key factor in the initial introduction and development of such horrific events to the public, whether through the media or at the sites themselves. The assassination of John F. Kennedy was the first major event that took advantage of global communication technologies (Lennon & Foley, 2000). Television made it possible to keep the public interested in Kennedy and the events surrounding his death. The media has shaped perceptions of what is important within history and what is remembered of

the events. Technology at sites themselves helps to provide the experience for the visitor rather than promoting the use of imagination. In an example at Fort Siloso, “simulations of gun-firing were introduced and ‘sensual’ elements – smell and sound – were also inserted into its exhibits so as to add to visitor’s experiences” (Muzaini, Teo & Yeoh, 2007, p. 35). These representations are being defined in narrative images and feelings, therefore clouding historical reality (Lennon & Foley, 2000). However it is because of these illustrations, interest in the event is developed and visitors become attracted to the sites of the death or disaster. At Fort Siloso, Muzaini, Teo & Yeoh (2007, p. 39) quote a Malaysian visitor saying “it is never boring here because we are constantly surprised by how history is to be handed down next.” He claims that visitors are “pleased with the use of technology” because it is the “new, helped to recall the old” (Muzaini, Teo & Yeoh, 2007, p. 39). Technology is a double edged sword at and for dark tourism sites and attractions, enhancing experiences and increasing knowledge before hand but also may create a more theme park feel of a site (Muzaini, Teo & Yeoh, 2007). Without a doubt, coverage by the mass media and academics has given dark tourism travel a high profile in novelty tourism. With the technological trends of today, the future of dark tourism favors technology in public awareness of sites as attractions (Seaton & Lennon, 2004). Technology tends to bridge the gap for historical monuments that are constructed at sites other than the original disaster site. The Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C. is a prime example of the way technology can enhance experiences of visitors, but also “technology is defining the reality of the visitor’s experience” (Lennon & Foley, 2000, p. 152). At the Holocaust Museum, the purpose is defined by the interpreters, in the way

US citizens have been educated about Nazi Germany and World War II. In its mission it has warped the actual events experienced by Jews to make it more attractive and engaging to visitors. Lennon & Foley (2000) give an example of visitors coming to attain a 'Jewish identity' when entering the museum; during the Holocaust, Jews often risked their lives just to find false non-Jewish papers. With the use of technology there is an enhancement to the subject and museum but it also creates a disconnect between history and reality. Also, technology has taken dark tourism sites on the web, creating experiences through cyberspace. Traumascaping has been developed for cyber-tourism for sites that cannot be reached easily, sites that have been altered, or sites that are no longer existent (Kaelber, 2007). Virtual reality applications can create close to the same experience as visits in person to a site by seeing and hearing everything, as well as having the balance and direction, movement, and pain/wellness senses. This is a relatively new type of technology but is currently being used by the State Museum of Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Motivations for dark tourism

Dark tourism sites are sought out by visitors who make a conscious effort to go. A plethora of motivations have been presented as to the reason why people visit sites of death, disaster and destruction. There has not been a concrete set of motivations however, that can explain the need of tourists to seek out dark tourism activities and attractions. Lennon (2005) presents the question asking if dark sites are popular basically because of tourist fascination for death or if there are other reasons for their

visit. Dann (1998) as cited by Stone and Sharpley (2008, p. 584) proposes that motives for this consumption are due to 'fear of phantoms', referring to childlike fears, "a search for novelty/difference, or a more basic 'bloodlust'." Rojek (1997) also shares his idea that tourists may desire dark sites because of a fragmented sense of cultural and social identity. Motivations differ by the type of sites that they are, who is going to visit, the type of society that has molded views and ideas of its residents. For example, "dark tourism has wider and fundamental implications for contemporary (western) society, especially with regards to the 'death process' within those societies" (Stone, 2005b, p.114). These motivations have created the argument of whether or not this form of tourism is either demand or supply driven (Stone, 2005a). Have there been more opportunities for sights to be created because of the amount of disaster that has taken place, or has it been highlighted because of a growing interest tourists have in these sights? One of the biggest motivation theories that Stone and Sharpley (2008) claim stems from a disconnect our post modern society has with death. Because of technology's representation of death, we consciously and subconsciously consume death and suffering everyday but it no longer holds the meaning that it developed in the past. This subject has not always been in discussions in the past, somewhat of a taboo within society. Stone and Sharpley (2008) conclude that a reason people have an intrinsic pull towards these sites is due to the separation that has taken place since it became an unspeakable topic. Death is a scary concept to grasp and deal with and without an outlet for anxieties a deeper separation occurs because of the refusal to deal with the feelings. "The presence of death themes in popular culture and the treatment of mortality as an

entertainment commodity is simply a way of bringing death back into the social consciousness” (Stone & Sharpley, 2008, p. 585). Dark tourism has a way of helping visitors confront the inevitability of their death but also give visitors a false sense of reality that they have control on when their life will end. “Both sensitizing and sanitizing death allows individuals to view their own death as distant...” (Stone & Sharpley, 2008, p. 587). This contemplation of death is known as ‘thanatopsis’. Seaton and Lennon (2004) explain this subject by stating historically death was known to be everyone’s fate, therefore meditation and interest in the subject was expected. This feeling is what may bring visitors to memorials when they do not have any tie to anyone or anything that was involved. Through this contemplation and curiosity, tourists may unintentionally leave with meanings of mortality without meaning to contemplate death in the first place (Stone & Sharpley, 2008).

Motivations thrive on the shades and intensities of dark tourism and dark tourism activity that were mentioned before. A motivation to visit a memorial compared to a motivation to visit a house of a serial killer hold different weight in the minds of different people. On her reasoning to visit the graves of people she has never met, Cristina Lugo, member of the ‘Cemetery Girls’, claims, “It’s almost like church for me... It’s a reminder that life is precious” (Ravitz, 2009). Stone and Sharpley (2008) sum up their view on the motivations for dark tourism activity in three different theories. They claim that dark tourism brings back death into the public and therefore closing the separation that has been created. Secondly, by consuming these dark tourism sites,

visitors become neutralized towards the subject. Lastly, a meaning system is constructed for individuals making them capable of confronting the inevitability of death at a 'safe distance'. The basic premise is the fact that there is no understood answer as to why people are motivated to visit sites that bring out this large amount of emotions and feelings. According to several sources of literature, there are many different theories of motivations for dark tourism activity including what has been discussed, which is where study in dark tourism reaches an end. The subject is still too young with too little literature and empirical research to reach an educated conclusion.

Dark tourism and memorials

Memorials play an integral part in dark tourism and dark tourism studies.

Commemorating events of destruction and death, memorials hold in them meaning to family, friends, or anyone that feels connected in some way to the incident. Shortly after occurrences of tragedies, shrines begin to appear out of respect, remembrance, reverence, etc. for the victims. When taking the World Trade Center collapse site as an example, "Union Square... became a sacred space through the creation of spontaneous memorials..." (Low, 2004, p. 329). Places to relieve grief and emotional baggage for the event will create themselves making the importance of immovable memorials very high. This has been seen with local people leaving flowers and candles at prominent sites around the Columbine campus (Grider, 2007) and flowers on the fence surrounding the site of the Oklahoma City bombing (Low, 2004). "Conventional spontaneous shrines generally consist primarily of candles, flowers, stuffed animals, balloons,

photographs, notes and messages, and personal or idiosyncratic items...” (Grider, 2007, p. 4). Eventually, most spontaneous memorials become a more permanent site in order to forever commemorate the victims of the disaster.

Memorials can vary in locations, many occurring at the actual site of the disaster.

However, they may not necessarily be where a victim will reside after death. Gravesites serve the same purpose of larger memorials, a tribute to the life of a person individually, but can be considered a planned final resting place for the deceased. Memorials and gravesites serve as a more meaningful and powerful way to face the idea and reality of death (Stone & Sharpley, 2008). Reactions to these tragedies and sites differ between persons; depending on what previous experiences they have had (Low, 2004). Memorial development does not try to place blame but instead leave interpretation open out of respect for visitors. In his travels to gravesites, Jim Tipton, founder of ‘Find a Grave’ database of burial sites for the famous, states, “It does sound morbid and dark. But when you’re actually visiting someone’s grave, it’s like visiting a relative; there’s a closeness there” (Ravitz, 2009). This is one of the major differences that memorials and cemeteries provide for visitors, the emotional connection to the victims. “It can be a form of entertainment and inspiration, a history and architecture lesson, a cultural appreciation course, a genealogical journey and a source of relaxation” (Ravitz, 2009).

