

Professional Summary



DEREK H. ALDERMAN is Professor and Head of the Department of Geography at the University of Tennessee, where he serves as a Research Fellow in the Center for the Study of Social Justice and serves as an affiliated faculty member with the Africana Studies, American Studies and Disaster, Displacement, and Human Rights programs. At the University of Tennessee, Alderman also holds the Betty Lynn Hendrickson Professorship in Social Science. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Georgia in 1998 and previously held tenure-line positions at Georgia College & State University (1998-2000), where he also served as Co-Director of the Center for Georgia Studies, and East Carolina University (2000-2012), where he also served as a Research Fellow in Cultural and Heritage Studies at the Center for Sustainable Tourism and held affiliated faculty positions in African/African-American Studies, Coastal Resources Management PhD Program, and Center for Natural Hazards Research.

Alderman is a broadly trained, award-winning human geographer with interests in cultural and historical geographies of race, social justice, and African American belonging; public memory, heritage conflict, and commemorative landscapes; the racialization of mobility, travel, and tourism; the politics of popular culture, media geographies, and regional identity; the role of narrative and language in the social construction of place and nature; and social theoretical approaches to study of place naming, urban symbols, and spatial inscription. Much of this work takes place in the context of the racially charged southeastern United States and addresses the inequalities faced by African Americans in their ongoing struggles for cultural and political inclusion and social and spatial justice. He employs a wide range of methods, including archival analysis, interviewing and surveying, textual/discourse analysis, landscape iconography, photography, as well as mapping and descriptive statistical analysis. Alderman is frequently in demand as a speaker, having delivered over 80 invited talks to universities, museums, and community groups. He has provided unpaid assistance to over 40 government organizations, non-profit groups, and minority initiatives. In 2015, Alderman received the Diversity Leadership Award from the College of Arts & Sciences of the University of Tennessee in recognition of his research and outreach on race, racism, and inclusion/exclusion.

As a geographer, Alderman's approach is one that bridges the humanistic traditions of his discipline, which emphasize the meanings, values and interpretations that people assign to place, race, and memory, with "newer" approaches that emphasize the cultural power and politics that underlie the historical and contemporary production of landscape and the relationship between space, rights, and social justice. Much of His work focuses on analyzing the range of landscapes, symbolic forms, and vernacular inscriptions fashioned within and about the American South—paying particular attention to the racialized histories, ideologies, and identities given voice and silenced in and through these expressions and ongoing struggles over southern identity and history. These struggles

have long captivated public attention and they have grown in intensity in the wake of the Charleston Emanuel Nine Tragedy. He is especially interested in the landscape as a site for what geographer Richard Schein calls an “oppositional politics of belonging,” where African Americans challenge their historical exclusion by re-making place, materially and symbolically, and re-working the region’s and the nation’s collective memory of their struggles through commemorative activism, historic preservation, and the heritage tourism industry.

The African American struggle for justice, identity, legitimacy, and survival has attracted growing attention from geographers—both in terms of how the civil rights struggle was conceived, executed, and struggled over spatially in the past, as well how it is being remembered and commemorated in the present through a growing array of memorial places and commemorative landscapes. Alderman’s research addresses both aspects of the historical geography of the African American experience. He recognizes, as the late historian Manning Marable argued, that the reconstruction of civil rights history cannot be done outside the context of understanding the racial politics of how we remember these struggles and the political efficacy of these memories in transforming the present and future. Alderman has examined struggles over civil rights heritage across a wide range of commemorative objects and places—museums, monuments, memorials, historical markers, and (re)named places and streets. All of these symbolic sites communicate powerful ideas about whose past is deemed historically important, who matters politically and has the power to rewrite public memory and space, and where we are in terms of race relations.

