

Mallory Noe-Payne: The Last Ride, a deep dive into a shocking unsolved mystery. >> Male 1 These two young men disappear off the face of the Earth and the last person to see them live was this sheriff's deputy. His stories were so unbelievable. Listen to The Last Ride podcast, part of the NPR Network. [Music] And so this journey began with monuments, with the conversation around Confederate monuments in Richmond and in the South and with people saying there are no statues of Hitler in Germany. As it turns out, it is true, yes, there are no statues of Hitler in Germany. In fact, it's illegal to display Nazi iconography. But instead, the landscape is speckled with other reminders of the past. And being back in Richmond now, my mind is full of what our landscape could look like. And you might want to scoot your chair in just a little bit.

Michael Paul Williams: Testing, testing, one, two, three.

Mallory Noe-Payne: Yeah, perfect. We've got a busy road to our left, a highway to our right. And I mean, is there any way that you would know we're in a cemetery right now?

Michael Paul Williams: No. We are literally sitting in the shadow of an old Sunoco gas station.

Mallory Noe-Payne: But this is the final resting place for a lot of people, right?

Michael Paul Williams: Yes. This was once one of the largest burying grounds for free and enslaved Black people of its era. We are at the Shockoe Hill African Burying Ground.

Mallory Noe-Payne: Do we have any idea how many people were there buried here?

Michael Paul Williams: Estimates are around 22,000.

Mallory Noe-Payne: But no gravestones?

Michael Paul Williams: You would never know. I've lived in this town all my life, I've driven by this site countless times, and until fairly recently I had no clue about the history here. So when did you learn that history? How? Lenora McQueen [assumed spelling], a Texan who has relatives buried here. I believe she brought it to my attention and to a lot of folks' attention. And now it is now a historic site.

Mallory Noe-Payne: Yeah, it's now on the national -- as of very recently, on the National Register of Historic Places. There's a historic marker on the road right next to us. What does it say? Can you read from where you are?

Michael Paul Williams: It says the city of Richmond opened the Shockoe Hill African Burying Ground here in 1816 to replace the burial ground for Negroes

in Shockoe Bottom. The new cemetery laid out along the northern end of Fish Street near the city's poorhouse. begin its two adjoining one-acre plots, one for free people of color and one for the enslaved. The grounds expanded greatly over time, eventually spreading down the slopes and into the valley with an estimated 22,000 interments. It was among the largest cemeteries for free and enslaved African-Americans in the US during its era. After closing the cemetery in 1879 due to overcrowding, the city repurposed the site, making the burial ground unrecognizable today. Repurposed. The euphemistic language for what's been done here. But we have a history of construction that literally was built atop the bodies, the bones of the people who were who were buried here. We had a viaduct that was built that exposed those bodies and bones and then used them as construction fill.

Mallory Noe-Payne: We're turning home to Richmond and seeing sites like this after having visited memorials in Germany. I have a whole new vision because I feel like I have a point of comparison for what it could be. I took a tour and visited Dachau, a concentration camp outside Munich. You know, school groups visit, it's a site of learning, of remembrance, and it's also a graveyard. There's a site there, a small memorial outside of the museum space and it has this language on it labeling it as a [inaudible 00:04:33]. You could translate it as a warning memorial, [inaudible 00:04:39]. It's almost like an admonishment.

Michael Paul Williams: Sounds like this would fit this site.

Mallory Noe-Payne: Well there's also [inaudible 00:04:49], which you could translate as a thinking memorial, a place to inspire thought.

Michael Paul Williams: That'd work here too. There's a lot of history to unpack, to acknowledge, to properly memorialize, some of which I suspect we don't even know about. I've lived in this city all my life and I did not until recently know the history here.

Mallory Noe-Payne: But I think that's why we're choosing to end looking at the idea of memorials because creating spaces like this in some way feels like the end of the process, not the start of the process. We've seen how narratives shift and change over time, the intentional work it takes to welcome people back, to come to terms with the facts of difficult history, to reflect on what our ancestors have done. And creating spaces like this is one example of what we can then do with that work.