Background

Texas Aggie Bonfire

The year of 1907 was the first of 89 years of bonfire, built by students at the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas throwing together a trash pile in order to welcome home their football team from their football game and to congratulate them on their win. Then 1909 brought the first official and planned bonfire to campus which started a nine decade tradition. Over 90 years, bonfire evolved from a small trash pile into an unorganized pile of wood into a teepee style stacking of logs into a layered wedding cake style design using large tree trunks. Each bonfire was built in order to burn before the annual showdown between the Aggies and the University of Texas Longhorns the week of Thanksgiving. It was said that if the bonfire fell after midnight, the team was going to win the next day. Bonfire was symbolic of every Aggie's burning desire to beat the University of Texas, and the undying flame of love that every loyal Aggie carries in his heart for the school (Colloff, 2009, p. 92). "In keeping with A&M's belief that Aggies should learn as much outside the classroom as they do in it, the arduous task of constructing Bonfire was left entirely to students" (Colloff, 2009, p. 92). Because of the students' endeavor to keep the bonfire up as long as possible while burning, the bonfire grew in size, reaching its tallest height in 1969 of 109 feet setting a world record. The night of 'burn' was complete with a traditional Aggie yell practice followed by the lighting of the bonfire. The lighting ceremony consisted of the singing of the "Spirit of Aggieland", the alma mater of the university, followed by the reading of "The Last Corps Trip". Over its 90 year life, bonfire was burned every year but one other than the

year of the collapse. In order to respect the assassination of President Kennedy, the 1963 bonfire was taken down, log by log. There was very limited control of adults or professionals on the entire project because it was a time for the students to learn and grow as a family and develop the leadership skills they would need after graduation. The leaders and supervisors of construction were the 'Red Pots' and they were assisted by an array of other groups, who were assigned responsibilities based on the color of their 'pots'. The building and burning of bonfire happened in three different phases, Cut, Stack and Burn. Cut took place in surrounding areas where dead groves of trees needed to be cleared out on the land. Although a very long process, bonfire was not about the burning of the stack, it was about the leadership, hard work and camaraderie that was built within the students during their work to get it built.

The morning of November 18, 1999 was just like any other, students all over stack pushing to get yet another layer completed. Just a few minutes after 2:30 am a loud creak came from the stack as the logs surrounding the center pole began to shift and lean. Several students on and around the stack could feel and see this movement but had almost no time to react or respond. The stack was beginning to collapse crushing the ground, the students, and all of the work that had been put into building it. Of the students working on and around the stack, the collapse injured twenty-seven and took the lives of twelve. The hours following contained everyone on campus and in the area coming out to help in the clean up and the search for students. Some began to leave mementoes at the fence to help give back to the students who worked so hard and fell so

hard during the collapse. Items such as 12th Man Towels, flowers, candles, Aggie Rings, Senior Corps boots, a diploma, a case of Pearl beer, axes, poems and messages, etc. were left in memory of those who gave their life (Grider as cited by Colloff, 2009, p.178).

The days following the collapse were filled with memorial services and vigils commemorating all of those involved, injured and killed, and bonding the Aggie family over one of the most tragic event that Texas A&M University had seen in its history. Thanksgiving night in 1999 was filled with the flicker of candlelight coming from the 70,000 flames that burned with each person attending the vigil held in remembrance of those who perished. Although bonfire did not burn literally that year, it burned with each candle that was lit.

The next step in the mourning and grieving of the Aggie family was to forever memorialize the brave souls that gave their lives for this 90 year tradition. In 2002, three years after the collapse, a final design for a memorial was chosen among over 200 entries. The design that was chosen came from a San Antonio architectural firm, Overland Partners, Inc., created by former Aggie, Robert Shemwell '82. The memorial was constructed at the exact spot that the bonfire fell in 1999 and would contain twelve portals for the lives of those who lost their lives, connected by twenty-seven granite stones to symbolize the twenty-seven that were injured. The diameter of the grass lawn within the memorial is the exact diameter of the bottom layer of the 1999 bonfire. A black granite circular stone etched with the date and time of the collapse, *11-18-1999 2:42 a.m.*, was placed at the very spot that the center pole, the main support for bonfire,

resided. From that point in the memorial, looking through each portal orients you towards the hometown of the fallen. Figure 1 shows an example of the portals are bronze structures containing the face of the student and includes quotes, stories, words from letters, etc. that help to immortalize their life.



Figure 1. Bronze portal of a victim at the Bonfire Memorial.
Source: Author

All of these pieces come together as the third part of the three part design concept, known as “Spirit Ring”(Bonfire Memorial 2009). Entering into the memorial, you walk into “Tradition Plaza”, containing a large granite wall with the poem “The Last Corps Trip” engraved in it (Bonfire Memorial 2009). This wall serves as a barrier between the outside world and the peace and intimacy of the memorial (bonfire.tamu.edu). As you walk down the path leading to the Spirit Ring, you walk along 89 granite stones that symbolize the 89 years of Aggie Bonfire leading to the 1999 collapse. This is known as “History Walk”(Bonfire Memorial 2009). Each stone has the 11/12th of the block taken out and to symbolize the month of November and has an amber light set inside to

symbolize the glow of bonfire that year as shown by Figure 2. There is only one year where a granite stone does not reside and instead a black slab holds the place of 1963, the year that President Kennedy was assassinated. This was the only other year that bonfire did not burn. Three other bonfire related deaths are recognized with bronze plaques in the years of 1955, 1982 and 1996 (Bonfire Memorial 2009).



Figure 2. Picture of granite block on timeline with amber light inside.
Source: Author

All of those large components make up the three areas held within the bonfire memorial, but there are several other pieces that hold to not just bonfire but to Texas A&M University. The gravel that was laid for the paths throughout was used in order to provide ‘light noise’ while visitors are walking through. This noise is enough to keep people aware of anyone around or behind them, but still light enough to not detract from the intimacy of the memorial. The hill lining the side of the memorial was constructed in order to keep the memorial sacred by blocking views. Every piece is held together by gravity; no epoxy, cement or glue was used in the construction. As History Walk

approaches Spirit Ring, the path begins to narrow in order to symbolize the coming together of the Aggie family. Each of the portals contains a 16 foot granite piece and a 12 foot bronze piece inserted inside, symbolizing that the Aggies who were killed did not reach their full potential in life. Lastly, the two components of granite and bronze that are used each hold their own symbols as well. All bronze was used to symbolize those who were injured or who perished and all granite used is to symbolize Aggie life. Each piece means something, not only to the families and friends of those who were involved, but to the whole Aggie family.

The Bonfire Memorial is cared for and maintained by Texas A&M University and the on-campus service organization MSC Hospitality. The latter offers guided tours upon request and also provide brochures at the entrance of the memorial to support self-guided tours. The memorial was designed in order to be accessed at any time, day or night. Visiting during the day provides the best lighting to read and look at all of the portals, but visiting at night provides a different experience with the lighting that was included in the design.

The main website that serves as a remembrance website for the Bonfire Memorial is bonfire.tamu.edu. Here visitors can find the history of Aggie Bonfire, video highlights for the 10-year anniversary of the collapse, descriptions of the design and other items that relate to Texas A&M University. The Convention and Visitors Bureau does support the memorial and will provide information and directions to visitors new to the area

inquiring about what there is to do in the Bryan/College Station area. They also promote the memorial in their brochure as well as on their webpage as an attraction that can be found within Texas A&M University.

What sets this memorial aside from many other tourism attractions is the lack of merchandise and souvenirs. There is no place at the actual site to house such objects and the closest place to find Aggie memorabilia is at a bookstore off-campus. It has not been until recently that bonfire memorabilia could be found at the bookstores other than small wooden figurines of the burning stack. The MSC Bookstore is now carrying Bonfire Remembrance shirts as well as a tribute DVD with a documentary on the bonfire collapse and the annual Texas A&M and University of Texas football game of 1999. Artist and Texas A&M graduate Benjamin Knox is also very well known for his depictions of the Aggie Bonfire through his artwork. Several pictures of the burning stack can be purchased through his studio in College Station or on his website.

The Alamo

The battle of the Alamo, although a loss to the Texans, was an incredible symbol of patriotic sacrifice held within Texas history. The original name of the mission was Misión San Antonio de Valero, and it served as a seventy year home for missionaries with Native American converts (www.thealamo.org). The Alamo was first occupied by the Spanish military that were then forced out by Ben Milam and Tejano and Texian volunteers. From that point forward, the Alamo served as headquarters for the

volunteers of the Texas Revolution. The mission remained threatened by the Mexican military and General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna's army. The date of February 23, 1836 was the first point at which Santa Anna and his army infiltrated the city of San Antonio. Although the Texans were only a fraction of the troops brought by Santa Anna, when demanded to surrender, Colonel William Travis responded with a cannonball (www.tshaonline.org). From that point forward, the Alamo defenders were thrown into a 13 day battle against Mexican forces. Colonel Travis sent several couriers pleading for help from surrounding communities only receiving approximately 32 additional men. The Texas defenders totaled only about two hundred.