Alderman has actively contributed to the development at least three bodies of thought within geography and the broader humanities and social science literatures. The first literature involves the “spatial turn” in the study of social memory, a perspective that contends that the memorialization process is embedded within and structured by a place politics. Ongoing commemorative changes and challenges in the American South cannot be fully analyzed without considering the region’s broader history of locational discrimination, racial boundaries, and territorialized public spaces. *Civil Rights Memorials and the Geography of Memory*, a book Alderman co-authored with Owen Dwyer, provided the first critical geographic reading of the many monuments and memorials dedicated to the Movement. They examined the different ways in which the Movement is remembered in America, particularly the South, and the important role that commemorative landscapes and places play in remembering (but also forgetting) certain stories about the black struggle for civil rights. Importantly, Alderman and Dwyer reflected on the geographic and social marginalization of these landscapes, a tragic irony for memorials intended to celebrate the end of segregation and disenfranchisement. *Civil Rights Memorials and the Geography of Memory* received a 2008 Globe Book Award from the Association of American Geographers (AAG). An AAG committee awards the annual prize for a book that conveys most powerfully the nature and importance of geography to the non-academic world.

Second, Alderman has contributed to the rise of “critical place name studies,” a literature that recognizes that the naming of places is not an ideologically innocent practice but part

of the social process of claiming and legitimizing certain conceptions of heritage and identity, including regional and racial identities. Drawing inspiration from the southern scene, particular the African American experience, Alderman has explored place naming as an “arena” for racialized debates over the history of the South, why it matters, and for whom it matters. He has explored the processes and politics of southern place naming (and renaming) in the context of wider changes in the region’s political economy and culture wars—from developers and promoters using subdivision names to sell the region’s history as a form of symbolic capital to African American civil rights activists using school names as tools of symbolic resistance in their battles over heritage. His work reveals that these naming struggles do not simply take place between whites and blacks. Rather, the naming process also sheds light on different identities and political visions within the African American community. Alderman has recently delivered invited talks hosted by the University of Vienna (Austria) and the National Geographic Information Institute (in Seoul, Korea) on the racial politics of place naming.

Within the areas of memory studies and critical place name analysis, Alderman is perhaps best known for advancing scholarly and public understanding of the politics of naming streets after Martin Luther King, Jr (mlkstreet.com). In doing so, he has established himself as a national authority on King street naming. The naming process is often contentious and these debates (especially where to locate King’s name within cities) shed light on the “reputational politics” of remembering the civil rights leader and the larger social and spatial injustices that still confront African Americans in the South and across the country. The attraction of street naming to African American communities is multifaceted, and commemorating Martin Luther King in urban public spaces transcends an immediate concern with simply naming roads to mediate myriad questions of race and racism in social life. A seemingly mundane landscape feature helps open up a provocative story about the role of change and continuity in the black experience. While MLK streets appear to help us map the contours of a new, post-civil rights South, many of these roads, in reality, lead African Americans and whites to the same old South in terms of divided neighborhoods and inequalities. *Importantly, King streets as not only monuments or historical references to the Civil Rights Movement but also extensions of the ongoing struggle for civil rights, and thus these contested streets must be examined in the context of larger historical patterns of racism and resistance.* As Alderman has discovered, commemorating King along the nation’s roadways exposes the continuing importance of traditional racial and economic boundaries and barriers in communities, the power of elite, property-based interests in directing city planning and development, the unwillingness of government officials to openly engage issues of race and racism, and the legacy of transportation and environmental racism as it affects communities of color.

Alderman frequently provides pro-bono consultation with elected officials, public administrators, and activists from across the country about the politics of naming streets. Previously, he has delivered community education forums on the street naming issue in Grand Rapids, Michigan, Ithaca, New York, High Point, North Carolina, Manhattan, Kansas as well as in Greenville, North Carolina. He has sought to inform municipal leaders about the politics of public memory and naming by publishing in professional magazines such as *Public Management* and *Planning*, co-authoring these pieces with

practicing public managers and planners. Currently, he is assisting the St. Louis-based non-profit organization, Beloved Streets of America, as they plan a campaign to revitalize King's namesakes in many US cities.