Michael Paul Williams: Why do we bury people? Why do we give them proper burials? Why do we go through the expense of giving them nice headstones that document their time here on Earth?

Mallory Noe-Payne: So we can remember them.

Michael Paul Williams: Yes.

Mallory Noe-Payne: It's for the living.

Michael Paul Williams: Yes. Think of the 20,000 plus people here. Wouldn't they like to be remembered? What makes them different?

Mallory Noe-Payne: The man who gave me the tour at Dachau said the meaning of that space today is that it's a place for visitors to strengthen their conscience. To be faced with the question of when your chance comes to do the right thing, are you going to do it?

Michael Paul Williams: So on this final episode, creating meaningful places of encounter, spaces where you just can't look away.

Mallory Noe-Payne: We go back to Germany one last time and explore the conflict and contestation over space with the story of a single cobblestone.

Michael Paul Williams: I'm Michael Paul Williams.

Mallory Noe-Payne: And I'm Mallory Noe-Payne.

Michael Paul Williams: And this is Memory Wars.

Mallory Noe-Payne: A podcast exploring how society confronts sin. [Music] A Stolpersteine is a stumbling stone. A small memorial about the size of half a brick. All over Germany, from big cities to small towns, the cobblestones are installed right outside front doors of homes, offices, or schools. They're set into the sidewalk in sets of one, six, a dozen. Chunks of the street are pulled up, dug out, and the stumbling stones are nestled into their place. Each cement block has a brass plate on top, and stamped into the soft brass is a name, a birthday, sometimes a death day. It's a memorial to a single person, a Jew deported to Auschwitz, a disabled child euthanized, a gay man gone into hiding. The stones are set outside the last place, that person, called home, the final place they chose to live before their neighbors, their government, turned on them. The first time I saw a Stolperstein, I was in Nuremberg, getting doner kebab with friends. It started to rain and we ran under an awning to wait out the storm. I peered up at the gray sky, and then down at the wet sidewalk, and underneath my feet were several of the scuffed brass plaques. Someone lived here, they seemed to whisper. Don't forget that. Behind the individual each stone represents is another person, the person who requests the stone. Sometimes it's family. A grandchild says, I want a Stolperstein placed outside the home my grandparents were forced to flee. But other times it's just someone living in a neighborhood, asking themselves, who lived here before me? It could be two people who never knew one another. But this cobblestone weaves their stories together anyway. [Music] The small stones are organized by a global network of volunteers. And for decades, they were created and installed by a single artist, Gunter Demnig. The project began in the mid-1990s, when Demnig was discussing his idea for memorialization plaques with a friend. The friend, a Jew, told him plaques wouldn't work, because people

wouldn't want them.

Gunter Demnig: And he told me, Gunter, "Plaques on the wall, forget it. 80, maybe 90% of the owners will refuse to have a plaque on the wall."

Mallory Noe-Payne: Demnig realized he shouldn't give people the chance to say no, so he thought, why not place something on the ground, on public property?

Gunter Demnig: Open space, so we don't have to ask the owners.

Mallory Noe-Payne: He liked the idea of having to bow, to read the stones, and the importance of having people's names. He quotes the Jewish text, the Talmud, a man is forgotten when his name is forgotten. So in 1996, he did a sort of guerrilla installation of several dozen stones in Berlin. As he recalls, there was an art exhibition that had a booklet with the names of Jewish victims who had lived on the street where the gallery was. Demnig decided those names and that street would be his first stumbling stones.

Gunter Demnig: Even after some viewers, I thought, OK, I will make the stones and we will install them. And then thinking about permission or better not permission. So better not permission, it was pretty good, it was a good decision.

Mallory Noe-Payne: Demnig parked his car on the side of the street and got down on his hands and knees. He began to chip away, creating a space large enough in the sidewalk to settle the stones into the ground. He says one man stopped to ask what he was doing, but no one else batted an eye. >> Gunter Demnig. That's Berlin, that's typical. Eventually, city authorities did notice. It took some years, but Demnig worked his way through Berlin bureaucracy and got permission to place more. Now, almost 30 years later, and the project has exploded. The team has made and placed almost 100,000 stones across Germany and beyond.

