



LAWRENCE ABOLITIONIST INSTITUTE: CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Hand out - 01

The [Kansas](#) Territory was opened to settlement on May 30, 1854 by the [Kansas-Nebraska Act](#). According to the concept of "popular sovereignty," settlers could decide whether to admit their territory as a slave or free state. Soon, New England abolitionists began organizing emigrant aid societies to encourage like-minded citizens to settle in the new territory. On August 1, 1854, Twenty-nine northern emigrants, mostly from Massachusetts and Vermont, were the first to arrive in Lawrence, [Kansas](#), named for Amos A. Lawrence, a promoter of the Emigrant Aid Society. A second party of 200 men, women and children arrived in September. Lawrence is one of the few cities in [Kansas](#) founded purely for political reasons.

<http://www.legendsofamerica.com/OZ-Lawrence.html>

*I met one man who was wounded in love
I met another man who was wounded with hatred*

Bob Dylan (A Hard Rains' A-Gonna Fall)

PREMISE:

Alongside infinite variations and colors of cultures and histories, the history of humanity has also produced unbearable and far too many instances of human oppression. To some degree it almost seems that the occurrences of human injustice are somewhat proportional to the degree to which a culture may be regarded as "civilized". To delve into collective-human psyche in the quest to understand why humans tend to oppress each other may lead us to the beginnings of a solution. However that is well outside the boundaries of an architectural endeavor. In as much as that continuing acts of aggression and oppression happen in physical place, and as does its resistance, the physicality of architecture is intimately bound up with this issue. Architecture could therefore play a role in this issue, and yet without the pretense that it can "solve" it.

A PLACE OF ACTIVISM FOR LAWRENCE:

Lawrence, Kansas has a unique history among small cities. Having been founded in part to establish an opposition to slavery, political, activist and humanitarian agendas are the underpinnings of the city- an aspect that is faint in the city's memory. Even if too often recounted, Quantrill's raid upon Lawrence establishes our city's identity in freedom and in a belief in human rights. With this history, naturally the city has been considered recently as a possible site for an Abolitionist Museum. Such an idea is highly probable (given that is, our post-war economy improves). Similar projects become realized once a while: a National Underground Railroad museum has just opened in Cincinnati.

Rather than only reflect on the past (which is essential to keep a collective memory alive), the mission of this proposed center will proceed from the history of the abolitionist movement and focus on what perpetuates in the present: slavery, in many traditional and camouflaged hybrid forms, as many activist organizations reveal, is alive and well around the globe. Beyond this, various forms of atrocities continue around the world to which many peoples and their governments are impotent, passive or sometimes abetting witnesses. In the highly connected (both digitally and physically) contemporary world, action has become more and more the realm of independent groups and is no longer necessarily the purvey of local governments.

The proposed project will therefore be seen as a place of volunteer activism toward human-right issues. It will have to be a place based on the horrors of history, the actions of the present and the hope of the future. As a place of activity, the center can be involved as a watch-dog in the local and regional issues. Conceivably, the center can offer its resources to prevent injustices and negotiate and arbitrate local and regional conflicts. In essence, with the possibility of being a bit of gadfly, the center can heighten the awareness locally and regionally and prevent the yet-to-occur problems.

The general area around the two main bridges connecting downtown Lawrence and North Lawrence will constitute the "site". Students are free to locate the building any where in this general area with the pre-condition that the existing buildings will not be removed. Access to the site and relationship to the city at large must be considered in locating the specific buildings.

THE PROJECT TASK:

The events and activities of the Center should determine the program and not the other way. The center will be a "container" of two aspects: things and activities. As a "container" of things, the center will fall into the convention of holding three categories of things that seem, on the surface, to be mutually exclusive but exhibit much overlap and ambiguity on closer examination:

"BOOKS"

The center should act as a place of resource for conducting and disseminating research. Books, historic documents, maps, photos, audio-visual material will all be available to general public as well as societies and scholars.

"ARTIFACTS"

The center will collect and display every-day and technological artifacts associated with specific periods of anti-slavery movement. Students are expected to research individually and collectively to determine a few major objects and artifacts and select them for inclusion in the center. The spaces of display will be driven by the consideration of these artifacts and objects.

"ART"

Similar to artifacts, the center must perform the role of collecting and displaying things regarded (currently or in the past) as art which relate to the struggle against slavery. Again, students are expected to identify some pieces that could activate conceptual ideas for space.

As a base line the following must be included in a building that is between 12000 and 15000 square feet:

750-1000	Administrative use (offices/ work room/ storage)
3000-4000	Temporary and permanent display of art/artifacts
2000-3000	Research center
1500-2000	Public spaces (including rest rooms, lounges, lobbies)
1200-1500	Archival and restoration
2000-2500	Auditorium
1700-2000	Community space and Kitchen

A critical consideration of the actions and events of such an institute should lead to the proposal of additional programmatic elements. There are no set criteria in terms of physical area for this, but students are expected to make proposals and develop these ideas during very early stages of the project. Additional built area will be required for circulation, storage, janitorial and mechanical equipment. Outdoor areas and connectivity to the other aspects of site and the city beyond are strongly encouraged.