RECASTING MONUMENTALITY:
PERFORMANCES OF PUBLIC PROTEST AT CONFEDERATE MONUMENTS

By

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A Thesis submitted to the Institute for Curatorial Practice in Performance at Wesleyan University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Performance Curation

Middletown, Connecticut May 2018
Abstract

This thesis explores performances of public protest at Confederate monuments. The unveiling of a monument suggests its shared meaning with spectators. Civil War Confederates were memorialized for their sacrifice, as they fought to preserve a Southern way of life that included systems of slavery. White supremacists and alt-right groups recently have gathered across the country to protest what they see as the erosion of traditional Southern culture with monuments as the backdrop for their protests. However, this meaning is being challenged by acts of public protest. These monuments, cast initially as representing white sacrifice, are now seen to promote white supremacism and African American subordination. I examine the significant role that white women have occupied in the erection and celebration of these monuments, and the role Black women have played in their protest. I explore the performative rituals that represent a shift from African American subordination to African American mourning. Using the notion of “visuality,” I analyze the aesthetics of the Confederate monuments and the protests against them. By bridging a historical context with contemporary social discourse, it is my intention that this reassessment suggests an interdisciplinary exhibition that resonates with the motifs and themes researched in this thesis.

Keywords

Confederate monuments; African American; public protest; public space; monumentality; mourning; visibility; visuality; performance; interdisciplinary; intersectional feminism; curation
Acknowledgments

Thank you to the Institute for Curatorial Practice in Performance at Wesleyan University. I am grateful to Sam Miller, whose initiative in creating the only program of its kind provided me a place to explore my interdisciplinary and creative instincts. I am thankful for Noémie Solomon’s always open and critical response to my work. I am also grateful to Sarah Curran’s solid reasoning and support of my work—I am glad to count her among this group of peers, and now friends.

Judy Hussy Taylor, Philp Bither, and Kristy Edmunds were generous with their time and opened their careers up to the students. Being educated by working curators provided me a birds-eye view of the rigor and dedication required to advocate for both the artist and the institution, at a time when surrounding influences conspire to dissolve their support and legitimacy.

I am grateful to my thesis advisor Rebecca Schneider for encouraging me to follow my instincts. Profound thanks to the intrepid Jessica Del Vecchio for managing the editorial riddles I left on the page.

Without sentimentality, I thank the poet Karen Kevorkian, my mother and mentor. She is the one I turn to for the most real discussion of any topic. I want to thank my stepfather Dell Upton who knowingly kept an arm’s length from my research so that I could find my voice. Last but not least, I impress infinite thank yous on Greg, Desmund, and Dekker Eklund, my hearts.
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Chapter One: Introduction

A gray Dodge Charger plowed into a sedan and then into a minivan. Bodies flew. People were terrified and screaming. Those closest to it said it was definitely a violent attack. The driver, who people later described as a skinny white guy with a straggly beard, reversed out of there and drove off, the front end of his car all smashed up. . . . .

Meanwhile, counter-protesters were trying to stop the far-right groups from entering the park. Some counter-protesters, including many marching under red and black anti-fascist banners, tried to block the streets. . . . .

“I thought it had something to do with Trump. Trump’s not a white supremacist,” Samantha Bloom said, before becoming visibly upset as she learned of the injuries and deaths at the rally [caused by her son.] “He [her son] had an African-American friend....,” she said before her voice trailed off. (Helmore et al.)

How Did We Get Here?

In the passage above, a mother tries to make sense of her son’s actions. She replies in the moment, immediately after having learned from journalists that her son was arrested for driving a car into a group of counter-protesters, injuring twenty-four and killing one. She stammers in response as she takes in the news. On May 13, 2017, her son went to the “Unite the Right” rally, a neo-Nazi gathering in Charlottesville, Virginia, to protest the removal of an equestrian statue, the Robert E. Lee Monument, from public view. She thought he was going to a Trump rally. She struggles to complete her thoughts, her mind racing to find a rationale linking the President of the United States, Donald Trump, and the political groups that organized and planned in advance for violent confrontation that day.

In what appeared to be a Friday night pre-performance to the infamous Saturday afternoon rally, the alt-right and neo-Nazi groups from across the United States convened
around the statue of Robert E. Lee, paying homage to it and creating ritual space around it (Wallace-Wells 1). They held “backyard tiki-style torches” (Wallace-Wells 2), echoing the use of lit torches used by the KKK decades back. On the day of the rally, the white nationalists brandished weapons, making a stand to protect the bronze and granite Confederate leader and all that it represented to them. Employing the conventions of traditional theater, the marchers argued for the monument’s protection, carrying props of Confederate flags and shields, wearing costumes of helmets and military fatigues, and chanting “you will not replace us,” and “Jew will not replace us” (Rosenthal and Stolberg). Five blocks away from the Charlottesville protest, sitting across the street from the courthouse, is the site of a supposed slave market.¹ In opposition to the protective protesters, counter-protesters held their ground, carrying signs that read, “Y’all SUKKK!” and “KKK Sashay Away!” (Beckett).

Robert E. Lee, a General of the Confederate Army, is one of the most popular Confederate leaders memorialized to exemplify Southern culture (Savage 130). The patriarchic equestrian statue is intended to symbolically project the authority that commands loyalty to the “lost cause” of slavery. The “lost cause” narrative has also been perpetuated in “speeches, performances, prints, and other visual imagery” (Mills 33). Antiquated high school history books teach white-washed impressions of Lee's greatness. Lee represents a history that insists that the South’s motivation in fighting the Civil War was to maintain individual states’ rights. However, the ordinances of secession of that time clearly pledged to uphold slavery.² Postbellum America's attempts at Reconstruction failed to create an

¹ The Slave block adjacent to “0” Court Square and 6th Street operated for over 100 years, selling enslaved Africans and African Americans.
² Each Southern state drafted its own statement to secede from the United States. In these ordinances, clear mention was made distinguishing their states from non-slaveholding states.
atmosphere of racial equity between Blacks and whites. Whites searched for ways to reassert authority over freed former slaves. Jim Crow laws led to segregation, the Klu Klux Klan emerged to intimidate and exert control over African Americans, and Confederate statues were erected in open space as a public reminder of white supremacy. A spike in the number of Confederate monuments erected occurred in two major periods: first, in Reconstruction during challenges to Jim Crow segregation laws, and, second, during the Civil Rights movement through the 1950s and 1960s. The building of these monuments can be viewed as an attempt to remind African Americans of white dominance during times of national discourse around African American rights. (SPLC “Heritage” 11) (see fig. 1.1).

Figure 1.1. “150 years of Confederate Iconography,” 2016.

Since 2015, there has been renewed debate concerning Confederate monuments, brought on by public protests in cities throughout the South. These protests critique the monuments’ presence as an homage to slavery. In cities such as Charlottesville and Richmond, Virginia; New Orleans, Louisiana; and Durham, North Carolina, citizens argue for and against the removal of these monuments from public view as protesters perform acts of intervention by defacing these monuments and correspondingly, what they stand
for. Through news outlets and social media, the American public is made aware of the heightened racial tensions, protests and counter-protests, and the acts of intervention that support or challenge white supremacist ideals represented by Confederate monuments.

Issues of race feel increasingly urgent today as the media makes violence committed on Black bodies more visible, and as dialogue ensues around nationalist and anti-immigration legislation. The 2017 ascension of a neoliberalist politician to the office of the United States presidency, whose campaign was supported by the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) and alt-right groups, has exposed the deep-seated racist values that have continue to resonate since the Civil War. Since the 2017 Charlottesville alt-right rally, the KKK has brazenly staged rallies around Confederate monuments. Such public appearances have resulted in their mockery in the media. The mockery, in turn, forces those who identify with conservative political thought to question the alignment of their beliefs with the Klan’s overtly racist politics. However, elaborating on the stature and influence of the Klan, Jack White in The Guardian stated he, “believed the ‘alt-right,’ a collection of internet-savvy far-right nationalists, racists, misogynists, and anti-Semites steeped in online trolling culture,” should be considered a more significant problem in the propagation of hate philosophy (Beckett).

Many politicians recognize the danger of the alt-right philosophy and have come out in support of the monuments’ removal. Charlottesville Mayor Mike Signer compared the tiki torch ceremony at the alt-right rally “to KKK tactics ‘designed to instill fear’ in minorities” (Moomaw). Facing disagreement over the future of a collection of Confederate monuments in Richmond, Virginia, the former capital of the Confederacy, Mayor Levar Stoney, proclaims he “wished those sculptures had never been made” and insists now is the time to “set the historical record straight” (Oliver). He continues:
Equal parts myth and deception, [the statues] were the “alternative facts” of their time—a false narrative etched in stone and bronze more than 100 years ago—not only to lionize the architects and defenders of slavery, but to perpetuate the tyranny and terror of Jim Crow and reassert a new era of white supremacy. (qtd. in Oliver)

In a recent interview with National Public Radio, New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu defended his decision to remove the city’s Confederate monuments. He said, “I recognize that the Civil War intended to destroy the United States of America, not to unite it. And it was specifically fought to preserve the institution of slavery” (Martin). Here, Landrieu exposes the true purpose of Confederate monuments: to memorialize and honor African and African American slavery rather than reject the institution as immoral.

What follows is an analysis of Confederate monuments themselves, the circumstances of their creation, the celebrations staged around them, and the protests that challenge their presence. I argue that white women played a dominant role as mobilizers of a false Confederate collective memory, and that Black women play a significant role in arguing for the dismantling of these monuments. I also demonstrate that Confederate monuments are symbols of white commercial enterprise that benefit from Black subjugation. I show how protests around these monuments aesthetically and psychically resemble Black burial practices of the Antebellum Period. I also examine what these monuments make visible and the multiple African American histories and identities they keep hidden. Not least of all, I argue that my research offers me an interdisciplinary curatorial focus so that I can organize a possible contemporary art exhibition of artists whose work supports a counter-memorial aesthetic.

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3 In May 2018, Mayor Mitch Landrieu will be awarded the Kennedy Profile in Courage Award by the Kennedy Library Foundation for supporting the removal of four Confederate monuments from public space in New Orleans (DeBonis).
Theoretical Overview

Histories of the Civil War provide context for Confederate monuments as well as understanding of the prevailing racist attitudes that exist today. Eric Foner’s work on Reconstruction and its failed promises to African Americans provide overall historical context throughout the thesis. I establish a thread between sites of battle and burial, moving from graveside ritual to statue, from private to public space, and ultimately arguing that the collective trauma experienced by African Americans can go from invisibility to visibility through the protests staged at monument sites. As I do so, John Vlatch’s work on antebellum and postbellum Black gravesites offers aesthetic and spiritual background for identifying Black political strategies to enter public space.

Throughout my thesis, I use the term “monumentality” to refer to the physical shape bodies form when protesting Confederate monuments. I also define protesting bodies as counter-monuments. James F. Osborne likens the difference between the terms of monumental and monumentality to the difference between form and meaning, referencing visual art’s formalist conventions. A crowd of protesters can be seen as monumental in proportion and become a visible monolith that speaks to architectural scale and other formalist qualities. The crowd also accumulates meaning that relates to variable details of a particular moment. Osborne states that within monumental there is:

an ongoing constantly renegotiated relationship between thing and person, between the monument(s) and the person(s) experiencing the monument. Such a relational approach to monumentality offers the possibility of forging a unifying discourse to the topic, and one that might act as a guide for future research. (Osborne 3)
Hal Foster notes that monumentality exists in a relational context given to “architecture as a site of public space, of public discourse” (Foster 136). This is useful in my discussions of the authority exerted by Confederate monuments apart from sculptural form, and how protest at these sites dismisses impressions of monumentality.