Gunter Demnig: So when it started, I never had the idea that it would become such big thing. I thought maybe some hundred or maybe sometimes thousand, but 90,000. That's incredible in a way. And it's still going on.

Mallory Noe-Payne: But this is the story of a single stone and it starts in Berlin in the 90s. The energy of the city at the time, tense but exciting negotiations of landscape, the rejuvenation of a city reunified. This is what Volker [inaudible 00:13:33] wanted to be a part of. It was 1994 and Volker moved to the city after spending a decade abroad. Like many from West Germany, Volker and his wife, along with some friends, decided to buy old property in East Berlin.

Volker: To live in an old building, it gives you a different feeling from a living. in a concrete structure.

Mallory Noe-Payne: For Faulker and his friends, the focus initially was rather romantic. The neighborhood they chose, Prenzlauer Berg, had a certain aura conjuring up images of a bohemian lifestyle. But at the time of the sale, there was this special authority. It had been set up after reunification and it forced buyers and sellers to consider more than the romantic version of the past. The government agency was responsible for investigating and clearing real estate transactions. They would check whether the property had been owned by Jews and confiscated by the Nazi regime. If it had, the sale would cancel, and ownership would revert to the family it had been stolen from. It was one element of a wide system of restitution and reparations. Nevertheless, Volker and his friends decided to give it a try. They chose an apartment building that was built at the end of the 19th century. They loved the old structure. It had high ceilings, moldings, and curved walls.

Volker: There's more flair to it. There is more history to it. You know, you can even feel that people were living before you and that history is not erased.

Mallory Noe-Payne: But what history? And who had lived there before? Volker and his friends put in an offer for the apartment building. The government agency investigated its history and cleared the sale.

Volker: But we did not think further beyond the question of ownership. [Music]

Mallory Noe-Payne: That comfortable bubble would eventually break. [Music] There are moments in life where we are deeply touched. When fact morphs to feeling and that feeling squirms its way inside our bodies, lodging itself deep into our chests, making it difficult to breathe, maybe that moment comes from a book, a play, a radio story. For me, it was at the concentration camp in Dachau, standing inside a room designed for the sole purpose of gassing human beings. And for Volker [inaudible 00:16:43], it was reading and watching the testimony of Holocaust survivors. In the mid-1990s, about the same time he and his friends bought the apartment building in East Berlin, Faulker first encountered the more than nine-hour-long documentary, Shoah. To this day, he still recalls specific interviews from the film.

Volker: And the survivor was overwhelmed by his memories. He was overwhelmed of what he had experienced, the horror.

Mallory Noe-Payne: Volker had learned the details of this terrible history in school.

Volker: And he couldn't speak.

Mallory Noe-Payne: But the direct testimony. It struck differently.

Volker: And the other detail of that video is an interview with an SS man from Treblinka.

Mallory Noe-Payne: He remembers, listening to the SS man, an extermination camp guard, speak frankly about forcing Jews to sing as they worked outside the gas chambers.

Volker: And the lyrics, protection mark, of the song was Treblinka [foreign language] something like that. So a translation it would be, the air in Treblinka is fresh and a nice breeze is -- so they had to sing that so that the incoming victims were deceived at the moment when they entered the area where they were to be gassed. So they should not hear the cries and of the dying. It is, we would say it is incommensurable, you can't compare it, you know. The murder of the Jews cannot be reconciled. There's no one who couldn't forgive. It's as simple as that. Everyone should not even speak about reconciliation. [Music]

Mallory Noe-Payne: Volker told me that to know the facts about history is one thing, but to be aware of the presence of the past in your own life, well, that's another thing entirely. For him, that revelation came in 2017 when he found out that initial investigation into the building's history at the time of the sale, well, it didn't tell the full story. You learned that there had not been a Jewish owner?

Volker: Yes.

Mallory Noe-Payne: But did not think about tenants. When did it first occur to you?