Santa Anna's troops executed their final assault on March 6, 1836, beginning at 5 a.m. This last attack allowed the Mexican forces to penetrate the mission where they overpowered the Texans and gained control of the entire post. Every man within the compound on the defenders' side was killed with exception of seven, including within that number the infamous Davy Crockett. Ongoing research has found that there were nearly 257 men that lay dead after the battle (www.tshaonline.org). Although outnumbered, an estimated 600 men from Santa Anna's troops were killed during the struggle for the Alamo. Also, the delay of the Mexican Army at the battle of the Alamo made it possible for a drafting of a constitution and the formation of a revolutionary government. Although a technical loss in the Texas Revolution, the battle of the Alamo provided time for the ultimate win of the Texas Revolution for Texans and Americans.

Today the Alamo still stands in its original spot, in the middle of downtown San Antonio. The Daughters of the Republic of Texas have managed the old mission since 1905. The design of the front of the chapel that resided in the complex has now become an iconic asset to the mission as well as the city of San Antonio. Although only a small part of the entire mission in 1836, the chapel is now the front focal point of what is known as the Alamo today and is used in many promotional materials as well as on souvenirs sold throughout the city. The mission is also the source of the nickname of San Antonio as “the Alamo City”. The front view of the Alamo can be seen in Figure 3.



Figure 3. Front view of the Alamo.
Source: Author

There are three main areas contained within the walls including the Shrine, the Long Barrack Museum and the Gift Museum. Every year close to 2.5 million people visit the Alamo to see the symbolic form of the “...courage and sacrifice for the cause of Liberty” (www.thealamo.org). The mission is open every day of the year except Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, Monday through Saturday from 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. and Sunday

from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. There is no charge to enter the Alamo and visitors have the option to take a guided tour or walk through themselves. At several spots within the mission, curators present the stories of the battle and help to highlight what the heroes of the Alamo did for Texas. Brochures are offered at the very front entrances to provide a history and map for those going on self-guided tours as well as a list of the 'Heroes of the Alamo'. Within the mission there is a gift shop towards the middle of the complex that was built in 1936 as the 'Sales Museum', marked on Figure 4. Along with rocks, books, shirts, etc. that the Sales Museum holds in the gift shop, it also presents exhibits on Texas History. Also, throughout the grounds soda and snack machines can be found in order to nourish visitors that have been spending a lot of time within the walls. The Alamo is one of the major tourist attractions of San Antonio and is promoted not only by the San Antonio Convention and Visitors Bureau, but also by the state of Texas through the Office of the Governor, Economic Development and Tourism. There are a large amount of foreign tourists, mainly from Mexico, that visit the Alamo each day. Because of the size of the city and the importance of the role of the Alamo in Texas history, there are many promotional opportunities for the mission.

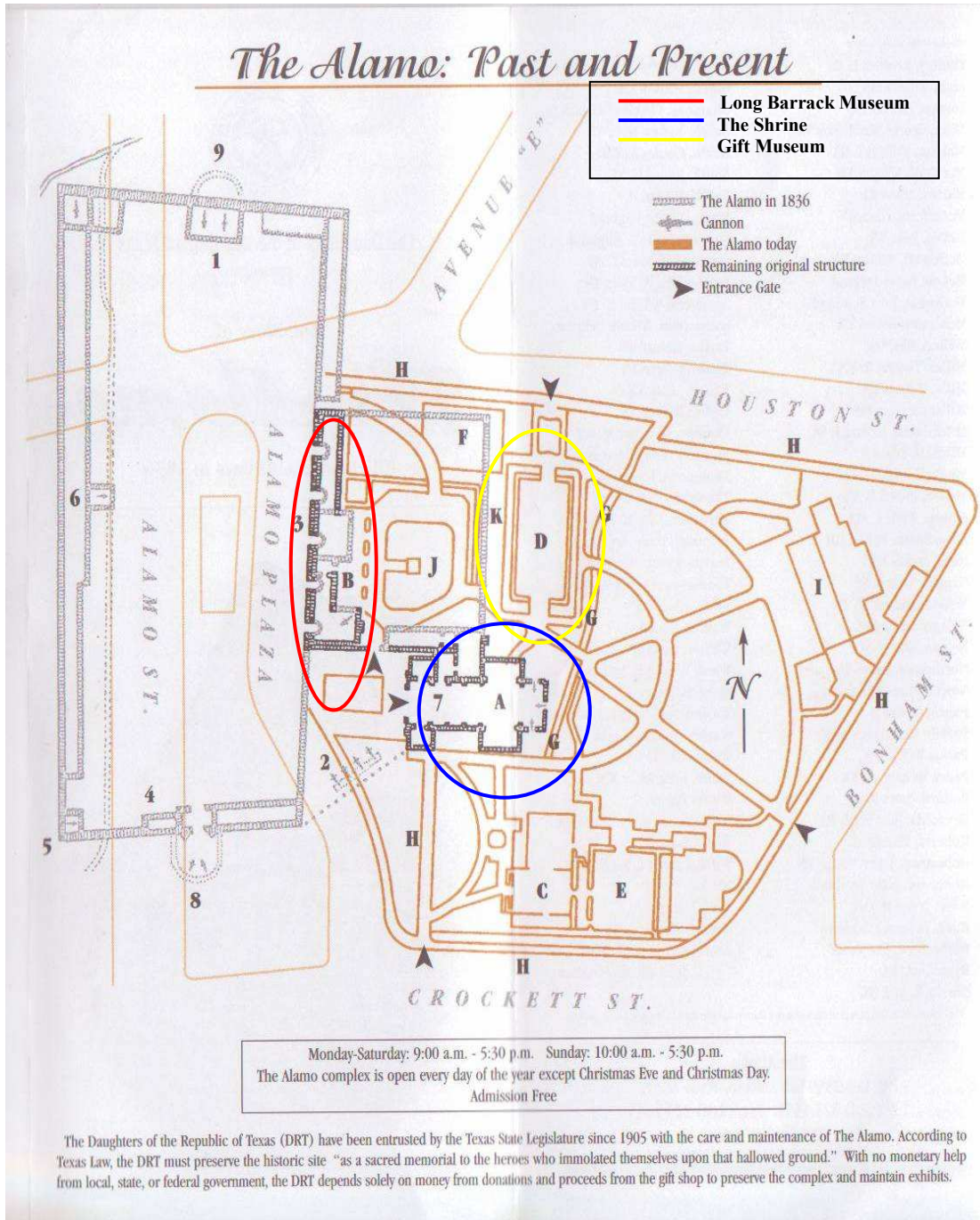


Figure 4. Internal map of the Alamo with the Long Barrack Museum, the Shrine and the Gift Museum marked.
Source: Author

Comparison

Although both were established in order to honor those who had fallen in those spots, the two sites fall on opposite ends of a spectrum of memorials. First we must look at the location of the two memorials. The Bonfire Memorial is on the campus of Texas A&M University, known around Texas but not much beyond those boundaries. Also, being centered in a very seasonal city that is not large in size takes away from the possible opportunities of promotion that a large city such as San Antonio has. Therefore, naturally, the Alamo has a larger base of tourists that visit the site than the Bonfire Memorial. What must also be considered pertaining to the size of the area it is in is the number of people that feel connected to the tragedy and destruction that occurred. It is common for most tourists to have gone through some form of Texas history whether it is through an actual class or through an American history class. Most are aware of Texas' struggle for independence and make it a point to visit the mission if they are visiting San Antonio. The city is a tourist destination in and of itself therefore helping to provide tourists that may be focused on other aspects of the city a chance to see the Alamo as well. Most visitors to Texas A&M are there because of some connection to the university. Although a much trafficked memorial, the Bonfire Memorial does not compare to the large number of visitors at the Alamo. A trend of former students, family members of graduates, current students, or the families of the fallen appear among the visitors to the Bonfire Memorial. Outside of the Aggie Network, the larger population is typically not aware of the bonfire collapse, much less the memorial that resides in the place of the tragedy.