Also crucial to my analysis is an understanding of the counter-monument. In his study of German monuments, James E. Young proposes that perhaps the very materiality of monuments and memorials is counter-productive to their intention. He suggests that maybe it is the desire to forget historical atrocities such as the Holocaust or the slave trade that drives us to produce these monuments. Young argues that "once we assign monumental form to memory, we have, to some degree, divested ourselves of the obligation to remember" (Young, "The Counter Monument" 273). When a country attempts to memorialize its best represented self, it inadvertently memorializes its worst acts of humanity embedded within its entire history. Consequently, the monument is negated by its own inherent failure. Additionally, Young argues that it is impossible for monuments to hold their meaning while situated within continually shifting contexts. He writes that it produces a counter-effect one that "forces the memorial to disperse—not gather—memory, even as it gathers the literal effects of time in one place" ("The Counter Monument" 294).

Similarly, the authority that monuments are meant to convey, when challenged, relocates to the protesters that oppose them. The monument’s authority is displaced as the public gains awareness of the beliefs of groups that oppose the values the monument represents. Acts of vandalism or public protests at Confederate monument sites (recognized as counter-influence) also create a counter-aesthetic that suggests a disruption to the western
tradition of figural statues. “Vandalized” monuments visually signify a disruption to an established way of thinking.

Much like Germany's efforts to deal responsibly with the memory of the systematic killing of millions of Jews during the Holocaust, the United States' debates around ethical commemoration are complex. The U.S. has also been responsible for crimes against humanity perpetrated during the many years of Indian Removal and the enslavement of Africans brought from Africa as well as their families who were born in America. The challenge for the United States government then lies in the need to acknowledge that history and accept "the litany of its misdeeds, [which] make[s] them part of its reason for being" (Young, "The Counter Monument" 270).

Discussing the counter-monument movement in Germany, Young says that the very materiality of stone—its stillness and rigidity—is counterintuitive to the shifting nature of memory. In fact, he argues, a monument dedicated to fascism—such as those in Italy commissioned by Mussolini—becomes the fascist object

Fig. 1.2. Image of the “Berlin Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe” designed by Peter Eisenman.
itself, and so a counter-monument is one that exists in abstraction, retains some element of temporal fluidity, and is designed as a "self-conscious memorial space conceived to challenge the very premises of [its] being" (Young, "The Counter Monument" 274, 271).

One example of such a counter-monument is architect's Peter Eisenman's "Berlin Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe," which opened in 2005 in Berlin. The memorial consists of a park filled with masses of large concrete slabs (see fig.2.2). Eisenman’s counter-monument aesthetic opposes traditional monument design. The slabs in Eisenman's Memorial resemble the pedestals left behind after their Confederate monuments have been removed. Such a memorial offers ideas for how to repurpose these remnant pedestals. Displayed in such a way, their multiplicity would make them counter-monumental. Counter-monuments invite a process of contemplation as we determine our relationship to the history that has occurred, whereas monuments declare absolute statements with little room for multiple viewpoints. Monuments are subjective statements. Privately commissioned, they represent an incomplete narrative that promotes bias by those seeking to construct honor. In removing the presence of slavery from these memorials, paradoxically they make room for African Americans to respond. Protests are taking place.

As a curator that works across the performing and visual arts, I consider monuments as both physical objects and performative constructs. Performance swirls around these seemingly fixed objects as action and audience mix in public space and at unveiling ceremonies, and protests. Performance is situational, rooted in site, and draws from the theories associated with theater departments. Diana Taylor states that (social) performances “function as vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity through reiterated, or what Richard Schechner has called ‘twice-behaved behavior’”
(2) Social protests at sites of Confederate monuments thus can be viewed as performative.

I recognize public space as an area such as a sidewalk or street where relationships between meaning and social awareness continue to change, activated as politics and social ideologies evolve. As I analyze the Confederate monuments and protests of them, I show that intention and meaning, even interpretations of history, continue to change based on social and cultural relationships surrounding the monuments at any given time. I look to Susan Leigh Foster who writes on the collective body in public space as performance. Foster investigates the choreography of collectivity in public space and considers the body as an agent in acts of political protest, insisting that “the body as articulate matter” builds “agency and sociality” (S. Foster 395). The body is a medium; it “feel[s] and learn[s] from other bodies, both friendly and hostile,” and can lend itself to formal qualities of the monumental (S. Foster 412). The body also creates public space relational to another body, to architecture, and even to Confederate monument. Foster says the body is a “responsive physicality that, everywhere along the way, deciphers the social and then choreographs an imagined alternative” (S. Foster 412). Judith Butler’s ideas about gendered public and political space are also useful to me as I interpret women’s protest strategies.

I am highly aware of my privilege as a white woman. I am attentive to the power dynamics in academia and society at large, as I attempt to theorize aspects of African American and African American women’s history. I use a feminist sensibility to engage with work that considers a broader scope of “women’s” life experiences. Patricia Hill Collins informs my understanding of Black feminist theory and the differences between white and Black women’s experiences over the last century. Through the writings of W.E.B. Dubois, Tavia Nyong’o, and Fred Moten, I widen that feminist perspective to a more general
reconsideration of African American history. Throughout my thesis, I borrow Christina Sharpe’s vivid use of a “wake” as a metaphor for slavery’s implications.

I view protests as an oppositional force and statement. Confederate monument protesters do not accept the authority these memorials are meant to convey. I see counter-protests as moral objections to another protest taking place. To be in public view is to be seen in an open area, which, described above, even exists between bodies and forms.

Chapter Breakdown

There are over 718 Confederate monuments found on public land in the U.S. today (SPLC 7). Of those, I look primarily at Confederate monuments that were erected between 1870-1910 by the Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) and analyze the monuments currently in the news as sites of protests: the Robert E. Lee Monuments in Charlottesville and Richmond (1924 and 1890), the Jefferson Davis Monument in Richmond (1907), the Confederate Memorial at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia (1914), and the Confederate Soldier’s Monument in Durham, North Carolina (1924). I also focus on sites that include several Confederate monuments like Richmond’s Monument Avenue and Monroe Park.

At the time of this writing, New Orleans has removed the Robert E. Lee Monument (1884) from public space. The city has declared the monument a public nuisance for its celebration of Confederate symbolism. In this thesis, I ask whether the statue’s removal from public view sufficiently critiques the core values of racism that are held within these monuments. I look closely at the alt-right rally and counter-protest at the Robert E. Lee Monument in Charlottesville, the counter-protest at the Confederate Soldiers Monument in
Durham on August 14, 2017, as well as others. I explore the ways that protests can shift the meaning of monuments from reverent memorials that honor soldiers who fought to uphold slavery, to reminders of the African American victims of Confederate violence.

In Chapter Two, I analyze the role of women in the activities around Confederate monuments. As supposed custodians of moral health, white women were involved in the planning and funding of Confederate monuments, and they continue to play a part in present-day public protests, advocating on both sides of the monument removal debate. I also look at African American women’s roles in protesting the principles of slavery and racism, and in arguing for the removal of Confederate monuments.

Linking burial sites to public memorials, in Chapter Three, I analyze two historic cemeteries in Richmond: Hollywood Cemetery, site of a large number of Confederate burials, and Evergreen Cemetery, a once grand, now derelict African American burial ground. I conducted site visits to both of these cemeteries and use newspaper accounts to trace African Americans’s claiming of public space as an activist strategy to gain autonomy.

In Chapter Four, I look at visuality as both an oppressive and liberatory force. I demonstrate how whites create controlling images that attempt to disable Black power, and I argue that racist culture and Confederate monuments are linked through visible means. I look at aesthetic protests of Confederate monuments that leave visible messages that indicate a counter perspective to a monument’s meaning.

In Chapter Five, I give a brief example of how I might build an exhibition from the research presented in this thesis. The hypothetical exhibition “Space Is the Place” will explore issues of racism, emotional vulnerability, the visibility of people of color, and collective memory. I offer examples of artists who, through their work, explore intersecting
qualities of transference, subversive messaging, and political voice. Viewed through the lens of performance curation, it is my hope these sites can claim a new monumentality. I give the term “monumentality” new meaning through an investigation of interdisciplinary counter-memorial aesthetics.

Methodology

Like my curatorial practice, my research process involves searching for connections between cultural and social events to gain a wider understanding of how things are done and why things are made. My online research took me to an extensive list of sites including The Library of Congress, and the Valentine Museum Archives. I visited The Library of Virginia historical archives to read articles from the African American newspaper The Richmond Planet (1883-1938) and the dominant newspaper The Richmond Times-Dispatch (1850-present). I looked for reports on statues’ vandalism, on burial and memorial ritual performances, and on unveilings that described the day’s festivities. I analyze original photographs, songs, audio recordings, oral histories, interviews, academic publications, organizational reports and websites, and city archives. I used newspapers such as The New York Times, The Washington Post, and The Guardian, primarily, as well as online platforms that feature social and cultural responses to the presence and removal of Confederate monuments. I trace a long history of Confederate monuments planned, unveiled, defaced or vandalized, which I read as performative acts, rituals, protests, and interventions, protested, re-veiled, and even, removed.

I used an associative writing process to time-jump through decades and disciplines, creating a patchwork of moments and objects, that, together, allow me to build a flexible
context that is always ready to evolve. I engaged with a variety of voices and resisted the
dominant Western linear history model that frankly feels heavy and immovable. I feel emboldened here, but maybe we can shift the discourse and action around Confederate monuments through aesthetic interventions—both through the protests of the monuments and through this writing. Otherwise, inevitably, as history has shown us, the conversations around monuments will die down, and the monuments’ fates will remain unresolved until the next time they wake to vitality with protesters standing in their space. When I get to the core of my research, the question I seem to be asking, as it relates to my professional curatorial practice, is: "how do you engage historical and contemporary contexts that provide the site for cultural work reflecting wider social issues? How do you address this complexity to an unknowing public?"
Chapter Two: Full Circle Matriarch

Sojourner told them that her breasts had suckled many a white babe, to the exclusion of her own offspring; that some of those white babies had grown to man’s estate; that, although they had sucked her colored breasts, they were in her estimation, far more manly than they (her persecutor) appeared to be; and she quietly asked them, as she disrobed her bosom, if they, too, wished to suck! In vindication of her truthfulness, she told them that she would show her breast to the whole congregation; that it was not to her shame that she uncovered her breast before them, but to their shame

---William Hayward, in a letter dated 1858 (qtd. in Mirzoeff)

In what reads like a review of a piece of contemporary performance art, an 1858 newspaper story detailed an abolitionist meeting in which Sojourner Truth was to be the featured speaker. Truth, an African American woman born into enslavement, would become an iconic abolitionist and women's rights activist. Before the meeting started, complaints were made by white male audience members who questioned whether Truth was a woman, believing that she was in fact, a man in disguise. They demanded she expose her breast to the white women present in the audience, who would then report back their findings to the men. Defiantly, Truth belittled the male spectators by addressing them directly, likening them to the white children she had breastfed. Truth invokes maternal power by inviting them to also breastfeed from her unveiled “colored breasts.” Truth was forced to expose herself, as though the rules of female etiquette that would forbid such a display do not apply to her. When Truth stated that her “breasts had suckled many a white babe, to the exclusion of her own offspring,” she recognized the double-standard that honors white maternal bonds and disallows Black women a physical hold on their families—families that had been sold and torn apart. Truth’s activism often took place in front of white audiences as she would attempt
to access “elite space” such as the White House and abolitionist meetings (Masur 2). Following Emancipation, “black activists’ demands for access to such spaces as equals to whites had drawn considerable public attention” (Masur 2). Over a century and a half later, Black women activists also stage their protests in front of white audiences.