Volker: The answer is very simple, by coincidence. [Music]

Mallory Noe-Payne: Here's what happens. An old man showed up to the apartment building in Prenzlauer Berg wandering the courtyard. At this point, Volker no longer lived there. He had moved to a different apartment nearby. But one of the building's current residents spoke to the old man. And the old man told him a story of having lived and grown up in this very building before the war. He wasn't Jewish, but he spoke of a childhood friend, a neighbor who was. The old man's memories were muddled and unclear. But he called the old friend Poldi [assumed spelling]. He talked about playing with Poldi and about how Poldi one day disappeared. When Volker and the other owners heard that story second-hand, it was the first time they had thought not just about possible Jewish owners, but also about residents.

Volker: From that moment on, we knew there were Jews living in our house.

Mallory Noe-Payne: The group immediately knew they had to learn more. Volker led the way in hiring a historian to do research.

Volker: Who lived in the house and who was persecuted. And what happened with that person? Was he deported? Was he killed?

Mallory Noe-Payne: The historian came back with six names, including the

name Leopold Jones or Poldi for short. The historian learned that in the years of the war, Poldi wasn't a young child. He was a teenager. And he had been a member of an underground Jewish Zionist group who managed to evade the Gestapo for a while by hiding in Berlin. But eventually, Poldi was found.

Volker: And they almost beat him up to death. So he had to be taken to a hospital.

Mallory Noe-Payne: He was tortured.

Volker: And --

Mallory Noe-Payne: Interrogated to learn more about others and hiding.

Volker: They let him live to torture him.

Mallory Noe-Payne: But he never wavered. He didn't tell the Gestapo the names or locations of his friends.

Volker: And then he was put on the train to Auschwitz.

Mallory Noe-Payne: How old was he?

Volker: Nineteen. I mean, he was a young man. You know, he could be even still be around. And he could become anything. [Music]

Mallory Noe-Payne: Volker knew he couldn't atone, but doing nothing, just forgetting, that was never an option. He and the group of building owners raised money among themselves and their tenants. They got a plaque made honoring Poldi's unique story. They also requested Stolperstein for Poldi and the other persecuted residents the historian had found. Volker is part of a generation known as the 60 Aiders. He participated in the student protests of the 60s and became a member of a communist splinter group.

Volker: You have to take part in public affairs and we don't want to live in a repressive society.

Mallory Noe-Payne: He says the choice to commemorate is ingrained into him.

Volker: This is our own interest. It feels very uncomfortable to live in a society where others are persecuted. [Music]

Mallory Noe-Payne: The word uncomfortable strikes me. Volker says it's uncomfortable to live in a society where others are persecuted, not that it's uncomfortable to be reminded of that persecution. [Music] It's impossible to walk through Berlin today and not be reminded of the past. It's a city where history is written into the landscape. Throughout the 90s and early 2000s, monuments were built all over the place. The Berlin Wall had fallen, opening the way for a new generation to make their mark in the reunited city. Their

efforts ranged from small and grassroots to government-supported and well-funded, but few were without controversy. One of the largest is the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in the heart of Germany's capital city. The memorial is a maze of concrete pillars spread on a site the size of more than three football fields. As you walk in, the land slopes down, the columns rising taller, casting shadows. Views of the surrounding government buildings and public gardens fade away. There's a sense of feeling trapped, lost, separated, glimpses of other people coming and going. It's like a black hole smack dab in the middle of the city. Opened in 2005, it took more than a decade to get institutional support for this project. Elida Asman [assumed spelling] is an academic and activist, and in the 90s she was part of a small group advocating for this memorial. They sent their petition to Germany's top politician at the time, Helmut Kohl.

Elida Asman: We sent it to Kohl and he said nobody in this society is interested in such a thing. You have to prove to me that there's a social demand for this.

Mallory Noe-Payne: Kohl was a conservative who led Germany through the end of the Cold War and the reunification of the country. He was a politician, often driven more by practicalities than ideologies. He sent them on a bit of a wild goose chase to collect signatures.

Elida Asman: And he said, OK, bring me I think 250,000 or 500,000 [foreign languages] signatures and I will consider the case. So then he thought he would make us quiet for a long time.