This year marked the 10 year anniversary of the bonfire collapse and the six year anniversary of the Bonfire Memorial itself. Although removed in time by several classes of students, the memorial and the event are very young in the history of Texas A&M. The event of the collapse still holds great meaning to the university because of its recent nature and most former students from the time of the collapse and before who still remember the burn of the bonfire the night before the football game, the hard work it took to build the stack, and the looks of terror that people held when the stack lay lifeless on the polo fields, are still alive and active alumni. It has been nearly 200 years since the Battle of the Alamo and the development of downtown San Antonio does not help to keep the feeling of the battle ground sacred. It can also be said that meaning has been lost in the time gap that now resides between the event and today. There are no longer citizens from the day of the battle alive, therefore making historical information a tale that has been passed down over the centuries unless it was written down. The historical integrity of the events differs in the two memorials because of the time gaps they both possess and the media available at the time of the tragedy. However, as years go on, the stories of the bonfire may not be forgotten but may still become skewed as it becomes a more distant tradition.

Although both sites have been established as memorials to those that have perished on their grounds, there is a difference in the reason for the development of the structures that reside at each place and the people who are actually memorialized. The Alamo was built and developed in 1724 and served the purpose of a mission for the Spanish Military

and Texians. What is known as the Alamo today was the chapel within the mission and has since only been reshaped in order to look cleaner. Also, because of the historical value of the building, this may be a draw for visitors other than the Battle of the Alamo. There has been landscaping and maintenance development that has taken place, but the site itself was created for a completely different reason than a memorial. Also, the battle of the Alamo claimed hundreds of lives, but individual representations cannot be found within the memorial. Three men of the hundreds served the Alamo at a higher level and are recognized by name throughout tours and presentations. All of the other Texians who gave their lives are remembered with the presentation of their names on the far wall along with flags from where they came from and the printing of their names in the site brochure. The Bonfire Memorial on the other hand was developed for the sole purpose of memorializing those who had fallen individually, all 12 students. Each part has the purpose to symbolize Texas A&M and what the bonfire meant as well as provide a place of reflection. Most visitors to the site are there in order to focus their attention on those who are memorialized and do not have much else to take away from what is seen. Each fallen student has their own portrait and representation of their lives and character, and nothing else goes into detail throughout the entire memorial. Of those who were wounded a small piece of bronze is placed in their honor but they are not named.

What may be the most important difference between the two memorials is the commercialization that they have both been exposed to. The Alamo is almost the center of downtown San Antonio; therefore it is constantly exposed to vendors, shoppers, and

tourists expecting to spend money. Immediately outside the grounds of the front entrance of the mission, snow cone vendors are set up at each corner, and there are even vending machines within the walls of the mission itself. The gift shop provides a large amount of revenue as well going towards the payment of the employees to the Alamo as well as towards maintenance and landscaping. The site has become a large commodity for the city while being a tourist attraction at the same time. There are several attractions that surround the Alamo as well including a *Ripley's Believe It or Not* museum, an interactive theatre that tells the story of the Battle of the Alamo, along with many stores, shops, restaurants and hotels that also absorb tourist attention. One of the most intriguing attractions that can be found right across from the Alamo is *Ripley's Haunted Adventure* which is also considered a dark tourism site. In comparison to the Alamo, a completely different meaning of dark tourism appears. Rather than memorializing those who have died in a tragedy, the goal of the Haunted Adventure is to scare visitors with a death like theme. Even before you enter you encounter a ghoulish looking employee that will say comments in order to heckle tourists passing by. This example shows the extreme and intentional commercialization of death and tragedy. On the other hand, the Bonfire Memorial does not need any commercialization and is not surrounded by the spending of money or other attractions to detract visitor attention. The atmosphere plays a role in the feeling of the memorial and considering its subtlety to the area, it would not be normal to see it become commercialized. Its location on the Texas A&M campus also restricts commercial development immediately around the memorial, giving it a buffer zone from the more developed areas. Also, the event of the bonfire collapse was

not as large of a tragedy as the Battle of the Alamo making it possible to draw the conclusion that people do not feel the need to take away a part of the Bonfire Memorial like they may do for the Alamo. As was stated before, there are small figurines and pictures depicting the burning of bonfire every year, but those were sold before the tragedy of the collapse took place therefore not commercializing the memorial. Bonfire was a 90-year tradition to the university so these objects that are sold help as a symbol for former students and alumni. The t-shirts that are now being sold for Bonfire Remembrance have 100% of their proceeds going toward the Bonfire Memorial scholarship that will help give back to the students of Texas A&M.

Both sites hold their own meanings and their own experiences, but in the end they both serve a purpose to highlight the lives of those who perished in the tragedies. Because of their location being at the site they both contain a large amount of emotion to anyone interested in the history. It can be seen however that there is not a black and white explanation of what a memorial is, much less why one feels motivated to visit and how they are affected by it.

CHAPTER II

METHODS

This chapter describes the methodology used for the study. An introduction to qualitative research is presented to explain the importance of using this type of research for the current study. The process of data collection followed by the analysis approach is explained. Lastly, there is a discussion of the assumptions and bias held by the researcher.

For this study on the motivations of tourists to go to dark tourism sites, a qualitative approach is used to allow for the inclusion of emotions and the human aspect in the research. There is not much research done on the subject of dark tourism and the motivations that drive visitors, therefore there is a need for research that helps with theory building rather than theory testing. One of the conventional views of science is that “Science is an activity that is individualistic and mentalistic” (Woolgar, 1996, pp. 13), meaning that it is a cognitive process. However, it actually is a social process. Qualitative research is used to reach into the social aspect of science. The questions that are being asked in this study cannot be answered by quantitative methods because of the relationship that must be formed between the researcher and the participant. In qualitative research, attention is drawn towards making sense of the outside world (Woolgar, 1996). Since the field of dark tourism is rather new, such deep sense-making through qualitative research is needed.

In qualitative research, data collection can be stopped once it has reached the point of ‘saturation’ (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.136). At that point, interviews add no new information to the categories developed and no new conclusions can be drawn since there is no variability. Therefore, sample sizes are not determined in advance when conducting qualitative research. Although with qualitative research it is more difficult to include a large sample compared to quantitative research, it provides more detail in answers. With this level of detail included in answers, conclusions can be drawn from tone of voice, action during interviews, and even how questions are answered. Further, large samples are not needed as the goal is not generalization to a large population but rather gaining deep insights into the topic at hand. The goal of this study was to capture different kinds of motivations to visit dark tourism sites and ways to experience memorials and not to measure the proportion of visitors to the sites who actually have a certain motivation or experience.

Data collection

Bonfire Memorial

Data was collected between May 1, 2009 and November 24, 2009 through observations and semi-structured interviews. Observations consisted of a walk through the bonfire memorial site followed by the researcher strategically sitting within the Spirit Ring of the memorial to capture the actions and expressions of the visitors as they viewed the portals of the victims. There was no interaction with visitors during this step of the

process. All visitors that were present during my five visits to the Bonfire Memorial between May 1 and May 14 were included in the observations that were taken. There was no selection process. Notes were taken on the actions and expressions.

Interviews began on May 15, 2009 at the site of the Bonfire Memorial on the major weekends of spring and fall graduation and during the week after the tenth anniversary of the bonfire collapse. Graduation weekends were selected because of the large inflow of visitors for those ceremonies. Interviews were conducted between 9 am and 12 pm on Friday, May 15 and Saturday May 16 and Sunday, August 16. The week after the anniversary of the collapse was the week of Thanksgiving as well as the annual Lone Star Showdown football game between Texas A&M University and the University of Texas. Wednesday, November 25 was used to collect interviews of visitors that were in College Station for Thanksgiving and the football game. The hours were again from 9 am to 12 pm. A total of 12 hours were taken to collect over 20 interviews. Visitors were asked if they were willing to participate in the study as they left the memorial between the History Walk and Tradition Plaza. Again, there was no selection process for participants in the interviews. Almost all visitors asked to participate consented to the interview process, with the exception of 3 groups. All participants were given the option to sit or stand during the interview. Most interviews were conducted in groups, offering a chance for any member of the party to interject an answer to any of the questions. The population of the visitors consisted of former students seeing the memorial for the first time, current students accompanied by family members who have

never visited the memorial, current students visiting the memorial for the first time, and family members unaccompanied by current students. Although a tour is offered through MSC Hospitality, none of the participants were aware of the tour nor been a part of one. There was a mix of ethnicities that participated in interviews including African-American, Hispanic, but the majority Caucasian, including one mother and son who were from Holland. Ages of interviewees ranged from young adult to retirees. There was an even dispersion of gender in the interviews; many were mixed gender groups. The average size of the groups consisted of three interviewees.