As this anecdote demonstrates, despite demoralization by racist white culture, after the Civil War, African American women were active strategists in negotiating for themselves and their communities. White women, it turns out, were strategists of a different sort; who, over the next century, "played an essential role in promoting Lost Cause mythology," reifying white supremacist values through their participation in the construction and celebration of Confederate memorials (Ott 131). Barbara Ellen Smith also emphasizes the differences between white and Black lived experience in the post-war period, deconstructing any assumption that Southern women had one shared reality. She contends that, after the Civil War, Black and white women were both moving into public space as “civic activists and skilled organizers” (Smith 17) and that white women were active in restoring white superiority after the South lost the war. Smith argues that, in fact, white women were responsible for the mythologizing and revisionist history that props up both “white supremacy and male supremacy” (21).

In the atmosphere following the Civil War, a sense of mourning and matriarchal power mobilized white women, who worked to ensure the persistence of Confederate values. At the same time, women of color worked to dispel those same racist values. In this chapter, I will examine how white women used memorialization in cultural markers like monuments and photographs. These artifacts promote women’s autonomy, but also support patriarchy. By creating likenesses of Confederate leaders, and through the use of children to suggest
futurity, white women aided in the continuance of Confederate values. Through their use of the stereotypical Mammy figure, they symbolically supported the continuation of slavery. I also look at how women served as the keepers of memory to show how Confederate monuments uphold matriarchal whiteness and argue for white women's complicity in constructing a new Southern history that denies its attempts to protect slavery. To demonstrate how Black women resist—historically and today—I examine African American women activists like Sojourner Truth and Mamie Garvin Fields. I also analyze the role that Takiyah Thompson played in the 2017 counter-protest in Durham, her acts signifying an ongoing fight against systemic racism.

White Women Mourn | Constructing Memory

Following the Civil War, white women formed memorial committees to find ways to honor their dead and rationalize the immense loss of life (Blight 64). Women who had traditionally served “as educators and moral stewards of the nation’s children,” moved from the domestic interior to more public arenas continuing their “important role in the transmission of culture” (Brundage 72). Women found that they could now enter public space in new ways, and memorial committees provided women public legitimacy as they took on moral causes, which lead to their role in crafting public memory. Committees like the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) were instrumental in promoting the “Lost Cause” version of history which “trumpeted the constitutionality of secession and touted the war’s purpose as the defense of states’ rights while eschewing slavery as the cause of the war” (Ott 131). In actuality, secessionist states actively fought against the Federal
government, which condemned Southern resistance to Federal law as political treason and considered Robert E. Lee “nothing less than a traitor” (Savage 132).

As the UDC organized and raised funds for mourning rituals, monuments, and their unveilings, white women moved into their role as the "guardians of culture" (Savage 139). A photo from the 1880s illustrates white women's role in constructing a new Southern Collective memory through monuments. In the photograph, a group of white women embodies and dramatizes remembrance and mourning as costumed angels around a Confederate memorial (though it is not clear if the monument is a prop or actual) (see fig. 2.1). Women’s move into these strategized roles is evidenced by an 1899 announcement published in the *Alexandria Gazette*. The ad calls for the formation of a planning committee for a new Robert E. Lee monument in Washington:

> The Robert E. Lee Monument Association, which was organized early this week, held a meeting at 1210 G street, Washington, yesterday. In the absence of Mrs. Florence Vance, president of the association, Miss Virginia Miller, one of the vice presidents, presided. The secretary, Miss Nina Stevenson, recorded the minutes of the meeting… All the white persons who subscribe $1 to the fund may become members of the association. (“Thursday Evening”)
Notably, the ad speaks directly to a white audience; only “white persons” were able to join the committee. It is clear that these women honoring Robert E. Lee, the “key figure in the cult of the Lost Cause” (Savage 130), in no way believe that Blacks are equal to whites.

Erecting Confederate monuments was not an easy endeavor. Even back then, memorial committees faced resistance to their efforts. Some felt the monuments would prevent the healing of the already politically divided country. Robert E. Lee, himself, wrote of his unease at being honored, his persona monumentalized in cities not only across the South but throughout the United States. Written in a letter in 1866, just a year after the war ended, Lee expressed concern for the potential for the monuments to impede the nation’s healing:

As regards the erection of such a monument as is contemplated; my conviction is, that however grateful it would be to the feelings of the South, the attempt in the present condition of the Country, would have the effect of retarding, instead of accelerating its accomplishment; & of continuing, if not adding to, the difficulties under which the Southern people labour. All I think that can now be done, is to aid our noble & generous women in their efforts to protect the graves & mark the last resting places of those who have fallen, & wait for better times [...] (Lee, “Sender”)

History shows that monuments honoring Lee continued being built despite his concerns. Once erected, the statues represented years of efforts by white women who had planned and sought funds for their realization. At the end of all that female effort, there were ceremonies to memorialize Confederate leaders, but also to celebrate the efforts made by the women on their behalf.

**Maternal Power | Performing Children**

Performing children featured significantly in monument unveiling and reunion
festivities, which demonstrates women’s central role in their planning and execution. Documentation of unveilings describe performative pageantry by children where, for example, you might see 600 children costumed to resemble a human Confederate flag singing “Dixie” (see fig. 2.2) or groups of orphans marched through the streets like regimented soldiers (“Reunion of Confederate Veterans”).

![Figure 2.2. “Human Confederate Flag,” 1907.](image)

![Figure 2.3. “Unveiling of Confederate monument, Arlington Cemetery, Va., June 4, 1914.”](image)

Children were also spectators (see fig. 2.3) listening and viewing the speech-making by white male politicians and female committee members (Brundage 2005). Citing Rebecca Schneider's patricidal theory, I argue that Confederate women become homicidal matriarchs in the ritualized re-killing of fathers and sons, through the erection of public monuments ("Patricide" 56). Women’s use of children in these celebrations supported Confederate values alluding to a (growing and) continued future of white leadership in their own likeness. Children portrayed a specific image of the future during a moment in time when sentimentality (which fed the designers of the Lost Cause) began to evolve into a form of nostalgia (Kete 157). The act of memorializing moves from generation to generation, often
through women, at sites of mourning like gravesites and monuments, and also in photographic portraits.

The UDC exists still today and continues holding remembrance ceremonies to prop Confederate memory in public consciousness. In a 1983 photograph, a man presents a flag to

Figure 2.4. “UDC Massing of the Flags,” 1983.

Daughter Mrs. John G. Williams, past historian general of the UDC. She is dressed in Civil War attire (see fig. 2.4) that appears to be nearly a century old. As Williams performs a ceremony in front of the Richmond Jefferson Davis Monument, her role as historian to protect the (constructed) Confederate legacy solidifies as she draws from her power as Matriarch (and Daughter) in the public space of the monument.

In "Patricidal Memory and the Passerby," Schneider suggests that monuments to dead fathers are used to preserve a patriarchal culture in which “dads must die to insure that dead dads remain” (52). Patriarchal statues associate male figures with power, leaving the implication that women have none. She writes of "ritualized acts and habitual behaviors in and around statues of dads," suggesting that "patricidal patriarchy is live and that, perhaps
ironically, it is through memorials to dead dads that their presence is “given to remain live” (“Patricide” 56). I see Confederate Leaders as “dead dads” who, mythologized in bronze, face “ritualized acts and habitual behaviors in and around statues of dads,” such as unveilings, reunions, and protests, that activate these monuments (“Patricide” 56). These male figures represent death and sacrifice when presented to the public. They promote a Southern way of life (slavery) that was lost through their failure to win the war. Women in new public roles used memorialization to reinforce the suggestion of fathers, who live-on through dying, in a regular cycle of renewed power.

Ironically, women performing these rituals to empower men as leaders gained significant autonomy and power themselves as they assumed memorialization duties. In “Burial of Latane” (1868), an engraving based on a painting by William Dickinson Washington, the widow of Confederate Captain William D. Latané mourns his death at their Summer Hill plantation and is “attended entirely by women, slaves, and children” (see fig. 2.5). According to the summary on the Library of Congress website, “Mrs. Willoughby Newton performs the burial service. Slaves are to the left, and women and girls stand to the right” (“Burial of Latane”). Here, a white matriarch, defined here as a white female head of a social unit, takes on the additional roles of preacher, mourner, father, and authoritarian.
Confederate monuments mostly depict white men although some examples honor
Confederate women. Commissioned by the UDC, the Confederate Mothers Monument
(1918) sits in the civic space across from the town courthouse in Texarkana, TX. An ode to
Confederate matriarchs is inscribed on the monument:

> O Great Confederate Mothers, we would print your names on
> monuments, that men may read them as the years go by and
> tribute pay to you, who bore and nurtured hero sons and gave
> them solace on that darkest hour, when they came home with
> broken swords and guns. (Little 422)

Here a committee of white women erects a memorial to honor themselves and to
make public their private mourning. The implication here is pretty clear; we
brought you, sons, into the world and through our matriarchal power, we will be
the ones to keep you in public memory.

History shows us that public consciousness diminishes when news coverage of
Confederate monument protests moves out of the news cycle. Schneider refers to Walter
Benjamin's “optical unconscious” where “the naked eye cannot penetrate all details – even
quite ordinary or banal ones–of any scene” (53). That in fact, monumentality negotiates
between its significance and its small details that contribute to its site, that if focused on, reveal issues that contribute to understanding the monument's meaning. Confederate monuments cause so much pain and offense for some, while others walk by them, unaware. In fact, monuments are made to bypass—that is, to stand in solidity as humans pass by on their way to work or on their way home. If a passerby has no knowledge of the history a monument intends to honor, or if the monument offers no visible clues as to its original meaning, the passerby nevertheless becomes complicit with the monument. The bypasser thus becomes a carrier, consciously or not, of the memory invoked (Schneider, “Patricide” 52). To consider a monument's small details that are not immediately visible is to resist allegiance to its message (“Patricide” 63). Schneider implies that focus on the detail of a monument might dislodge meaning from the monumental to the quotidian. Confederate monument protesters who become aware of and challenge a monument's intentions draw its details into focus.