Mallory Noe-Payne: Kohl did that because he was interested in a different memorial. He was pushing for a structure elsewhere in the city that he said would honor German unity.

Elida Asman: He made in Berlin this new wake, the Neue Wache, new watch monument and he declared it and dedicated it to [foreign language], to the victims of war and violent regimes.

Mallory Noe-Payne: Activists like Asman thought that language was too vague and purposefully failed to differentiate between Germans who had lived under Nazism, including soldiers, and their victims, like Jews who had been singled out, persecuted, murdered.

Elida Asman: A far cry from what we wanted to install but he made it. And it shows you how difficult it is against the top-down energy of somebody who just doesn't want it.

Mallory Noe-Payne: In the end, both memorials were created. A top Jewish leader struck a deal. He agreed to support Kohl's push for the Neue Wache Memorial and in exchange demanded Kohl's support for the Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe.

Elida Asman: And he said, OK, I'll leave you your monument, but you must give your consent to my monument. This is what he said. And then he said -- Kohl had to say, OK, it's a deal.

Mallory Noe-Payne: So in 1999, the German parliament approved the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe. The government set aside almost five acres in the heart of Berlin. Today, it's one of the most visited sites in the city. But it's also still the subject of criticism. One German politician of the far right [inaudible 00:29:53] party denounced it as a memorial of shame. This story of memorial battles and negotiations, it's a story of dueling narratives. Narratives that aren't always settled. Negotiations that are constantly ongoing. Even in the case of Stolperstein, says Volker [inaudible 00:30:17].

Volker: I tell you another story. There lives a tenant in our house. And he has a little office, a little real estate office. Right, vis-a-vis of the plaque.

Mallory Noe-Payne: That's the plaque specifically about Poldi, which had already been installed, not the Stolperstein.

Volker: He came out of his office and I asked him, how do you like it? And now listen, he said, I'm not guilty.

Mallory Noe-Payne: Volker told him, I'm not saying you're guilty. You weren't even alive when Poldi was persecuted.

Volker: But he don't want to be bothered. Oh, what can you do? There's little you can do on stupidity, unfortunately. But he has to live with that. And the Stolperstein we installed today, will be right in front of his office. Yeah. So he will remember whether he wants or not. [Music]

Mallory Noe-Payne: Which brings us to a beautiful August afternoon in Berlin. As Volker [inaudible 00:32:02] and a small crowd watch the artist Gunter Demnig, install a set of small stones into the sidewalk outside the apartment building in Prenzlauer Berg. Quickly, efficiently, Demnig kneels down and pulls up parts of the existing sidewalk. In the empty space, he settled in six shiny brass plaques Stolperstein. Here Vonta [assumed spelling], here lived Leopold "Poldi" Jones, reads one, born 1924, forced labor 1943, reported October 29, 1943, killed in Auschwitz. With a brush, Demnig softly wipes away the dirt, giving them a final tap around the edges. In a matter of minutes, it's done. Demnig loads up his equipment and rolls out onto the next set of stones and installation elsewhere in the city. Volker takes me inside to show me the building he fell in love with so long ago.

Volker: So that was built in 1876.

Mallory Noe-Payne: We head up a big stairwell with tall ceilings. So in all the research, do you know where they lived? The victims.

Volker: Well, the parents of Poldi would live here.

Mallory Noe-Payne: Really? This apartment?

Volker: Yeah.

Mallory Noe-Payne: We're right outside the door. We knock, but no one answers.

Volker: There might be no one's in.

Mallory Noe-Payne: Yeah. Can I ask one question? What does it mean? What's the power in knowing the history of the place of the building?

Volker: What does it mean? Well, it is -- I don't quite know what you are expecting me to answer. But certainly the answer is not that each time I walk the stairs, I say to myself, well, this is the flat of so-and-so.

Mallory Noe-Payne: At each turn, in the long stairwell, Volker stops, though, as if something new has occurred to him, he wants to add.