A total of 21 interviews were conducted with consent to use an audio recording device and ranged from 5 minutes to 23 minutes, determined by the visitors' elaboration on each question and any extra stories or additions they included in the interview. No personal information was recorded. Interviews were semi-structured, focused on but not limited to six main questions regarding motivations to visit the memorial, awareness of the symbolism, a description of their experience to the site, and their likes and dislikes of the memorial. Questions would differ according to the participants and their previous experience with Texas A&M. Not all questions had to be asked if they were answered throughout the course of the interview. Also, other questions were asked in order to include the knowledge and familiarity the participants already had with the memorial. After the first day of interviews, the researcher was able to identify areas that needed to be discussed deeper as well as redundancy of questions, therefore restructuring the questions to aid in discussion.

Relationships were developed with participants through the researcher's affiliation with Texas A&M University. The researcher is a 21-year old, Caucasian female undergraduate student at the university, providing the background knowledge of the historical tradition of bonfire and the Bonfire Memorial. The researcher would provide a quick overview of the study to lead into the interviews, and follow-up the interviews with discussion about her history with Texas A&M and additional knowledge of the memorial or the university.

The Alamo

Observations and interviews took place on August 13, 2009 over the course of four hours. The researcher took observations while walking through the entire site during the first hour, taking notes of the actions of the visitors to the mission. In order to take inventory of the attractions of the site, she sat through a piece of a history presentation, walked through the exhibits and through the gift shop. Because of the regulations of the Alamo, no interaction of any kind was made with the visitors regarding interview questions. All who were within the grounds of the mission during the respective time were included in the observations.

Interviews were conducted over a three hour time period during the same day as observations, off of the grounds of the Alamo due to the regulations of the Daughters of the Republic of Texas. The researcher set up across the street from the Alamo, around the trees in order to provide shade and a place to sit for participants of the interviews.

Targeting visitors leaving the mission, she would approach groups to explain the process and reason of the research followed by requesting consent to the interviews. The majority of the participants in the interview were tourists to the San Antonio area traveling in groups to visit the mission and had been to the Alamo in previous years. Out of 25 – 30 inquiries, eight consented to the interview process. All of those interviewed were families or couples in San Antonio as tourists, several coming from out of state. Ages of interviewees at the Alamo ranged from mid-twenties to early forties. The majority of participants were of the Caucasian ethnicity, but there was one that was Hispanic. There was an even mix of genders included in the interviews, with many groups consisting of mixed genders. There was difficulty in collecting data because of the diversity faced in downtown San Antonio. The language barrier was the largest obstacle in conducting the interviews. Of those who participated, 50% had been involved in a tour provided by the Alamo the day of as well as in previous years while visiting the site.

As was stated, eight interviews were conducted with consent to use an audio recording device and ranged between 3 – 10 minutes. No personal information was taken during the interview in accordance with the process taken for the interviews held at the Bonfire Memorial. Again, the interviews were semi-structured with an outline of questions that reflected the questions asked at the Bonfire Memorial. Not all questions were asked determined by the answers that were provided and different questions were added to the outline based on the previous experience the participant had. Rapport was developed

throughout the interviews by sharing stories of previous visits to the Alamo as well as hometown information.

Data analysis

Data analysis began with the transcription of all digital recordings that took place into a word document. Half of the interviews were transcribed by the researcher and the other half were transcribed by a contracted transcribing company, Capital Typing. Once all recordings were in print, a process of separation was adopted, separating the text by the questions that were asked.

After reading through each printed interview the researcher determined which responses fit best for each question. A new word document was created to copy and paste the pieces of the interview under the most fitting question. There were some responses that overlapped between questions so they were assigned to multiple questions. Only information regarding the actual question was used when splitting the transcripts while all other information that did not apply directly to the Bonfire Memorial or the Alamo was put into a miscellaneous category. This category consisted of stories of former student experiences, questions about the symbols that were included in the memorial, family lineage in relation to Texas A&M University and stories about events that took place after the collapse for the victims.

Next, an analysis of each question was conducted in order to develop sub-categories for the concepts that appeared in the transcripts. Sub-categories consisted of but have not been limited to: whether or not the participant had been to the site previously, their connection to the site, what they did and did not like, emotions that were felt while there, etc. With each new analysis of the text, additional sub-categories were found to better examine each response. Although the transcript is split up between questions, every sentence was considered in the analysis, making it possible for a response to match other questions after being reviewed more than once. Extra stories and information were then sorted into the sub-categories according to what answers they supported in the interview.

After categorizing and sub-categorizing all of the text and disbursing supporting details from stories, conclusions were then drawn using the text. By using the similarities that were highlighted by categorizing the data, themes began to appear relating to why people were visiting both sites and how it made them feel. Analyzing these conclusions, a deeper comparison could be made between the Bonfire Memorial and the Alamo. Location, types of visitors, types of interpretation offered, and environment worked together during the analysis of data by the researcher to emphasize the differences between the Bonfire Memorial and the Alamo. All developed conclusions were recorded in print to provide a reference for the rest of the study.

A separate category was created to classify observations that were taken at each of the sites. From the notes taken, sub-categories of actions, behavior, time spent at the site,

choice of interpretation and choice of route taken within the site were created.

Comparisons were then made between the two sites using this information to draw conclusions as to why they were different. These conclusions were then matched with the explanations for the motivations and experiences that visitors had at each of the sites. Parallels could be seen between motivations and how visitors acted at each of the memorials, while differences could be seen between both memorials.

In order to complete the analysis process, a review of all interviews was conducted by an outside advisor. The advisor provided additional insights and suggestions for themes within the text of the interviews. The information that was offered was taken into consideration in the analysis and understanding of the information at hand for the study. The inclusion of an outside party helped to include all aspects of what the information means and another angle to examine the interviews by.

Assumptions and bias

Bonfire Memorial

Assumptions and bias must be considered when examining the responses in the interviews and the openness of the participants. The researcher is a 21 year old, Caucasian undergraduate student at Texas A&M University which makes her connected to the university and the tradition of bonfire. This connection may have provided a comfort to the respondents making it possible for them to open up more and share deeper stories than if she were not affiliated with the university. Also, the fact that she is

conducting research for the university could play a role in the amount of participation the respondents had during the interviews. It was not obvious that being a female or Caucasian had an effect on the amount of interviews taken or who agreed to participate. There were more visitors that were middle age, Caucasian, than any other age group or ethnicity, therefore the same is reflected in who was interviewed.

Alamo

Finding participants for interviews at the Alamo was a difficult process which may have been due to the diversity of the visitors to the site. Because of the tourist destination status San Antonio holds, a large number of international tourists were among the visitors to the mission creating a language barrier. This can be assumed as a reason for the small amount of participation in the interviews compared to those done at the Bonfire Memorial. Also, those asked to participate who were tourists would not agree because they were on a tight schedule. As a 21 year old undergraduate student, some hesitance could have been taken because of the lack of legitimacy that may have been translated. Also, the researcher's affiliation with Texas A&M University did have an effect on who participated. If there was any dislike for the university, no interview was agreed to. Had she been accompanied by an advisor there may have been more respect for the research and the study by some of the visitors.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

Observations

Bonfire Memorial

Observations began with visitors that were a part of a group beginning their self-tour of the site at tradition plaza, stopping to read the inscription of the “Last Corps Trip” and from there would begin heading down history walk toward the spirit ring. As they entered the grounds of the memorial, a slight hush would fall over all conversations and would take over throughout the rest of the tour around the site. From what was observed, if conversations did not cease, they would be to the point of inaudible or carried on infrequently. Close to 75% of those observed would stop while walking down the history walk in order to read and observe the plaques placed inside the blocks of certain years. These points were where discussions would occur briefly then end as they made their way into the spirit ring. Before walking to the actual ring itself, all visitors would stop in order to see the entire spirit ring in one view and then would begin to either the right or the left side. From observations, 50% chose to walk counter-clockwise while viewing each portal while 50% chose to walk clockwise. The determinant of the direction looked as if it pertained to the congestion of visitors on one side or the other. There were no other connections made to visitor decisions. Guests visiting in groups would begin at the first portal together, but would begin to separate as they completed reading and observing each of the victim’s tribute. 90% of the visitors

would hold no conversations while studying each portal. The behavior while reading was consistent among all who were observed. An average of 2-3 minutes was taken to read and examine the portrait of each individual in complete silence. For those that took time to look at each individual portal, they would then proceed to the middle of the spirit ring to the marker of center pole, the main support in the construction of bonfire. The visitors would then proceed down the history walk once again taking less time to observe each block if any at all. This is the point where discussions would pick up again as groups would exit the memorial. Visitors who were at the memorial alone went through the same routine while viewing the site without interaction with any other visitors to the site. There was no specific dress that was worn by all visitors but instead consisted of casual wear.