For example, the role of women as the driving force behind Confederate statues is not largely known. Women activists also call for the removal of these monuments. In New York City, a statue of J. Marion Sims was recently removed from the edge of Central Park after New York Mayor Bill de Blasio put together an arts commission to assess the histories and removal of Confederate monuments. The commission became aware of Sims' practice of performing “gynecological surgeries on slave women” and argued that he “should not be lionized” (Bellafante 2018). Letitia James, the city’s public advocate, and an African American woman activist stated, “a monument to recognize a serial torturer of enslaved black women has no place in our city” (Bellafante 2018).
This theory of women who cast dead men in bronze so that they may keep their legacies alive draws me to Victorian “Hidden Mother” portraits as another example of strategies used by matriarchs to create monumental forms and to construct memory. A Google search for “Hidden Mother portraits” yields a treasure-trove of peculiar portraits, in which white and Black mothers are draped, veiled, or hidden from view while holding an infant or child; a necessity to accommodate for the long-exposure time (see fig. 2.6).

![Figure 2.6. Google search for Victorian “Hidden Mother” portraits, 2017](image)

Knowing her baby will soon grow independent, through these photos, the matriarch mourns the loss of her dependent child but retains power over the child’s image. Like monuments, photographs are designed to keep memories alive. Remaining photographs represent white children disproportionately. Kids appear self-possessed although cradled by the invisible hold of a mother or, perhaps a caretaker. A baby or a child sits at what resembles the base of a monument. The mothers’ heads are hidden, creating apex points similar to the tops of monumental obelisks. In her essay “Motherhood Reimagined in A study of Domestic Photography in the Digital Age,” Lindsey Harding likens the “Hidden Mother” photographs to the digital selfies that mothers take of their children in contemporary culture.
Following that comparison, Bryoni Trezise argues in “The Mother of All Wombs” that the use of the photograph extends familial presence while removing the reliance on mother. In both the digital formats and the “Hidden Mother” portraits:

[T]he mother’s agency is similarly hidden from view. We see mothers cloaked in ghostly form enveloping the setting for the child’s frame; we see “hide-and-seek” mothers crouching awkwardly behind curtains and chairs as well as mothers relentlessly shrinking into the shadowy outline cast by the figure central to the image: the child. (Trezise 115)

While the maternal exists by her actual presence, she also endures by her (implied) absence. Through these photos, women memorialized those whose memories remain dependent upon the activities of the matriarch. Similar to “Hidden Mother” portraits, the erection of Confederate monuments of “dead dads” by white women offered both an opportunity to mourn and to hope for the future through the visualization of the deceased.

Black women also had these portraits made. However, the uneven numbers of white to Black “Hidden Mother” photographs found online imply that Black women simply did not have the same access to the technology despite its inexpensive availability. The African American women who did have access to it used the technology to depict themselves in a range of identities, for example, as mothers, activists, and professionals. Sojourner Truth, whose performance I analyze at the start of this chapter, is one such African American woman distinctly aware of the power her image carried. She would often photograph herself in fine dress indicating gentility far from the stereotypical mammy that “suckled many a white baby” or, she would pose reading books to signify an African American desire and ability to receive an education (Mirzoeff 73). Truth would carefully pose her image, and then used these photographs of herself to fund her abolitionist activities. Using the strategy of self-portraiture, Truth gained control over her image and identity. As Nicholas Mirzoeff
writes, in Truth’s carefully constructed photographs, “the emancipated woman makes her image the object of financial exchange in place of the substance, her whole person that had once been for sale” (21).

Figure 2.7. “Sojourner Truth seated with photograph of her grandson, James Caldwell of Co. H, 54th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment, on her lap,” 1863.

Taken in 1863, just three years into the Civil War, a photograph of Truth provides a reversal of a veiled “Hidden Mother.” In this image, Truth’s face is visible. In her lap, she cradles her child (grandson), made of paper not of flesh (see fig. 2.7). While “Hidden Mothers” offered the appearance of autonomous children up to the future, Truth suggests the reality is not true for James Caldwell of Co. H, of the 54th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment. According to the description on the Library of Congress’s website, Caldwell was held prisoner by the Confederates at James Island, South Carolina, between 1863 (when the photo was taken) and 1865 (“Sojourner Truth Seated”). Truth cements for public view an African American maternal bond to child and, while unveiled, inverts the white gaze that views African American women as immune to the bonds of affection and family.
Black Women Resist | A Hole in DuBois’s Veil

W.E.B. DuBois's paradigmatic work, *The Soul of Black Folks*, introduces the motif of a “veil” that separates the African American consciousness from white experience. He writes of “this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (18). The theme of the (mourning) veil surfaces in the discussion of African American women’s relationships to Confederate monuments. In this section, I employ the metaphor of the veil to consider how African American women mourned their association with Confederate monuments. I also consider the mourning of African American women in public space that surrounds Confederate and slave culture. African American women's lives are distinct from the generalized experience of racism and slavery. Not only do Black women activists argue for racial equity but also for gender equity in the politicized public space initially intended for white men. I would add that African American women have not only a DuBoisian “double-consciousness,” but a “triple-consciousness,” in that they experience the world through the veil of racialized gender. Likening DuBois's veil to the veils removed from Confederate monuments in ceremonies planned by white women, I highlight the racialized differences in white and Black women's identities and experiences.4

In 1931, DuBois criticized Confederate monuments as being nothing more than a promotion of Black subjugation:

> The most terrible thing about war, I am convinced, is the monuments—the awful things we are compelled to build in order to

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4 Farrah Jasmine Griffin suggests Black Feminist revisionist history must acknowledge DuBois’s “disturbing” implication that, although some of his views seem precursory to feminism, he also seems to promote a sensibility of intraracial hierarchy where he defines Black females according to ‘class and color politics’” (Griffin 6).
remember the victims. In the South, particularly, human ingenuity has been put to it to explain the Confederacy on its war monuments. Of course, the plain truth of the matter would be an inscription something like this: “Sacred to the memory of those who fought to Perpetuate Human Slavery.” (qtd. in Levin 21)

However, Dubois's dual consciousness theory would benefit from a third-eye perspective of the veil, drawing attention to African American women who experienced “human slavery” through Confederate culture.

The difference between how white and Black women were viewed can be seen even in an attempt to honor or create uplifting images of Black women from the Civil War. Take, for example, the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument (1871) in Providence, Rhode Island, designed by Randolph Rogers (Savage 85). Using the veil lens to analyze the monument, it becomes clear that the monument still invokes racial stereotypes and objectifies Black bodies differently than white bodies. Erected just six years after the war's end it is a rare example that includes African American Civil War veterans in the postbellum narrative. Even rarer, it is also the first monument not in a cemetery to represent an African American (Savage 85). The monument includes four female figures; one of which represents “Emancipation” (see fig. 2.8) as a newly freed African American woman with her breast exposed. As described by Kirk Savage, she looks upward, manacled, “as if to meet the gaze of God or some other unseen higher authority” (86).

“Emancipation” is, in a sense, ill-fated, as she will never be able to access her full agency in this depiction. Stuck in bronze, she continually defers to some other authority than her own. Over the years, her nipple's patina has chipped, the result of eager hands pinching and tweaking the emancipated Black woman's breast. In contrast, a white woman depicting
“Peace,” on the other side of the monument, is fully dressed and holding a sword. Her mouth has obviously been kissed—her bronze lips have oxidized to a green tone (see fig. 2.9).

Figure 2.8. (left) “Black woman, Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Monument,” Ellina Kevorkian, 2017. Figure 2.9. (right) “White woman, Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Monument,” Ellina Kevorkian, 2017.

Although “Sailors’ and Soldiers’” was erected with an intention to celebrate African American soldiers who fought in the Civil War, “Emancipation” courts a white male gaze, inviting white men to sexualize (and touch) the African American woman’s body, while it encourages men to romanticize and kiss the white woman.

There are clear examples detailing Black women’s historical resistance to Confederate monuments. Karen Cook Bell, writes in “Black Women, Agency, and The Civil War” that Black women were in possession of political agency and frequently engaged in “resistance strategies to challenge enslavement” (4). Bell argues that “enslaved women malingered, feigned illness, destroyed property, and escaped slavery to undermine the system” (5). In “Confederate Monuments and Civic Values,” architectural historian Dell Upton draws attention to Black resistance to Confederate monuments that promote pro-slavery values:
Mamie Garvin Fields, an African-American woman from a genteel family who was raised in Charleston in the 1890s, recalled that “Blacks took that statue personally. As you passed by, here was Calhoun looking you in the face, and telling you, ‘Nigger, you may not be a slave, but I am back to see you stay in your place.’” In response “We used to carry something with us, if we knew we would be passing that way, in order to deface that statue—scratch up the coat, break the watch chain, try to knock on the nose—because he looked like he was telling you that there was a place for ‘niggers’ and ‘niggers’ must stay there. Children and adults beat up John C. Calhoun so badly that the whites had to come back and put him way up high, so we couldn’t get to him.” The new statue was installed in 1896, standing atop an eighty-foot column. (9)

Rebecca Schneider argues that monuments are made to bypass—that is, to stand in solidity as humans pass them by on their way to work or on their way home. If a passerby has no knowledge of the history a monument intends to honor, or if the monument offers no visible clues as to its original meaning, the passerby nevertheless becomes complicit with the monument through bypassing, and thus becomes a bearer, consciously or not, of the memory invoked (Schneider, “Patricide” 52). In the quotation above, the passers-by resist allegiance to the monumentality assigned to Calhoun by acknowledging the details that recognize him as a secessionist who actively fought to preserve slavery.

Confederate monuments were designed to honor white loss; but they also aimed to commandeer Black emotion, continuing Black vulnerability within society in the wake of the war. This dehumanizing sentiment continues after the war, as many whites sought to perpetuate the myth that Black women were more caring of white than Black children. At the historic African American Evergreen Cemetery in Richmond, the grave of Maria Strother (d. March 5, 1899) reads eerily in its duplicitous messaging: “Our Mammy Maria Strother Died Mar. 5, 1899, Erected by the Hayes Family in Loving Memory of their Mammy” (see fig.
2.10). Through the use of “our” and “their,” Maria’s grave identifies the possessiveness white families felt for women in child-rearing roles.

Should there be any doubt as to the Confederate need to subjugate African American women within the mammy role, the Confederate Monument at Arlington Cemetery provides an additional marker (see figs. 2.11 and 2.12). Unveiled by the UDC, the statue depicts a mammy figure holding a white baby up to a departing/returning Confederate soldier. Another child is at her hip wanting to be picked up. As Michelle Harper argues, “in the early part of the 20th century, nostalgia for the lifestyle of the antebellum South, and particularly for the ‘mammy,’” drove a UDC proposal for a ‘Mammy Memorial’ monument” to be placed in Washington, DC (1). The movement never gained enough traction for a monument to be built; African American opposition to the idea created enough groundswell that the movement was abandoned. Mary Beth Terrell, a prominent civil rights activist, threatened that if the monuments were unveiled:

[T]here were thousands of colored men and women who will fervently pray that on some stormy night the lightning will strike it and the heavenly elements will send it crashing to the ground. (qtd. in Harper 3)
Over a century after most Confederate monuments were built, white and Black women come full circle as they demand monument removal and feature prominently in protests. In Durham, a large group of counter-protesters, both men and women, showed up at the site of the Confederate Soldier's Monument, erected by the UDC (Graham 2017). Counter-protesters (defined by their presence to protest expected KKK marchers) were excited that the KKK instead, turned back and didn't march. “Inspired by the violent riots over the removal of a statue of Robert E. Lee in Charlottesville, Virginia” (Graham 2017), the counter-protesters pulled down the Confederate monument from its pedestal (see fig. 2.13). Many of the group who pulled down the statue were arrested, notably Takiyah Thompson, a queer woman of color who climbed the statue to tie a rope around it. Of the experience of being one of four queer women of color charged for pulling down the statue, she says her intersecting identities motivate her activism and enables others to challenge her cause. “Because I occupy so many intersecting oppressed identities,” she explains, “it just lessens the amount of people who are willing to take up my cause” (qtd. in Bridges). Both Thompson and Sojourner Truth were activists who advocated for racial equality by claiming access to pre-determined white space; Thompson in the Confederate area of the monument
and Truth who publicly argued against Confederate values to white audiences both in the White House and at abolitionist meetings.