Volker: Many people think we should stop talking about it. They believed, let's go forward, let's talk about future. Yes, one might go ahead. As I said to you, there is no one who could forgive. There will be no release from this history. It doesn't happen. Many people tried. [inaudible 00:35:37]

Mallory Noe-Payne: I never really get to hear the end of that thought because we're interrupted by a young woman moving into one of the units in the building. Life goes on. Volker and I step back into the courtyard, then out onto the street. We pause to take a photo of the newly gleaming brass stones. There's a small bouquet of yellow and white flowers someone has already placed beside them. [Music] OK. So here we are on Monument Avenue.

Michael Paul Williams: The new Monument Avenue.

Mallory Noe-Payne: New Monument Avenue. Now we're sitting in this like wide, grassy, shaded median.

Michael Paul Williams: But where I'm sitting, I'm staring at the site of the former Robert E. Lee monument. And it's fenced in, and there are traffic barriers graffitied behind this fence. How do you feel in this space now, compared to how you would have felt two, three years ago when the monuments were still out?

Mallory Noe-Payne: Three years ago, with the monuments up here, I covered moments that were tense, that were scary, protests and counter protests, folks waving Confederate flags and with guns, as if defending the statues. And then two summers ago, I was here at this statue for June 19th, 2020. The statue was

still there. there it was totally covered in layers of different graffiti and artwork. The base of it had memorials to victims of police violence all around the base and that particular night there were fireworks, there was grilling out, there was music, an entirely different energy than I'd certainly ever seen here before. Part of the reason I wanted to end right here in this space is because when I left for Germany the statue of Robert E. Lee stood. When I got back he was gone.

Michael Paul Williams: I think of my lifelong relationship with this street. Even as a child, it seemed like a no travel zone, a place where hardly recall spending any time even though I went to a parochial school not too far away. I didn't really have an understanding of the street. I remember acquiring that as a young adult and not spending any real time here until well into my young adulthood when I would participate in the 10K or attend the occasional Easter parade and you just kind of learn to ignore the big Confederate elephants in the space. And I was there that the day the Lee monument was removed and it seemed almost anti-climactic. It was a big deal but it's like they had lost their power, the moment people started taking them down on their own, they had lost their power. And by the time the Lee statue was removed it had been totally transformed into something else. And now I'm staring at this big empty green space with this ugly black fence around it and I'm thinking it poses a question to me. Everyone's talking about how to reinvent or reimagine Monument Avenue. I think what next?

Mallory Noe-Payne: I'm curious stumbling stones. What do you think that could look like here?

Michael Paul Williams: Well the paving stones here on Monument seem like they would lend themselves quite efficiently to stumbling stones. An avenue once devoted to a lost cause could be an avenue literally paved and engraved with the darkest chapters of Richmond history. The forgotten people of Richmond history. So there's actually a project inspired by the German Stolperstein called stopping stones. In the US, each stone commemorates enslaved Africans in early America. As of the middle of 2020, they've placed about 30. The man behind the project is a descendant of Holocaust survivors who lives here in the US. Wow.

Mallory Noe-Payne: I could see that here in the stones of Monument Avenue.

Michael Paul Williams: Stumbling stones throughout Richmond could be the connective tissue that helps us come to terms with this history.

Mallory Noe-Payne: You know, Volker says that the murder of the Jews cannot be reconciled. And it just makes me think, is reconciliation the goal, the right goal?

Michael Paul Williams: Reconciliation is a pretty sounding word that to my

thinking is slowly becoming a four-letter word. Reconciliation was the goal behind the end of reconstruction and the re-introduced reign of terror on Black people in the South. The desire to reconcile, to put a pretty bow on things and bring people back together is not often in the best interest of justice. The mere definition of reconciliation is to restore peace, to bring peace between people or entities that once had peace. And there's no peace in this history of Black people in America or Indigenous people in America. So it's a misapplication of the term. Reconciliation suggests that we are at the end of something, that we've done the work, and that we can rest on our laurels in peace and harmony. It's a ridiculous idea. We're still living what was fought over. There's no enslavement, but there's you could say there's enslavement in other forms.