On numerous occasions, Alderman has moved beyond academia to contribute to the national dialogue about Martin Luther King streets and other commemorative and cultural issues. He has been interviewed or quoted over 180 times in print, radio and television media outlets, including *CNN*, *MSNBC*, *The New York Times*, *CityLab*, *The Washington Post*, *USA Today*, *Ebony*, *The Boston Herald*, *The Guardian*, *National CBS Evening News*, *BBC Radio News*, and on National Public Radio programs *Morning Edition* and *Marketplace*. In April of 2014, Alderman was conferred the Media Achievement Award by the Association of American Geographers (AAG). The award, one of the Association's highest honors, recognizes exceptional and outstanding accomplishments in publicizing geographical insights through media outreach. The award citation notes that Alderman "has consistently translated complex issues of social and spatial justice into readily understandable...information that help[s] to inform and elevate public debate. [H]e has worked hard and successfully to narrow the gap, not just between the worlds of academe and journalism, but between the ivory tower and the street."

Alderman's third contribution focuses on the historical and contemporary role of racism in southern hospitality and tourism, using this research to advocate for socially responsible approaches to heritage tourism marketing, development, and study that promotes coming to terms with the history of slavery, white supremacy, and civil rights. He is founder and co-coordinator of the interdisciplinary research initiative called RESET (Race, Ethnicity, and Social Equity in Tourism), and currently working with a team of five universities to examine the complex and often contested place of slavery within the representation and performance of the past at southern museums and historical sites. Recently, the RESET group completed a year-long study of plantation museum visitors, docents, and owners—the result of a public engagement partnership with four plantation sites along the famous River Road District in Louisiana. Thus far, the RESET initiative has resulted in several journal publications and special organized panels at conferences, guest edited issues of *Tourism Geographies* (on African American tourism) and *Journal of Heritage Tourism* (on slavery and plantation tourism), a major grant (over \$400K) from the National Science Foundation, and an edited book on methods in heritage studies for Routledge.

The NSF project, which is a three year project that examines dozens of plantation house museums in Louisiana, South Carolina, and Virginia, critically examines changes in how much and in what way slavery is narrated at sites that have traditionally said little about the enslaved community. The RESET team is paying close attention to the power of tour guides and other staff to use artifacts, exhibits, architecture, and other material spaces to encourage (or discourage) visitors from acknowledging and empathizing with the history of the enslavement. The RESET team is also investigating how visitors to plantations interpret, internalize, and even challenge the stories and social relations embedded within and narrated through the material objects and spaces within these historical sites. Alderman's goal through the NSF work is to understand the broader changes that

southern landscapes of racialized memory are undergoing as public pressure for discussing slavery and the wider themes of civil rights and racial reconciliation grows. His team's objectives forthright in that we seek to leverage critical historical and memory research to facilitate an intervention in the extent and nature to which slavery is not just discussed but also brought into a deeper appreciation and knowledge of African American historical contributions and struggles. But, as one finds, recovery and representation of these painful histories are often fraught with debate and thus involve the politics of bringing long repressed and suppressed histories and marginalized identities into dialogue with a tourism industry that until recently had been content with ignoring if not denying these very stories. It is important to point out that Alderman and his colleagues position themselves within critical tourism studies and that our approach is not one of unquestioning business promotion or commodification of the past.

Alderman's growing work in the racialized histories of tourism and travel is part of a broader interest in exploring the contested place of geographic mobility, travel and transportation within the African American struggle for civil rights and racial equality. He is especially intrigued in researching the historical geography of African American car travel during Jim Crow, with special attention on the negotiation of discrimination along southern highways and the creative spatial strategies used by motorists to survive and resist white supremacy on the not so open road. He and his students have worked with the North Carolina Museum for the Coastal Plain (in Wilson, NC) and the Beck Black Cultural Center and Museum (in Knoxville, TN) in collecting "Jim Crow Journey Stories" and researching the racial politics of automobility. Alderman co-authored an article in 2013 that applied a critical mobilities approach to analyzing and teaching the Montgomery Bus Boycott. More recently, he has written essays on geographic mobility as a civil right (in the journals *Political Geography* and *Southeastern Geographer*), the use of *The Negro Motorist Green Book* in teaching about Jim Crow social geographies (in *Teaching Ethnic Geography in the 21st Century*), and the anti-racist mobility practices and work of Wendell Scott, the first and only African American driver to win a race at the highest NASCAR level (forthcoming in *Annals of the AAG*). Alderman is currently working with a colleague (Josh Inwood) to develop a pedagogical workshop for geography and history K-12 teachers on *The Green Book*, a recently rediscovered travel guide used by middle class African American motorists before and during the Civil Rights Movement. *The Green Book* lists accommodations that serve black travelers by state, city, and street address, providing a wonderful means of remapping the geographies of Jim Crow as well as illustrating general theories about racial politics of mobility, black counter-public spaces, and commodity activism.