Figure 2.13. “Durham's Confederate Statue Comes Down,” 2017.

Thompson climbs the Confederate monument to bring it to its knees. She is left standing, and the statue lies crumpled on the ground. The power has shifted from the elevated white perspective to a grounded Black one. The media documented Thompson during the protest, mid-action, and again as she was led off in handcuffs to the police car. Her actions live on through documentation. Truth also lives on, through the performative qualities of her photograph, in the skewed temporality she creates by holding another photo while being photographed. Truth was highly conscious that she needed “to counter the ambivalence of earlier abolitionist photography with a series of carefully chosen signs” (Mirzoeff 72). She fashions herself distinctly as a counter-monument not only to the “Hidden Mother” portraits but to the culture of slavery at large. Through their symbolic acts, both Thompson and Truth leave open possibilities that African American women defy and redefine cultural expectations of how they are meant to behave within a white social order.
Black Mourning Moves

For many, Confederate monuments represent Black subjugation and mourning and can be viewed as sites that activate collective trauma. The bronze heroes, mythologized by sleight of hand historicizing, represent a selective history that omits unimaginable African American narratives of slavery attached to that history. Through them, African American pain and response are made invisible. Cemeteries and Confederate monuments are both memorial spaces designated by decorative markers that indicate death. As Confederate monuments move from the graveyard into public space, their visibility increases. They go from having an audience of primarily white spectators to an audience that includes African Americans. Their purpose shifts from being solely memorial to also functioning as a tool of intimidation. The earliest Confederate monuments were sited in graveyards, where they “purportedly expressed simple grief over the dead” (Upton 3). But in fact, even before they started moving into public space, they were thinly veiled “signs of continued allegiance to the Confederacy” (Upton, “Society” 3). Once moved into open, public space, the monuments became unapologetically pro-Confederate, touting a false history, “depict[ing] the war as a tie, one in which whites on both sides emerged with honor and with principles intact, while slavery and African Americans were ignored” (Upton, “Society” 3) (see fig. 3.1). By conscientiously overlooking Confederate leaders' efforts to protect slavery, their immovable shrine/tombs monumentalize Black mourning alongside their overt celebration of white superiority. The denial of accountability contributes to the absence of healing after trauma for African Americans. While honoring a lost way of Southern life that included slavery,
Confederate monuments attempt to silence the immense trauma and mourning for enslaved African Americans by not addressing slavery directly.

Confederate monuments perform racist and false histories, celebrate white supremacy, and erase the real history of enslaved Africans in the United States. Confederate monuments in civic space are used to enforce racial segregation and white supremacist values. At the same time, they provide an opportunity for protest. The protests of and around Confederate monuments call to mind the history of subversive Black burial practices in America which harken back to African mourning rituals. In this chapter, I analyze historic African cemetery space and burial practice in the ancient Swahili town of Songo Mnara in order to establish an origin of Black mourning activism and practice in the racialized spaces of enslavement. These spaces existed in plantations and segregated cemeteries: direct results of slavery’s representation of Confederate values. I also analyze African Americans use of public space and mourning as a tool to negotiate power from whites.
Monumental Mourning Public Space

If we limit our understanding of monumentality to built structures only, then rituals and performances that take place in the public spaces built surrounding these “buildings” lose meaning. Space around a monument enables equally monumental or anti-monumental acts by the bodies that engage the monuments. Historian Jeffrey Fleisher explores ancient African use of monumental public space for performances of both compliance and resistance. Fleisher declares the space that surrounded monumental architecture was defined for specific functions and rituals that, in turn, could also be viewed as monumental. While not immediately addressing the Transatlantic Slave Trade, which took enslaved Africans primarily from the west coast of Africa, Fleisher’s essay focuses on the Swahili coast, which was a location of the Dutch slave trade centuries earlier. His example of the ancient town Songo Mnara provides a cursory glance at the use of monumental space in African American performative morning rituals. Examining the ruins of Songo Mnara, Fleisher found its cemetery uniquely placed at the center of town. The centrality of the town’s burial site along with its landscape design of pathways and cleared areas denoted a clear intention to make performative mourning rituals available for public view (263). Space was divided in such a way that there was a clear distinction between the areas for those who participated in the ritual, and the area for spectators who viewed the performative processions and ceremonies. Rebecca Schneider and others argue that the document left from an action itself iterates a continuation of the performance as it engages recollection of the performance (“Patricide” 54). So too, then, do the headstone and the deceased’s possessions placed at the site of lamentation continue a performance of mourning. In Songo Mnara, pathways (surrounding space) were specifically designed around a monumental staircase which suggested ritual
processions to gravestones, plots, and tombs, honoring leaders and politicians of status (Fleisher 271). Acts of placing objects at the sites of burial often lasted for years so that the on-going ritual was evident not only by the objectification of mourning and remembrance through markers but through the process of returning. These were specifically-built spaces intended for mourning performances and they display every intention of being visible to the town people (Fleisher 276). Fleisher says “three different types of ritual practices and performances are evident through archaeology: the burial of the body; the memorialization of individual graves; and ongoing offerings at certain graves,” all of which took place in public space (274). The “monumental houses” (274) Fleisher describes overlook the entire public space—“a place that was clearly positioned to be seen and observed” (274). Swahili dance in public space was often used to mitigate conflict resolution as well as to challenge established positions of power within the leadership (277). Dance was not only intended to honor the powerful in society but, equally important it was performed to challenge governing civic authority.

Breaking Racialized Space | Burial Sites, Cemeteries

The act of “breaking” is a significant and reoccurring motif embedded in slavery’s wake. As African Americans break free from racialized spaces that segregate them from white people, “breaking” continues as activists intervene in the area surrounding Confederate monuments as they attempt to balance racial injustice. Breaking as a ritual action can be seen in various African burial cultures, then later as a part of enslaved and emancipated African American burial practices. Fred Moten’s analysis of Amiri Baraka in “the break,” that which Moten describes as “internal and interstitial” space that “determines the character of Baraka’s
political and aesthetic intervention,” identifies Baraka’s Black radical political gestures as an “abundant refusal of closure” (85). Antebellum and then Postbellum ritualized “breaking” was not only a means of spiritual practice but can be read as a defiant act in reclaiming agency from the white control placed upon Black bodies. It is also true that whites worked to break Black psyche. However, whether the breakable action sought to build or destroy African American psyche, it nonetheless reflected a desire to define racialized space. In an effort to reclaim racialized space in contemporary America, “breaking,” as a tradition, continues today. “Breaking” is made visible by media coverage of public protests that use interventionist actions to challenge Confederate authority.

African American religion and its variations are a syncretic result of West African and “newly imposed Western traditions” (Jones 231). Black Americans maintained particular elements of West African burial practice—such as the use of broken ceramic pieces to adorn the tops of graves—while simultaneously rejecting the Christian burial practice they were often made to learn. Enslaved African Americans were forbidden to openly practice indigenous customs, or to speak their own indigenous languages. They were denied basic rights to practice religion freely, which amounted to another measure of spatial control (Jones 231).

Cemeteries and burial sites therefore were not immune to the racialization of space that consumed all other aspects of cultural America. Whether African Americans were living enslaved or as freemen, their burials on a plantation, a battlefield, or in a rural or urban cemetery were designated by their race. George Lipsitz argues that “the lived experience of race has a spatial dimension, and the lived experience of space has a racial dimension” (12). This is demonstrated by the systemic infrastructures of race that locate people of color to
“different physical locations by housing and lending discrimination, by school district boundaries, by policing practices, by zoning regulations, and by the design of transit systems” (Lipsitz 12).

African and African-American burial sites and cemeteries allow for Black practices that claim independence through their mourning rituals. There were some formalized plantation cemeteries for slaves but that was not the norm. Slaves simply were not valued enough to be given remembrance or real estate. Unsanctioned cemeteries were located in marginal areas of the plantations and along the edges of woods, farthest from the “Big House” (Jones 232). Such constructed spaces depended on their location to escape view so as to resist the authority that ruled them. As Jones explains, “slavery and landscape are inseparable lenses in the African American creation of place” (231).

Rural African American cemeteries possessed an improvisational design, which to some spectators looked chaotic (Jones 226). These cemeteries were made invisible by design and denote a “hidden” African American way of life (Jones 226). The European aesthetic of manicured grounds, for example, with sitting areas for contemplation, would not wholly be appropriated into African American rural cemeteries. However, evidence of this borrowed aesthetic could be found towards the 20th century, in Black cemeteries closer to the city borders, such as in historic Evergreen Cemetery in Richmond. Those Black cemeteries adopting more European design were associated mostly with the burials of affluent Black society, who were becoming more visible in commerce and wealth.

Diane Jones’s research on Mount Auburn Cemetery in Baltimore, Maryland—originally named “City of the Dead for Colored People” (1882)—links African burial rituals to African American religious and spiritual practice (226). While there was no uniform
religious practice that arrived from Africa, among different cultural groups there was a
general understanding that dead spirits inhabited the earth and that the dead could be placated
or angered. Ritual practices engaged not only those mourning but also those spectators who
would visit the burial site (Jones 231).

Western-minded accounts of Black burial sites and rural cemeteries towards the end
of the 19th century and into the 20th century often misunderstood the aesthetics and spiritual
practices shared by Africans and African Americans. Ernest Ingersoll describes his
experience entering a Black graveyard in Columbia, South Carolina in the *Journal of
American Folk-lore* in 1892:

If you go through a dilapidated weed-grown graveyard which straggles in and
out of the hollows on a side hill covering the high bluffs along the river, you
will see some very strange examples of this mortuary custom. Nearly every
grave has bordering or thrown upon it a few bleached sea-shells of a dozen
different kinds, such as are found along the south Atlantic coast. Mingled with
these is a most curious collection of broken crockery and glassware. On the
large graves are laid broken pitchers, soap-dishes, lamp chimneys, tureens,
coffee-cups, ...Chief of all these, however, are large water pitchers; very few
graves lack them. (qtd. in Ingersoll 69)

While much has been written about the seemingly ubiquitous and accidental
aesthetics of these graveyards, the appearance of objects placed at graves was an early
strategy of place-making and of building “African-inspired memories” that continued for decades (Vlach 139) (see figs. 3.2 and 3.3). The practice of using seashells as grave decoration goes back to West African beliefs about death and would long remain a feature of grave decoration in Black America (Vlatch 143). On one hand, breaking these objects was a performative ritual by the living that simultaneously satisfied the future needs of the dead and signified a temporal break—a discontinuity in time and genetic lineage. On the other hand, the ritual represented a kind of sympathetic magic, where you used associative objects that represented the person you wished to influence, initially theorized by James Frazer in late 19th century. Despite Ingersoll’s confusion of the magic he witnessed in the graveyard, what is clear is Ernest Ingersoll’s lack of ability to recognize what Jacqueline Dillon’s research identifies; in “nearly every recorded instance of sympathetic magic in the nineteenth century, the action was considered defensive: a desperate last resort after the failure of other attempts to cure a loved one, or livestock, from undiagnosable symptoms usually vaguely described as ‘pining away’” (46). Framed within this folkloric context, imitation as an element of magic was believed to affect outcome through its mirrored representation. It is not difficult to imagine that, aligned with similar cultural rituals of African and African American religion, the practice of this magic reflected “a tendency in human nature to perform whatever ritual is necessary in times of personal desperation when ‘acceptable’ methods fail to work” (Dillon 46).