On the night that marked the 10th anniversary to the exact day and time of November 18, 2:42 a.m. when the bonfire collapsed, thousands of students gathered at the memorial to walk to the spirit ring as a memorial service to the victims of the tragedy. Candles were handed out in order to be lit to symbolize the burn of the bonfire and were held by the students covering the entire memorial site. The congregation began by staying on the outer side of the spirit ring looking in on the parents and families of the victims, but once they gave the word for everyone to come in and surround them, in one large motion the entire body of students flooded into the middle of the ring. Not much was said or could be heard from those who spoke, and for most of the time everyone stood in silence side by side. At sporadic moments throughout the service, “Amazing Grace” as well as the

“Spirit of Aggieland” could be heard and then would be sung by the entire body of visitors. There was not a formal beginning or end to the song but would instead sweep the crowd like a wave. There was no cue to end of the service; all visitors turned almost simultaneously and left the memorial with only the sound of shuffling feet on the gravel and the grass.

The Alamo

As visitors approached the site of the Alamo, a more social atmosphere could be seen among tourists to the mission. Aside from the commotion of downtown San Antonio, a large mass of tourists speaking several different languages gathered to take pictures in front of the iconic chapel building, to buy snow cones from street vendors and to purchase aids in translation for the exhibits held within the site. Over 95% of visitors were there in groups of three or more, mainly consisting of families. The dress of tourists to the site included regular casual wear. There was a drastic difference in the amount of conversations that took place at the Alamo compared to the Bonfire Memorial. In and around the mission there was much discussion about the tourist site and its role in Texas History.

Inside the walls of the Alamo, conversations continued between visitors within their groups and with tour guides. Visitors are free to roam the grounds and were also provided with presentations of the Alamo’s history by interpreters at the site. These presentations were very popular on the day observations were taken attracting over thirty

tourists at a time. There were hundreds of people filing in and out of the area, experiencing the exhibits in each separate part of the mission. One of the most popular areas was the gift shop. There was no specific pattern to the direction of traffic within the Alamo as there were several different entrances to the site. Also, there was no pattern in the arrangement of the exhibits making visitors more capable of experiencing and interpreting the site for themselves if they decided on a self-guided tour.

Interviews

Bonfire Memorial

From the interviews conducted, visitors shared their backgrounds and roughly 87% of those interviewed had never been to the bonfire memorial before. The predominant reason for being in College Station was because of graduation and their affiliation with a student at Texas A&M University. When asked, no one was aware that it was possible to receive a guided tour of the memorial by the university. Only two students were part of the visitors that were interviewed, one was there because she had not seen the memorial and the other was introducing Texas A&M to his mother. A little over half of the participants were former students of Texas A&M and the same amount had family members that were current Aggies.

When asked about their motivations for taking time to see the memorial, most answered with the reason that they had not seen the site before. Although most were graduates of the university, they had not been around when the bonfire collapsed and could not

muster the strength to experience the distressing emotions that the memorial facilitates. This included those unfamiliar with the university as well as some former students. Four visitors claimed to have worked on the bonfire while at the university and therefore felt a connection with the victims of the tragic collapse. The high emotional stress it created was a cause of it taking this long for these former bonfire builders and students of A&M to return to the site. During the interviews a couple of the participants showed signs of tears from going through the memorial and one female began to cry. Also, the participants' saddened voices and facial expressions were also evidence of the emotions that were experienced. The time gap had just begun to be large enough to subdue the emotions that were held. Bonfire was a large part of the traditions at Texas A&M making their visits to the memorial a way to create a deeper connection with the university outside of the visitors' affiliation through their family members or friends. All participants took the time to find the memorial and visit the site although difficult to find due to the location and subtlety of the site.

When asked what was the most liked and the least liked about the memorial, very few responses included negative attributes for the site. The main complaint consisted of the lack of interpretation that was offered at the memorial. The features that were most liked by the visitors to the site included the inscriptions and portraits of the students, as well as the design of the memorial itself. Both of these attributes made it possible for emotions such as sadness for the victims, awe for the strength of the families and humility in the participant's own life to be revealed as well as providing a way to

empathize with the families. Getting to know these students through their words and faces helped to create a personal and intimate atmosphere, supported by a participant stating, “You felt like you knew them...” It was highlighted that this memorial is understated enough to show reverence to the victims in the tragedy, but it provides more than just a plaque with a name and date. The design was praised by those interviewed because you could look into the portals and “feel like you stepped into their life...” The symbolism contained within the memorial was also mentioned as a positive attribute that helped to intrigue visitors and help them understand the event, the tragedy and the university on a deeper level.

The symbolism held within each piece of the memorial was not easily seen or understood because of the lack of interpretation on the site itself. There was some intrigue caused by the mystery of the symbolism for a few participants in the interviews. This mystery provided new aspects to be discovered and is the main reason for repeat visits to the memorial. Many of the guests felt that the symbolism would have been more prevalent to former and current Aggies, making more sense of what was accomplished in the construction. Because of the way the site was laid out, visitors claimed to be somewhat aware that symbolism is there, but cannot see it outright. This was a positive aspect for most of those interviewed because the understatement made the site more solemn and dignified in their experience. One of the symbols that was known and picked up on was the facing of the portals towards each victim’s hometown.

Table 1. Adjectives used to describe experience

Adjectives of Experiences		
• Humbling	• Emotional	• Meaningful
• Touching	• Intimate	• Moving
• Solemn	• Sobering	• Strong
• Powerful	• Impressive	• Good
• Sentimental	• Uplifting	• Inspirational
• Somber	• Heart-Wrenching	• Difficult

There were a large number of saddened as well as uplifting emotions among the responses when participants were asked about the experience they had while at the Bonfire Memorial. Listed on Table 1 are several of the adjectives used to describe what was felt while viewing the site. For the visitors that had seen the memorial in the past, they claimed that the emotion had not subsided since the first time they experienced the site. A common response of a feeling of a connectedness among the community took place throughout a large majority of the interviews, containing both former students and those unfamiliar with Texas A&M. By viewing the memorial, participants felt accepted into that community due to the connections that were prevalent such as several of the victims were Eagle Scouts relating to the families with sons in boy scouts. Many of the parents felt a connection with the families of the victims because of the exact fact that they were parents. Several of the younger participants, the students, claimed not only a connection with being a Texas A&M student, but the fact that they are currently the age

of most of the victims when they were involved in the tragedy. The memorial did well to introduce sadness and sorrow into the visitors who claimed they were sad for the university to lose great people as well as a great tradition. A respondent claimed to be sad because present and future generations do not have the opportunity to experience what bonfire was like other than through the stories and the memorial. Several individuals that had been in the building process of bonfire while attending Texas A&M reported reliving the event during their experience, remembering the friendships made, the cuts and bruises gained and the gratification of seeing the structure burn after several long months of preparation. Texas A&M University was constantly brought up in the thoughts of the visitors, claiming they could grasp the vision and philosophy of Texas A&M through the memorial. One participant claimed that to have traditions that deep in the history and life at the university to where students will be involved knowing they could lose their lives was a respectable attribute of the university. In addition, an experience for one visitor was the creation of questions of what went wrong, as well as is the tradition of bonfire extinct. Many claimed to be pulled away from themselves in order to relive and experience this event and the lives of the victims.

The Bonfire Memorial provided a large amount of insights for the visitors through the experience they received while at the site. When asked what each of them would take away from their visit to the memorial many felt connected to Texas A&M and the Aggie family. It was understood “how connected everyone really was” and a connection to the victims through their words in the portals took place. The memorial also served as a

reminder for several of the interview participants, leaving them with a feeling of relief about what is happening in their lives today. They felt as if the problems of today are minor when they have the capability of walking around and living. A respect and appreciation for the university developed, helping the participants who were not directly connected to Texas A&M understand the traditions that take place and the principles that the school brings to all of its students. For former students of the university, it instilled a deeper pride for their alma mater and served as a reminder of their “love for A&M”. In its absence, the memorial also served as a reminder of Bonfire and what it meant to Texas A&M for a participant, which will provide them with the lasting memory of Bonfire and the students who gave their life for it. One of the most important impressions that the memorial provided are the thoughts that were formed pertaining to the return of Bonfire itself. Although the participant knew and understood how large of a part Bonfire was to the students and the university, he felt “there’s not a tradition worth the life.” After experiencing each individual through his or her portals, a reflection on the necessity of Bonfire did not seem to outweigh the danger in building it again. There was a common thought that “they were trying to build it too big.” Sadness was only expressed by one participant stating, “I mean when it’s all said and done I think that’s probably the first thing to take away from it ...the sadness of the tragedy...”.