Mallory Noe-Payne: So if reconciliation isn't the goal, I do think it leaves people wondering, well, what is it? What is there? And I think there's remembrance. For me, that's why it's so powerful and important to land on memorialization because it represents remembrance. It represents sites of education and connection. And these things are the foundation.

Michael Paul Williams: I think remembrance leads us to education. It leads us to empathy. It leads us to atonement. It leads us to commitment to make things right. None of that happens without the remembrance and the knowledge that remembrance brings.

Mallory Noe-Payne: Volker also talks about the man who will remember whether he wants to or not, with the stumbling stone placed outside his door. And that's an important lesson for me. I mean, sometimes we don't want to remember and that's human and understandable. I was content to not remember the specifics of my family history, but it's our responsibility to, regardless. I mean, we would never say we should forget the Holocaust. The phrase is never again and we accept that for that history. Why can't we accept the importance of that logic for our own history?

Michael Paul Williams: People who look the ugly truth in the eye and accept it are capable of doing significant things to ensure that that history does not repeat. The knowledge that comes with what they have absorbed leads to a commitment. When you went off to Germany, what were your expectations and have there been any surprises that you've had occasion to think about now that you've come back home?

Mallory Noe-Payne: When I went off to Germany, my expectation seems naive in that I thought Germany had done a great job and so I just expected to find out how.

Michael Paul Williams: You were going to bring back a template.

Mallory Noe-Payne: I was going to bring back a whole playbook and all we'd have to do was follow the steps. I don't think that's what I have. I feel like I've

learned that it's not about feeling good. It's not about trying to put this behind us or finding a silver bullet. The German lesson is that it is and will be constant, messy work. And we have to learn to be OK with feeling bad about it. We've let a lot of time pass without doing the work. And I think that means we've got a bigger hurdle to overcome. That's one takeaway. Another is that it is possible a society can enact the worst of the worst and still come back from the brink of that. If we don't ignore the past, it's a lot like trauma. And the way one would work through personal trauma, you have to face up to the facts of what happened. You have to interrogate how they transformed you. And you have to be willing to do it again and again and again. Because the disordered impacts will emerge again and again and again. And we've got to make the change on a systemic level. You know, we have to recognize that there are policies that are really important to dealing with inequity, providing healthcare and education, reparations. But all of those policies, I think, like aren't going to happen until we recognize why they're necessary. Which is different than what it was in Germany, because they had a big occupying force helping them get started. And, you know, we don't have that. It's all on us. We've got to do it ourselves. That's really, really tough.

Michael Paul Williams: Where we sit two years ago, I saw something I didn't think I would see in my lifetime. It was like Obama being elected president. You have those moments if you live long enough, if you're lucky. I saw masses of White people join people of color and demand something. And sometimes, frankly, your privilege allows you to pull off some things that we cannot do alone. And there was power in that. And to be honest, I think it scared the hell out of some white folks to see their children out here demanding racial justice. And that made me think that generationally, perhaps, if we live long enough, if we keep fighting, there's hope. And there will be other monuments to take down, not monuments of granite and bronze, but monuments of injustice that still live with us, monuments of inequality. And it's not going to be an easy fight. Looks pretty bleak right now, but we've got to fight like hell. [Music]

Mallory Noe-Payne: Memory Wars is a production of Radio IQ, distributed by PRX. This research and the resulting podcast were made possible in part by a grant from the German-American Fulbright Commission. I'm Mallory Noe-Payne. And you also heard from Michael Paul Williams. Oluwakemi Aladesuyi is our story editor. Additional editing from Caitlin Pierce. Our music is by Sun Rain, with sound design and mixing by Chad Skinner and Danny Ramez of Half Moon Audio. Ruth Tam designed our logo and feature image on our website. And we recorded this episode at the Studio of Virginia Video Network. You can find out more about the show and a link to suggested reading at radioiq.org. This podcast is supported by Radio IQ and the listeners who donate to that member station. If you appreciate innovative reporting like this, you can join those listeners by going to radioiq.org and there's a donate button in the upper right-hand corner.