Decoration of burial sites with everyday items was meaningful and the grave marker’s sculptural form evolved from decorative items like broken water vessels and seashells, to the tombstone, to the monument, and embedded within the monument all the mourning rituals enacted within its space that would define the personal and cultural identity
of both the living and the dead. The emphasis on repeating a decoration or returning to decorate, as previously mentioned by the Songo Mnara example, is as significant as the aesthetical and historical context of the gravestone’s objecthood. As Diane Jones explains, the performative lives on through “the variety and ethereal quality of grave markings,” so “marking a grave may have been more an act of ongoing ritual than simply long-term remembrance” (234).

The motif of “breaking” attached to spiritual practice and burial sites is further explained by a formerly enslaved African American woman Rosa Sallins: “you break the dishes so that the chain will be broke. You see, the person is dead and if you don’t break the things, then the others in the family will die too. They will follow right along” (Vlatch 141).

The language that describes the action of breaking—the physical embodiment of discontinuity—as it relates to one’s freedom to act is often discussed in relation to the body’s posture. The symbolism of breaking the chain, a euphemism for gaining freedom, appears repeatedly in cultural history. For example, the symbolism is seen here in an African American spiritual by an unknown author, dated from around 1865:

```
Slavery chain done broke at last, broke at last, broke at last,
Slavery chain done broke at last, going to praise God till I die.
Way up in that valley, just a–praying on my knees
Told God about my troubles, and to help me ef-a He please.
Well I told him how I suffer, In de dungeon and de chain,
And de days I went with head bowed down, And my broken flesh and pain.
Well I know my Jesus heard me, “Cause de spirit spoke to me
And said, ‘Rise up now, my servant, and you too shall be free.
There’s no more weary travellin’, ‘Cause my Jesus set me free
And there’s no more auction block, since he gave me liberty. (“Slavery Chain Done Broke At Last”)
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To elevate to the higher spiritual ground, one could “rise up” once one is set free from one’s “broken flesh.” If flesh is broken, it is in a sense brought to a point of discontinuity. As Black skin ruptures, exposing the body’s interior, constructions of racial difference also break apart. There are numerous accounts of auctioneers pulling back the garments worn by those enslaved, standing on the block, so that potential buyers could look for scars, an indication of a slave’s disobedience (Roach 214). Scarring, the flesh’s attempt to knit its broken self, is a temporal reminder of time passing; a visual marker of the rupture before and after, provided by the flesh. The other interesting imagery here is the auction block (or stage, or plinth, or base, or pedestal) which does not function to elevate the enslaved to reverence—instead, it does the opposite. It is the slave auctioneers elevated on the block who are reminiscent of Confederates leaders sitting high above on bronze horses in public view (see figs. 3.4 and 3.5).

African Americans decorated the graves of those in their community, in part out of a desire to free themselves from the racialized space of ante- and postbellum subjugation. The funerals included performative movement, a procession of some sort to the grave, followed by a ritual of decoration that included breaking objects last used by the deceased. In breaking
the objects, the mourners were acting for the dead, appeasing spirits who might be upset if their graves and needs in the afterlife were not met. Those burying the dead would decorate graves with objects used by the dead, so that the dead could “mirror” their former “live” selves, fulfilling their needs and finding pleasures as spirits. Tavia Nyong’o glosses Lacan’s theory of the mirror stage in life, writing that, at around age two, a child would experience “a chance gaze upon one’s reflection” and in so doing might “conjure forth a heretofore undreamt of, if spectral, plenitude and unity of the bodily schema” (37). The aspect of mirroring in death might be related to the notion of “breaking,” though as a kind of inverse mirror stage, or a severing. Mirroring in burial could provide a “semblance of a distancing” (37) for those left to the living world, severing the spirit’s need to return or the need for the living to follow the dead. Death could be “an escape forever from the bonds of servitude” in which slaves could return to Africa in death (Vlach 141).

For those African Americans enslaved on the plantation unable to practice their spirituality freely, secret and impromptu rituals would take place where and when they could. Interviewed and recorded in 1941, Laura Smalley, formerly enslaved in Texas, explained how she practiced religion through an attachment to everyday objects at hand. She explained, “all the church they would have, [would] be a tub, a tub of water sitting jus’ like this thing is, you know, an’ that would catch your voice. An’ they would, they would have church aroun that tub, all of them get aroun’ the tub” (qtd. in Bailey 70). The tub of water “would catch the voice” so the enslaved Africans could avoid detection.
Vocal expressions spoken into a work tub were acts of resistance, a reclaiming of white-owned space, a repurposing of an object that was filled with water that was intended for white convenience. In this example, through the use of sound, African Americans could exercise self-power and control. It is well-documented already that song and voice were used as tools of resistance and protest through slavery and into the Civil Rights era. A photograph from 1968 shows students gathered in Confederate monument space at Monroe Park to sing their protest of unfair treatment in Virginia (see fig. 3.6).

Throughout US history, a cycle of push and pull forces, both political and economic, has moved Black mourning in and out of centralized public space. Commercial development has continuously erased African American historic sites from view, which has resulted in the loss of family connection, created fragmented collective memory, and left communities financially struggling.

From Richmond’s early history, the African Burial Ground (originally listed as the Negro Burial Ground on an 1808 Richmond census) has been located in Richmond's Shockoe
Bottom district, directly across from the infamous Libby Lumpkin slave pen.⁵ Like so many Black burial sites and neighborhoods that are vulnerable to commercial interests, the land of the African Burial Ground, located in the downtown area of Richmond, eventually increased in value and developers thoroughly co-opted this African American space. Similar to other urban sites where this suppression has taken—and continues to take—place, the African Burial Ground and its burials were lost to history, entombed under a field of concrete in the name of outdoor parking.⁶ The burial ground was active from before 1750 to 1816 and was the first municipal graveyard for thousands of enslaved, jailed, indigent, and free Blacks in Richmond (*Sacred Ground*). The site is known to hold buried anti-slavery revolutionaries including “many of the members of the slave revolt of 1800 [who] were hanged, including its principle organizer and strategist, 24-year old enslaved blacksmith Gabriel, known at the time as ‘General Gabriel,’ on Oct. 10, 1800” *Sacred Ground*. This narrative was lost from view over the centuries, as the space became used for other commercial uses.

Activist protests challenging the presence of Confederate monuments has occurred intermittently through the last century, drawing attention to the suppression of African American collective memory and trauma that lives in the wake of the domestic slave trade. The African Burial Ground, recently rediscovered, continues to be at risk for the proposed commercial development of a new baseball park. Groups like the Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project of the Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality, and The National

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⁵ According to the African American Historic Sites of Virginia web resource, the Lumpkin slave pen, was “known as ‘The Devil's Half Acre’ because it was a holding pen, punishment and ‘breaking’ center for more than 300,000 enslaved persons from the 1830's until 1865, when Union troops took the city” (“Lumpkin’s Jail”). Richmond had the distinction of being the largest antebellum slave trading site second to New Orleans. In 2006, archaeologists began uncovering the Lumpkin site and today plans continue to establish a museum (“Lumpkin’s Jail”). This is significant given Richmond’s role in the slave trade. It is a history, perhaps, the city seems to want to forget rather than remember.

⁶ I have been unable to unearth information about when the ground was first cemented over.
Trust for Historic Preservation argue against the baseball park proposed by Revitalize RVA, and for a nine-acre memorial park acknowledging Richmond’s historic legacy as one of the largest slavery markets in North America. It is a considerable accomplishment that now a grass lawn covers the site instead of concrete. It still, however, possesses little signage to explain the site’s significance. Today, the space remains vulnerable to commercial interests, and its memory and history are at risk of being lost again underneath a stadium.

In 2015, African Burial Ground activists occupied the space surrounding the statue of Jefferson Davis on Monument Avenue to protest the presence of Confederate Monuments in Richmond. This strategically coincided with the first day of training for the UCI Road World Bicycle Championships. Activists argued that media coverage of the race would provide unfortunate visibility of the Confederate monuments that line the Avenue. Protesters did not want a Confederate leader representing the city of Richmond and all of its citizens. In a sense, the monument provided support for the protest through its oppositionality as it “undermines its own authority by inviting and then incorporating the authority of passersby” (Young, “Counter-Monument” 279). Quoted in the Richmond Times-Dispatch, Ana Edwards, then-chairwoman of the Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project argued, “so, we are here today to tell the world that most Richmonders do not support showcasing these monuments to Confederate military and political leaders during this world-famous sports event” (qtd. in Martz and Moomaw). Representatives of the National Trust for Historic Preservation used the day’s platform to link Confederate monuments to the city's attempts at building tourism instead of addressing requests to memorialize the African Burial Ground. The Trust spokeswoman, Germonique Ulmer plainly told the Richmond Times Dispatch that
“the reminders of the slave trade that lie beneath Shockoe cannot be ignored” (qtd. in Martz and Moomaw).

Smaller African American historical cemeteries are vulnerable to similar concerns of losing sight of history. These sites of Black mourning, then, move in and out of view as racist structures prevent Black communities for caring for their dead. It is difficult to claim protection of these sites through National Historic Registry Status, as their architectural design and/or aesthetics have not been considered significant within Western cemetery aesthetics (McCormick 2).7

As an example of one such historical site of African American mourning fluctuating between visibility and invisibility, Evergreen Cemetery Association created the Evergreen Cemetery in 1891 to provide burial and mourning space for the African American social elite (V. Davis 27). The Association intended to construct a burial site to rival Hollywood cemetery, the impressive Confederate cemetery that still sits across town from Evergreen (V. Davis 29). Like many historic Black cemeteries, Evergreen made no expense allowance for perpetual care of the grounds and therefore struggled to maintain its presence (V. Davis 30). It fell out of view, becoming overgrown and dilapidated through decades of neglect and vandalism (see fig. 3.7).

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7 This issue of aesthetic exclusion echoes the lack of inclusion of African American artists in Western art history.
There were radical African American pioneers in Richmond, like *The Richmond Planet*'s John Mitchell Jr., the influential newspaper editor and politician (who also was a founding member of the Evergreen Association), who were acutely aware that visibility through media—a public space—brought political awareness to Black issues, culture, and society. Mitchell reported on the national and local news and became well-known for his unrelenting and scathing reportage on lynching, earning himself the nickname of the “fighting editor” (Alexander 42).⁸

With his coverage of affluent Black society funerals in *The Planet*, Mitchell provided visibility to African American mourning, valuing what the white media ignored and uplifting the Black community. When Mitchell's brother died in 1901, his funeral was held at Evergreen Cemetery, then, still a distinguished cemetery in which to be buried. Colonel Thomas W. Mitchell’s Monument unveiling (see fig. 3.8), as well as

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⁸ The paper’s masthead logo for *The Planet* was that of a disembodied arm making a firm fist, electric lines emanating from the power of the Black fist. The public facade of *The Planet*'s office building also displays the mighty fist image.
descriptions of the ceremonies that day, were covered in great detail by *The Planet*. The funeral coverage filled several columns on the front page, and explicitly described the great support of mourners who showed up to grieve:

A SEA OF SPECTATORS.

. . . Before the Brigade Staff reached the city limits to take part in the unveiling ceremonies, the streets were filled with people, who cheered vociferously as the brave looking men rode by decked in gold and black. When the cemetery was reached a strange sight met the eye. All around the square, in the centre of which stood the grey monument, were, what seemed to be black walls, formed by the thousands of spectators who filled the grounds. To the north and west there were two solid lines of humanity. People had crowded to the grounds hours ahead of the parade in order to secure even standing room (Mitchell, “Monument Unveiled”).

The reporter not only mentions the actual Mitchell monument but also describes Black humanity as monumental in scale and as architectural form—“black walls, formed by the

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9 Although Mitchell is uncredited as author of the piece, I note many other scholars who reference him as author of many unattributed articles.
“thousands” through unity and mournfulness. In the vast space surrounding the statue, although no one protested the monument’s meaning, the gathering of thousands was a political statement of Black unity and empowerment. Mitchell’s published article intentionally used the media to represent African American political leaders and their “thousands of spectators” as equally significant to their communities as white political leaders. Echoing the Lee monument unveiling in 1890, Colonel Thomas W. Mitchell’s Monument unveiling held many events through the day including, military exercises, live bands, groups of children performing, and speeches.

As I noted above, there was no “perpetual care” clause for Evergreen, and as a result the cemetery fell victim to racism, segregation, vandalism, and overgrowth. People moved away, and within sixty years of Colonel Thomas W. Mitchell’s funeral, Jim Crow laws had done their damage impoverishing and relocating communities (Palmer). By the sixties, many Black families had relocated their dead to other cemeteries with perpetual care clauses (V. Davis 30). The once-elegant cemetery was forgotten.

Figure 3.9. “jgshuck” at the same site after clearing,” 2017.
In a stirring turn of events 116 years after Colonel Thomas W. Mitchell’s Monument unveiling, the site has once again returned to public view. As volunteers work to reclaim the space from overgrowth and indifference, journalists report on their efforts. One activist could barely contain his excitement after having found Mitchell's monument, lost to the dense foliage (see fig.3.9):

Two days ago, a group of us were tromping through Evergreen cemetery when Brian Palmer noticed the sun lighting up a big grave marker off to the side of the road so he went to check it out. It turned out to be the grave marker for Thomas Mitchell, brother of John Mitchell Jr. I had been looking for this grave for 7 years and now through serendipity we found it. Yesterday four of us went back and cleared the grave so we could see [emphasis my own] the grave marker. (jgshuck)

This description is in stark contrast to the account of overt visibility of his funeral and its media coverage nearly over a century ago.

Note that while Black historic cemeteries became invisible over time, Confederate cemeteries seemed to do well, surviving through state funding provided for upkeep of these sites. In a 2017 article in the *New York Times*, journalist Brian Palmer found that:

When creating its Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Alabama approved up to $25,000 a year, for “any committee of citizens” wanting to erect a Confederate monument or to supplement funds raised by organizations like the United Daughters of the Confederacy. Mississippi’s state code allows county boards of supervisors to donate money to locate and care for graves and graveyards of “Confederate soldiers or sailors who died in the Confederate service” and to purchase “land on which any of the said graveyards may be situated.

In comparison to historic Evergreen Cemetery, and unlike the fate of many historic African American cemeteries, historic Hollywood Cemetery continues as a functioning cemetery, offering tours, and selling tourist goods at its gift shop. The cemetery
Figure 3.10 “Confederate Pyramid at Hollywood Cemetery, Richmond, VA,” Ellina Kevorkian, 2017.

holds over 18,000 Confederate soldier graves and is home to the giant Confederate pyramid, The Monument to the Confederate War Dead (1869) (see fig. 3.10). The pyramid is fashioned after then-modern Egyptian Revival aesthetic that mimicked the Egyptian pyramids; a style that began in the 1830s as rural cemeteries became more prominent (Giguere 169). It seems ironic that a site honoring Confederates who died to protect slavery references an African aesthetic. Today, Confederate values are alive and well here at the pyramid. Crisp and clean Confederate flags stick up from the manicured lawn that surrounds the monument.

The gathering of Black mourners at a funeral such as Mitchell’s is significant because, before Lincoln's death, it would not have been possible for African Americans to gather in public space. There was urgent and violent suppression of Black civic gatherings, as they were viewed, almost certainly, as threats to the hegemonic social order (Upton, “question”). The passing of Emancipation by Lincoln and thereafter, his death, would signify a shift in the Black reclamation of time and space, but freedom came slowly.
When news spread of Lincoln’s death, it pitched the Federal States into despair, and thousands came out into the streets to grieve the assassinated leader. Lincoln's funeral procession was a durational performance—a spectacle in which his funeral carriage traveled by train to ten different cities—his body ritually embalmed at each stop. In each town, thousands poured into the streets to mourn his death. Outside a Vicksburg, Mississippi courthouse in 1865, African Americans gather to stand near the imposing and uninviting civic building, mourning the president; the national flag waves at half-mast (see fig. 3.11). Their collective bodies in an uninviting civic space suggest deep sorrow for Lincoln’s death and, more to the point, suggest fear. Would their newly acquired liberty be repealed in Lincoln’s absence? It was an expression of mourning and, simultaneously, a specific political statement that African Americans would be moving into public space with agency.
There was slow access to freedom for all African Americans, but when the final stage of the Emancipation Proclamation became official on January 1, 1863 (“History of Juneteenth”), a political shift occurred as more public space was taken back through ritualized annual celebrations of Emancipation Day (see fig. 3.12).10

It is a reality of African American histories that what is unseen is as informative as that which you do see. As Christina Sharpe argues, there is “so much of Black intramural life and social and political work [that] is redacted, made invisible to the present and future, subtended by the plantation logics, detached optics, and brutal architectures” (114). For example, the history of Memorial Day has been rewritten to obscure its origins. David Blight insists white efforts usurped Black historicity by changing the Memorial Day narrative from

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10 The meaning of this date is complex as different cities arrived at Emancipation at different times. In Texas, on June 19, 1865, Union soldiers arrived to announce freedom. Unfortunately, this date comes two years after Emancipation passed so enslaved African Americans in Texas would not learn of their freedom until two years after those in other Southern states such as South Carolina. This date evolved into Juneteenth, an annual holiday celebrated by mostly African American people today.
a Black to a white one. Memorial Day began as a holiday that combined Black mourning expression with an agency to argue against Confederate values. At Washington race course in Charleston, South Carolina, the field had become a depository of union dead (Blight 68). Used as a prison, the site was strewn with unburied bodies. It was freemen who chose to return to the site to bury the union soldiers. Blight argues that this was the origin of the first Memorial Day celebration. African Americans and white abolitionists organized an event on May 1, 1865, where they brought flowers and decorations to gravesites, and the date became known as Decoration Day, later recognized as the first Memorial Day. Despite the destruction of Charleston, African American communities celebrated—they had won Emancipation (Blight 67). With over 10,000 people in attendance, and maybe to signify a hopeful future, 3,000 African American children sang “John Brown's Body” (Blight 69). Other performative events included a small theatrical performance of an African American woman and her two children being sold on an auction block as it moved down the street (Blight 67). However, according to Blight, whites intended that Memorial Day’s true origins be forgotten:

[A] measure of how white Charlestonians suppressed from memory this founding in favor of their own creation of the practice a year later came fifty-one years afterward, when the president of the Ladies Memorial Association of Charleston received an inquiry for information about the May 1, 1865, parade. A United Daughters of the Confederacy official wanted to know if it was true that blacks and their white abolitionist friends had engaged in such a burial rite. Mrs. S.C. Beckwith responded tersely: “regret that I was unable to gather any official information in answer to this. (71)

**Black Mourning | Public Activism**

In 1955, African American Mamie Till put her son’s broken body on view for the world, and, in doing so, took control of his image and forced consciousness of white-
perpetrated violence on Black bodies.11 Photographed and circulated, the horrifying image would resonate in the collective memory of witnesses and spectators for a long time. An unprecedented indictment of a racist justice system, Till’s activism would be remembered for the way it emphasized Black pain and mourning and lay bare a legacy of white supremacy.

Mamie Till was able to use her son’s visibility as a strategy to amass community that would argue for her son’s justice. Today debates rage over the appropriateness of white voices seeking to narrate or contextualize Black pain. In *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, Saidiya V. Hartman writes about the potential for the visibility of these violent expressions of humanity to intensify suffering and to “tether, bind, and oppress” (5). Although published twenty years ago, there is astounding resonance today in Hartman’s assertion “that benevolent correctives and declarations of slave humanity intensified the brutal exercise of power upon the captive body rather than ameliorating the chattel condition” (5). In 2017, white painter Dana Schutz used the Emmet Till image in her painting, *Open Casket* (2016), which was shown during the Whitney Museum’s 2017 Biennial exhibition. In the painting, Schutz centered a semi-abstraction of Emmet’s head and torso as he lay in his coffin. A protest followed over the public display of the painting. Artist Hannah Black argued that “it is not acceptable for a white person to transmute Black suffering into profit and fun, though the process has been normalized for a long time” (qtd. in Gibson). As an interventionist response to the site of Black mourning, African American artist Parker Bright stood in front of the painting blocking it from onlookers, wearing a t-shirt that read, “Black Death Spectacle” (Gibson).

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11 In 1955, Emmett Till, a 14-year-old African American child was kidnapped and brutally beaten to death by two white men Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam, for allegedly whistling at Carolyn Bryant, Roy’s wife. The news coverage of this event would galvanize many Civil Rights activists (“The Murder of Emmett Till”).
Some Black and white artists, critics, and observers have critiqued the protests as censorship, asking if the painting was perhaps a productive example of a white artist exploring their relationship to racism.

The media-driven public activism used by Mamie Till resonates anew today as activist interventions (argued to be acts of vandalism) aimed at Confederate monuments gain media coverage and raise national consciousness. These public protests occur in the exterior space that surrounds each monument. The space in which the monuments are erected are designed to allow for their public viewing; enabling ritual and providing the material platform, the very ground, for the social performance of activism.

In this chapter, I show that monumental Confederate space inextricably links to Black mourning through the examples of burial sites like Songo Mnara, Evergreen Cemetery, the advent of Memorial Day, and the public mourning of Lincoln. Activities such as mourning rituals and street protests that exist in these “monumental” spaces can also be viewed as “monumental” as activists break through examples of racialized space, upsetting the power dynamic established by Confederate culture. Further on, I continue to look at the politics of African American mourning to demonstrate how visibility in public space increases awareness of racial injustice and foments an increase in social protest of these sites.
Chapter Four: Visuality, Protest, and the Transference of Authority

*Do you want to see what the Colored People are doing? Read the Planet. Do you want to know what Colored People think? Read the Planet. Do you want to know how many Colored People are hung to trees without due process of law? Read the Planet. Do you want to know how colored People are progressing? Read the Planet. Do you want to know what colored People are demanding? Read the Planet* (qtd. in Alexander 209).