Lastly, participants were asked if they would enhance the memorial in any way. There was a large consensus of providing more interpretation throughout the site in order to make the experience a little more understandable. However, the majority felt that the

site was well done and not much more could be done to enhance what was there. One of the visitors highlighted the simplicity by stating it was “just what you would expect A&M to have.” A larger sense of ownership took place for another participant because of the fact that they had to discover the meanings on her own. In order to make the intensity of Bonfire come alive, one of the visitors suggested some visual representation of what the fire looked like or felt like would make it more real for the generations who will not experience it. One participant felt that the way the memorial has been maintained has made it what it is to visitors. As long as it is preserved and maintained to be the same that it is today, later generations will still have the opportunity to know Bonfire and what it means to the university.

The Alamo

Due to the shorter amount of time spent at the Alamo as well as the inability to interview on the grounds, the responses were not as numerous as those that were collected at the Bonfire Memorial. However, it must be mentioned that it did not take many responses to see a pattern in words and experiences that were gained by those who were interviewed. The questions were slightly altered in order to gather information that catered more to the Alamo, but centered on the same subject of motivations and experiences. From what was gathered through observations and the interviews, all of the participants were tourists to San Antonio. The Alamo was not the only tourist attraction they were visiting, but on a list of many others for their stay in the area. Only two of the

respondents had been to the Alamo before and all were very interested in the historical significance that it held.

To begin the interview, when asked why they were motivated to visit the Alamo, close to 85% of responses focused on the history that was contained within the site, and its historical value to Texas history. As one participant was a history teacher, visiting the Alamo helped to reinforce the knowledge they had of the battle and of its role in the revolution. The motivation was based on the education that the mission provided. Also, visiting the Alamo was to make history come alive to a student, making it more understandable than just reading about it from a textbook. Because of its significance in Texas history, it is a common tourist attraction with its historical marker status, drawing in many tourists driving through San Antonio on their way to their final destination. Only one visitor claimed to be visiting the site with the motivation of remembering the heroes who stayed voluntarily. He stated, "Everyone wants a piece of that hero." No other responses pertained to the idea of the Alamo being a memorial to those who died in the battle.

When asked about what was liked the most and the least, there were more responses that regarded the respect it showed towards the heroes of the Battle of the Alamo. It was felt to be a place of respect and a tribute to the heroes which was what was liked most by two visitors interviewed. One stated that the fact that the site was not portrayed as a shrine was what they enjoyed most about it; it made it possible to focus on what it did

for Texas rather than the tragedy. Maintenance was an issue that was both positive and negative between two different groups of participants. One group claimed that it was well maintained and looked very good for being here for over a century. However, the other group claimed that they liked the maintenance of it the least because it no longer portrayed the history that it had. A 15-minute video was offered as a reference for the history of the Battle of the Alamo and for all of the artifacts that were preserved. This video, although high tech, was very informative to one group of visitors and helped them understand and learn the history better than learning it on their own. The Alamo being in downtown San Antonio was not an issue for the visitors, and did not take away from their experiences.

Table 2. Adjectives used to describe experience at the Alamo

Adjectives of Experiences		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fun 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interesting
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weird 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average 	

Listed on Table 2 are several of the adjectives used to describe what was felt while viewing the site. The descriptions of experiences through adjectives were not as numerous as descriptions for the Bonfire Memorial due to the amount of time that could be spent at the site. However, the adjectives that were used did not hold the emotional impact as those previously. The experiences that visitors had were more based on their knowledge of history rather than on the emotions that were brought out by visiting the site, as observed by one of the participants. Also, another participant stated that the interpretation the site by a professional had an effect on what type of experience a person

or a group would have based on their own relationship with the site. The adjectives used fit more on an educational level rather than an emotional level. There was another difference between groups interviewed however pertaining to how much was actually learned. One visitor felt as if she could have learned just as much about the site itself on her own using Google. She did not learn anything new from being at the site. On the other hand, another visitor felt that it was a learning experience for them.

History was the more common aspect that was taken away from the participants' visit to the Alamo. When asked what they would be taking away from their experience, two respondents stated that they would have the real history of the battle to look back on and would dissect it more in the future. One visitor would take away how it felt to stand where the heroes of the battle stood, pulling a deeper connection from his visit.

Although it is a historical site, a respondent claimed that nothing could be taken away from the experience for her because it did not measure up to the other memorials they had visited before. As an avid traveler, that the Alamo did not provide a deep enough connection to for her as other historical sites she had visited previously.

There were several suggestions on how to enhance the site, mainly revolving around the training and practices of the interpreters at the site. Over 50% of visitors interviewed commented on how the interpreters could make the experience better in their tours.

Ideas of consistency in representation of the Alamo by the interpreters were felt could benefit guests to the site as well as all interpreters holding a passion for the history that

they are relaying. When presenting the information like they are reading off of a script, the interpreters do not provide a pleasurable experience for the visitors. Two visitors did not mind how the information was presented, and one participant felt that nothing could be enhanced because it is history and cannot be recreated. The videos and artifacts helped to enlighten one group as well, therefore were a good addition to what was offered and enhanced the site for them.

A question on the commercialization of the site was asked due to its location in downtown San Antonio. When asked if the Alamo had been commercialized, respondents agreed that it had but did not claim that it hindered the site. All stated that the commercialization was inevitable because of the city that had grown around the mission. A visitor observed that tourists visit the Alamo because they are visiting San Antonio. They are there to spend money around the Alamo therefore bringing the money into the site to spend as well. One participant interjected that the environment around the site had changed, but walking into the Alamo was the same that it was before the city became too commercialized around it. The commercialization was taken as a beneficial element to the Alamo because without it, the 200 who died could not be remembered. The selling of gifts and paraphernalia was one of the main avenues for money to keep the Alamo open and therefore was seen as necessary for the preservation of the site.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

The study presented in this thesis was conducted to produce information about the motivations, affects and experiences visitors had while visiting dark tourism sites.

From the interviews that were conducted it became apparent that motivations ranged from something as simple as the convenience of being in the area and having free time, to more insightful and subconscious motivations that had to be drawn out of the answers to the rest of the questions. None of the participants mentioned explicit motivations to see a site that focused on death and disaster.

The experiences of the visitors were different based on the site that was visited. There was a similarity between all of the visitors to the Bonfire Memorial, reacting in an emotional style and fashion, and there was also a similarity between visitors to the Alamo reacting more to the history that they were learning rather than experiencing the lives of the fallen. From the observations and responses collected, effects on the emotions and thoughts of the visitors could be seen, with more insightful thoughts and emotional experiences taking place for visitors at the Bonfire Memorial. The motivations for visiting these sites that were stated by the visitors were not the motivations that shaped the experience; but, rather, some of the motivations that seem to drive how the memorials were experienced were woven into the descriptions of the

experiences and only became apparent when interviewees were asked to reflect on their emotions and thoughts while visiting. Finally, both observations and interviews showed that the setting and design of the memorials had a critical influence on the visitation experience.

Synthesis

From all data that was collected, several conclusions can be made as to where tourists derive motivations to visit sites of death and disaster. In regards to the Bonfire Memorial, participants claimed to be at the memorial because they were on campus that particular day. There were no deep emotions used to describe their motivations when they were asked at the beginning of the interviews. However, a theme began to arise when the researcher inquired deeper into the participant's visit. The theme that became apparent was one of wanting to feel a part of the Texas A&M community and family. Most of the visitors had heard of the Bonfire whether they were a part of the process or had only seen the news coverage of the tragedy of the collapse; regardless of their prior familiarity with the activity and event, all those interviewed felt as if they knew all of the students on a personal level after experiencing the memorial. Much of what was liked about the construction of it was the fact that it provided an opportunity to step into the victims' lives. Through this, connections were made, bonds were felt, and Texas A&M was easier to understand for these visitors. This bond that can be felt by being at the Bonfire Memorial is inviting to those close to the university as well as those who know it from a distance. As humans, we constantly want to feel like we are a part of

something bigger than ourselves, which is what the process of bonfire was for many students. After the Bonfire had collapsed, many were in awe at how strong the university was after losing students and a tradition so near to its core. Strength like this is sought after by many, therefore inclusion into a family such as this is something to be envious of. Many of the participants claimed that from their experience they will take away how connected everyone was, and the feeling of being a part of the Aggie family. For an event as tragic as the Bonfire collapse, most people want to know the details, want to be involved, in order to share the emotions, memories and feelings with one another. It is an experience that can provide future connections with others for those who did not already possess the connection of being an Aggie. For former students and current students, visiting the Bonfire Memorial helps to reinforce the feeling of being a part of this community and something “bigger than themselves,” and it is a symbol of how strong a community can be in hard times. This conclusion can be compared to being a part of an exclusive club. For those that are not in the club, they strive to find out the common bond between members and want to understand what the club is all about. For those that do have membership in the club, reminders of why they are a part of such an exclusive group helps to humble them in their lives and make them grateful and proud to be a part of something that will always be there for them.