Alderman's research and teaching spans many aspects of the southern landscape. He has written about the development of "NASCAR Valley" in the greater Charlotte area, the "Virtual South" and Internet humor as a form of regional electronic folklore, Elvis fandom and music heritage tourism at Graceland and in Memphis, and the idea of Mayberry as utopia/dystopia. Alderman also has interests in the southern environment, resulting in several essays on the cultural history of the kudzu vine, the drainage of the Florida Everglades, and research on hurricane graffiti and post-Katrina tattoos along the southeastern coast. In the case of these research projects and others, he often takes on

topics that have not received significant scholarly attention. He believes that some of the most taken for granted landscapes and expressions can serve as elegant indicators of the human experience, providing insight into conflicts over cultural meaning and the historical evolution of the landscape and people's relationship with it. The case of kudzu is especially instructive in this regard, where "untangling" the neglected history of this exotic vine opens up broad chapters about historical and geographic changes in the South and the way the environment can become a symbol or point of cultural and regional identity (see recent 2015 article in *Southeastern Geographer*). He is currently preparing a book chapter on kudzu for the edited volume *The American Environment Revisited*.

Alderman is a former co-editor of the peer-reviewed journal *Southeastern Geographer* (2004-2007). Distributed by UNC Press, the journal is widely considered to be the best regional geography journal in the United States. He has served as guest editor for eleven special journal issues and currently serves on the editorial boards of seven journals (*AAG Review of Books*, *Journal of Cultural Geography*, *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, *Tourism Geographies*, *Social & Cultural Geography*, *Southeastern Geographer*, and *The Flannery O'Connor Review*). Alderman is Past President of the Southeastern Division of the Association of American Geographers and recently served as Regional Councilor (representing the Southeast) on the AAG National Council (2011-2014). He is a long-time member of the Southern Studies Committee of the Southeastern Division of the AAG and, in 2007 he co-founded the AAG Study of the American South Specialty Group. Alderman co-organized (with Becky Dobbs) "The American South" featured theme at the 2014 national meeting of the Association of American Geographers in Tampa, FL.

Alderman has (co)organized over 80 special paper and panel sessions at professional meetings, (co)authored over 100 conference presentations. Alderman is (co)author of over 100 journal articles, book chapters, and other essays—several of which published with current or former students. He has published work in journals such as *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, *Area*, *Environment and Planning D*, *Geographical Review*, *Journal of Historical Geography*, *Journal of Geography*, *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing*, *Progress in Human Geography*, *Social & Cultural Geography*, *Social Science Quarterly*, *Southern Cultures*, *Southern Quarterly*, *Urban Geography*, and *Tourism Recreation Research*. Copies of many of his publications are available at <https://utk.academia.edu/DerekAlderman>

Alderman has won awards in the past for his research and teaching. In 2002, he received a Distinguished University Teaching Achievement Award from the National Council for Geographic Education. In 2005, Alderman received a Distinguished Professor of Teaching Award from East Carolina University and a Scholar-Teacher Award. In 2009, he received a UNC Board of Governors Excellence in Teaching Award, the highest recognition of teaching within the university system. As a result of this recognition, he delivered Keynote Addresses at ECU's 2009 Winter Commencement and 2011 New Student Convocation. In fall of 2013, Alderman delivered one of the prestigious "Pregame Showcase" talks at the University of Tennessee, an annual academic lecture series held before every home football game.

In the area of research, Alderman was the 2000 recipient of the AAG Nystrom Award for the best paper based on a recently completed dissertation in geography. He received a Research Honors Award from the Southeastern Division of the AAG and a prestigious Five-Year Research Award from East Carolina University in 2006. Most recently, in 2011, he received the AAG Meredith F. Burrill Award from the AAG, which honors work of exceptional merit, and quality that lies at the intersection of basic research in geography on the one hand, and practical applications or policy implications on the other.