When comparing both sites, the Alamo has many different characteristics than that of the Bonfire Memorial, making the experience very different as well. The main motivation stated for tourists at the Alamo was the fact that it is a historical site and it makes history

come alive. The rest of the questions did not stray far from this motivation in stating that what was liked most was the historical value it held and what would be taken away was the REAL history of the Battle of the Alamo. However, there was a similarity shared by those interviewed at both sites stating that those involved were “a part of something bigger than themselves.” Once again we can catch a glimpse of the tourists feeling to be a part of something bigger than them by connecting with those who died at either memorial. The Battle of the Alamo was a major turning point in Texas History but also for the United States therefore applying to a larger population than the Bonfire collapse. Because of this major point in history though, everyone from across the country has been exposed to the event and therefore feels connected to the event. By visiting the Alamo, tourists can strengthen this connection.

What must be considered next is the effect of the time gap between the disastrous event and the current experiences. There is a major difference in years between when each event took place, putting the emotions that are felt at either place on separate levels. A time gap has a major effect on how tourists experience any memorial as does how tragic the event was. Due to its recent nature, the Bonfire collapse is still a very emotional time in the lives of most Aggies. The Battle of the Alamo took place over a century ago, leaving the memory of it as a story passed from generation to generation as well as through formal history education. From these observations, a conclusion can be drawn that time can heal the hurt that is caused by these events, the less emotional it will be for tourists to the site. The time gap also provides an opportunity for growth around the site

as it becomes larger. As can be seen with the Alamo, San Antonio has expanded and grown over the past century and the area around the Alamo is becoming filled with a more commercialized atmosphere. Due to the rising demands of space and the promotion of business, open areas quickly become developed. Since the Bonfire Memorial was constructed less than 10 years ago, and the collapse took place exactly 10 years ago, time has not yet completely healed and has not provided a large enough gap to make it okay to build up the immediate surrounding area at the site.

From the responses in the interviews, a final conclusion can be made that like dark tourism, memorials themselves differ in what they provide to tourists. Just by comparing the Bonfire Memorial and the Alamo, major differences about what each memorial stands for can be seen. There are obvious differences such as the time gap that was mentioned previously as well as the city in which each one is located. These have effects on how memorials are experienced and what is taken out of the experience. When looking deeper, the emotions that are felt before visiting the site and while at the site are highly different. These will change how the memorial is viewed overall, and will change how tourists relate to the event. Empathy, sorrow, humility, etc. are some of the emotions that were felt at the Bonfire Memorial, making it a somber place to visit. Little to no talking took place along with no outside noise that distracted visitors while at the site. At the Alamo, the sounds of downtown San Antonio, multiple conversations, and interpretive tours helped to drown out any negative emotion that could be felt.

Limitations

The study of course has some limitations. Due to the amount of time spent at the Alamo, a limitation occurred in the amount of responses that could have been collected as well as from who they were collected. For example, because of the timing of the interviews in the summer, there were no school groups visiting the site during that time. The interviews taken at the Bonfire Memorial were limited to weekends and therefore also limited the responses to those who were at the site on those days. During the memorial service of the 10th Anniversary of the Bonfire collapse; only observations were taken due to the reverence of the event. The study however was focused on the motivations of regular visitors to these sites, and the special event would have represented a very different group of visitors. Because of the vast amount of visitors to both sites, it was impossible to collect interviews from all of the tourists to the sites. From those that did participate in the interviews a point of saturation was reached, providing no new information, making the small groups that were interviewed a representation of the larger public at these sites.

Implications

For research

What makes dark tourism motivations extremely hard to understand is a lack of extensive literature and empirical research. Thus, this study will add to the foundation that has already begun and will consequently be able to inform future research. While the research focused specifically on memorials, it can inform dark tourism research in

general by emphasizing the relationship between the tourist experience and the characteristics of the site. Future research that now needs to take place should be concerned with the feelings people have for going to sites that are not actual sites of death (i.e. haunted houses) as well as places with memorials that are disconnected from the actual sites of the tragedy. Another area that needs further investigation is that of tourists feeling connections to the victims as well as larger than life causes that were very much apparent in the study presented in this thesis. Findings from this research also show that trivial motivations of being in the area can still lead to profound experiences. More research is needed as to what elements of the site trigger such deep emotions.

For management

After review and analysis of the interviews and research that was conducted at both the Bonfire Memorial and the Alamo, several implications become apparent for the future of the Bonfire Memorial using the Alamo as a point of comparison. Within the past ten years of the history of Texas A&M, the tradition of bonfire has not existed physically since its collapse in 1999. Within that time the Bonfire Memorial has taken the place of what bonfire stood for to the students and former students of the university. Bonfire provided a sense of community for those involved, and had a lasting effect on all who participated at the various stages of the event. From the research that has been presented, visitors claim to feel a sense of community and feel connected to the victims as well as the rest of the university through their visit to the memorial. From that it

should be understood that the necessity of the reinstatement of bonfire is not important any longer. Is there a need to bring the bonfire back to campus if the memorial is providing the feeling of community that Texas A&M is proud of? Also, what effect will bringing the bonfire back to campus have on the integrity of the Bonfire Memorial? Whether it is placed in the adjacent field to the memorial or in another area on campus, the focus has the potential to be taken off of those who gave their lives building the 1999 bonfire. Although they were victims of an event that they loved, there is a risk to bring the bonfire back to campus. According to those who participated in the interviews, the solitude of the Bonfire Memorial made it possible to reflect and connect to the lives of the students as well as feel connected to Texas A&M on a deeper level. In the coming years when development of the university grows, these thoughts and emotions should be taken into consideration. Due to the openness of the land surrounding the memorial, there is potential for growth in that direction. The implications of the research that has taken place suggest that the University should strongly reject any thought given towards this development. Nothing should be added to the area adjacent to the memorial in efforts to keep the land free of noise and light pollution as well as human and car traffic. When compared to the Alamo, the Bonfire Memorial is viewed on a completely different level as the Alamo partly due to its age, the city around it and the outcomes of the tragedy that took place. Visitors were not upset with the build up of commercial business in and around the Alamo, yet they also did not experience the same emotions as the visitors to the Bonfire Memorial. The Bonfire Memorial cannot be treated as a piece of history. It was not constructed to present the story of the bonfire tradition but rather

completely focuses on the victims and strongly reminds visitors that they are wandering the grounds where these individuals died. This is the reason it is set apart from a memorial like the Alamo. Respect is the first and foremost element that should be remembered in order to preserve the feeling of community the Bonfire Memorial provides for visitors to the site.

Day-to-day management of the Bonfire Memorial as well as all memorials should stay true to why the memorial was developed. What can be implied by this is there should not be any piece of the site that does not receive attention or is overlooked. Every part of a memorial is a piece of a bigger picture, of a larger object that holds within it lives, memories, emotions, etc. One of the participants at the Bonfire Memorial stated that the way the Bonfire Memorial was kept today is exactly how it should be kept another 10, 20 or 100 years from now. The moment the respect is lost in the tragedy and in the victims is the moment when the memorial no longer holds a meaning. This does not mean that someone must be there to point out every aspect, every symbol, in order to recognize what happened. Free interpretation is a very unique aspect that memorials contain and therefore they should provide enough to intrigue visitors while leaving room for interpretation and personal meaning-making. However, the site cannot be too vague leading to misunderstandings or confusion among visitors. A right balance must be reached for the site to be enjoyable and effective.

The Alamo is a different kind of memorial as the Bonfire Memorial, and the time gap that exists has done exactly what was mentioned previously. It has made it okay to overlook the fact that it is a death and disaster site because of the fact that it is a historical marker. The lack of emotion implies that not much can be drawn from that site anymore with the surroundings developing with the times, and its constant need to keep up with the economy that surrounds it. The Alamo tends to focus more on the “things” that were used in the battle, rather than the people who gave their lives, and it does not provide a way to connect with them other than through the stories told. It would be difficult to keep people to silence while they toured the mission, but the promotion of a more reverent feeling may help to give visitors an opportunity to connect to the victims and feel what they felt or see what they saw. The Bonfire Memorial focuses on the people, not the place or the event itself. A similar focus could help the Alamo bring more emotion back to the tourists that visit.

Conclusions

Dark tourism as a field of study has been slowly rising over the past few years, but people have been practicing dark tourism for centuries and will likely continue to do so. With the amount of death and disaster that has taken place in recent years, it is actually a developing area and it will become very important to know why people want to revisit these feelings, emotions, memories. This research has provided some insights regarding the practice of this type of tourism, but there is still so much more to be discovered.

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