The epigraph above is pulled from a 1905 advertisement in *The Richmond Planet* newspaper. A radical Richmond leader, the 22-year old editor John Mitchell, a tireless advocate of drawing attention to injustices to African Americans, wrote a culturally and community-specific ad to make visible the plight of African Americans living in the wake of slavery in the US. Mitchell continually used *The Planet* to call public attention to racist and social violence African Americans experienced in Richmond and around the country.

Mitchell understood that drawing attention to African Americans in the media activated visuality to ask the questions: what is being seen and by whom? From those questions, he brought awareness, drawing a connection between knowledge and power. This visuality contributes to what Nicole Fleetwood calls “black iconicity,” the representation and subsequent codifying of Black identity. As Fleetwood argues in *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness*, Black iconicity exists “as a site for black audiences and the nation to gather around the seeing of blackness” (10). According to Fleetwood, black iconicity disallows for the full “complexity of black lived experience” and therefore effaces “discourses of race” (10). Repeated images in the media of violence against Black bodies in the media perpetuate highly-edited stereotypes of African Americans that leave a limited view of what it means to exist as African American in the U.S. today. For someone to be
visible, they need to be seen. Fleetwood implies that the inverse is also true; Black visuality can also highlight the lack of visibility given to Black culture. In other words, we should ask the question: What are we not able to see in the limited statement of mediated images of African Americans? Christina Sharpe's definition of “wake work,” the work that needs to be done to recover from slavery’s afterlife, indicates that culture must resist concealing strategies of “annotation” and “redaction” (114) that obscure African American historical narratives.

In each of the events I analyze in this chapter, African Americans mobilized in public view with (at times, limited) agency, strategizing when to be visible, and when not to be seen. Entrance into new political space challenged the ongoing aftereffects of slavery, most especially Jim Crow laws used to enforce segregation (SPLC 7). Even after the Civil War had ended, political tensions remained in place for secessionists (those seceding from the Union) and federalists (those loyal to Lincoln’s government). The country “was healing but not yet healed” (Blight 98).

**Public Protesters as Counter-Monument**

Judith Butler argues in “Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street” that through assembly (in protest) there is a recomposition of the materiality of public space. By citing Hannah Arendt's “space of appearance” where public space generates between adjacent and responsive bodies in group protest, Butler argues that “the very public character of the space is being disputed and even fought over when these crowds gather” (“Bodies” 1). In other words, bodies generate public space between them, shifting the relevance of the area by challenging or mirroring the site’s values. Bodies also transpose the meaning of the public
space as it generates it. The protest and the public space created by protesting bodies make visible the veiled values that a monument represents. That public space is then filled temporarily with authority, power, agency, vulnerability, and visibility. Arendt insists space created by public protest is not forever attached to the site; after all, the site is in a constant state of flux, making space able to move to other locations (Butler, “Bodies” 3). This mobility of the public space also occurs through the documentation by the media. Through the presence of the media, this public space performs in view with the ability to “extend the scene visually and audibly and participates in the delimitation and transposability of the scene” (Butler, “Bodies” 8). In the next section of this chapter, I use Judith Butler’s theorization of group protest to demonstrate how both defenders and protesters of Confederate monuments create public space through their amassed bodies.

Various political movements such as the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) and Civil Rights protests, would site their protests in the public space surrounding Confederate monuments. In 1984, women stood in support of the Equal Rights Amendment in front of the Virginia Washington Monument (1869) in Capitol Square, home to several Confederate monuments (see fig. 4.1). Protesters assume authority from these monolithic statues and tap into the invisible Black mourning attached to the Confederate cause and social justice issues. The protesters became counter-monumental as they challenged values intended by the presence of Confederate leaders.

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12 In this context, the media dually contributes to the archive and acts as an extension of the cultural performance made mobile and transposable. The photo, video, social media post, or television broadcast functions not only as documentation but also as part of the performance. Over time, amassed protests shift old meanings to new ones and public space morphs to new materiality when “one performance then is arrested and deferred onto the site of another” (Schneider, “Patricide” 54). Consequently, public space generated at the site of Confederate monuments exists as a movable archive of protest actions and memory.
Public protesters have used the space of Confederate monuments to confront existing power dynamics and dominant ideologies when arguing for the acknowledgement of social causes. Over the years, Monroe Park is one such site where organized protesters argued for social issues that seemed in juxtaposition to dominant power. The historical context for this site is additionally important. Formerly Stonewall Jackson's training ground for his military school cadets and recruits and a campground and hospital for soldiers, it is now a park regularly used for nearby residents (Sedore 150). Protests have advocated for civil rights (1968), protested anti-war involvement (1971), fought discrimination and inequality in Virginia (1981), and even argued against U.S. involvement in Nicaragua (1986), to name a few. In 2011, the Occupy movement staged a protest around the statue of Confederate brigadier general Williams C. Wickham located in the park. One activist stated convincingly, “we really are taking the public's power back” (qtd. in “UPDATE”). Now a global movement arguing against economic inequality, Occupy protests began in 2011 on Wall Street
to draw attention to corporate greed, evidenced, for example, by the rise of home foreclosures by big banks. This is relevant when you consider that the Confederate monuments in Richmond represent racist and authoritarian values that honor an economic system that depended on the labor of Black economically disadvantaged people. Protesters chose Monroe Park, “Richmond's financial district as ‘our Wall Street’ over Monument Avenue, where some had wanted to camp between statues they said were ‘symbols of oppression’” (qtd. in UPDATE).

Protesting Confederate Symbolism | Aesthetic Interventions

A report commissioned in 2017 by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) demonstrates that several incidents of violence against African Africans reported by news media since 2015 contributed to growing frustrations with Confederate symbolism. Contributing to the building frustrations on-going news reports regularly showed cellphone video of police brutality of African Americans. There was a rash of church burnings in the South in 2015 which prompted a report by the Pew Research Center. Over fifty percent of church fires in the South over the last twenty years were set by arsonists (Sandstrom). According to the SPLC, these events contributed to an awareness by protesters who argue that the deniability of continuing racial inequalities was no longer possible.

Perhaps the most significant event that seems to have instigated the protest of Confederate symbolism is reflected on a Confederate monument in Charleston, South Carolina. An anonymous activist spray-painted the names of the nine people shot to death in 2015 by Dylann Roof at the historic Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church. In a racially-motivated rampage, Roof entered the church then shot and killed nine members of
the congregation. After the shooting, a photo of Roof online appeared showing him holding a Confederate flag. It was then that a “grassroots movement to remove the [Confederate] flag from public spaces” began as government leaders and members of the public started to question Confederate monuments’ associations with slavery (SPLC 2). These names were spray-painted on the monument as a strategic and political act linking violence at Black church with racist culture and symbolism (see fig. 4.2).

Figure 4.2. “Vandals painted the names of the nine Charleston church shooting victims on top of a Confederate monument in Charlotte, N.C.,” 2015.

Monument Avenue in Richmond, VA, with its long processional throughway, guides spectators and the passersby from one Confederate leader to the next. Other interventions on and around the South’s Confederate monuments similarly acknowledge the white supremacism that they represent. In 2015, on Monument Avenue in Richmond, spray paint graffiti is left on a Jefferson Davis monument made of concrete, marble, and bronze. “Black lives matter” leaves the most direct statement of reclaiming public space and thereby recontextualizes it (“Virginia Man Charged”). Here spray paint acts as a public protest performance, or intervention, as it challenges the monument’s authority, intervenes in open space, and creates counter-meaning by the rejection of authority and racial superiority held
intrinsically by the monument’s symbolism, and its original intent.

Confederate monuments are placed around the country, not only the South, where activist interventions invert messages of racial subjugation. In 2007, at the site of the Alabama Capitol, anonymous interventionists painted the hands and faces of the Confederate Memorial Monument’s figures black (see fig. 4.3). At the base of the monument, “N.T. 11 11 31” was painted, believed to represent the day enslaved Black icon Nat Turner was hung on November 11, 1831, for inciting a Black rebellion. The intervention took place “‘either

![Figure 4.3. “Black paint covers the face and hands of a statue that was defaced at the Confederate Memorial in Montgomery, Alabama, in 2007.”](image)

Saturday night or Sunday night.’ Sunday was Nov. 11 and the 176th anniversary of Turner's death. It was also Veterans Day” (Hunter).

The inversion of the statue’s ethnic identity was meant to evoke empathy or, perhaps, to present an alternate view of racial authority in power politics. It also alludes to a more complex relationship between the cultural tradition of minstrelsy and its use of theatrical identity inversion to reify white stereotypes of African Americans. Subversion occurred through traditional blackface performance, which was used by whites in postbellum America
to reassert dominance over African Americans through stereotypical characterizations. Blackface became another way for whites to create a “cultural commodity [of] ‘blackness’” (Lott 24) that would become yet another “technique[s] of black subjugation” in public view (Lott 25). The practice of blackface as a form of resistance to the Confederate statue continues the tradition of using the stereotypical archetype to subvert power dynamics between Blacks and whites. The symbolism of Confederate monuments in open space continues to signify continuing oppression. These monuments appear during times of Black social uplift: the two decades that followed the Civil War and during the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s-1960s (Southern Poverty Law Center 9). The obscuring of the soldier’s race at the Confederate Memorial Monument is an aesthetic intervention that unveils Confederate values as antiquated and dependent on subjugating images of African Americans.

Aesthetic interventions performed on Confederate monuments occur mostly out-of-view, leaving material remains anonymously at these sites. The acts are intended to publicly shame, humiliate, and invert Confederate public messaging of white superiority. Like the blackening of the Confederate soldier’s face, the 2017 tarring and feathering of a UDC commissioned Jefferson Davis Memorial Highway Monument (1943) in Arizona recalls rogue mob mentality that takes law and order into their own hands (see fig. 4.4). Although tarring and feathering is an early European practice, in the more contemporary vernacular it was employed as a method of torture and intimidation by the KKK (“tar and feather”).
Figure 4.4. Tar-and-Feathered Confederate Monument

Feathered disruptions to the architectural form publicly ridicule the values and memory of the former President of the Confederacy, while both acknowledging and empowering Black pain in public view. The tar and feathers left in view extend the archive where the monument “would eventually become the architecture of a particular social power over memory” (Schneider, “Remains” 99). The performance of protest continues at these sites in the remains left behind.

**Racist Culture | Confederate Ties**

White Confederates who suffered from the Lost Cause of slavery would renew their fighting spirit with the formation of the KKK. Using theatrics and relying on the minstrel tradition found in popular culture, the KKK terrorized, tortured, and killed African Americans during Reconstruction, through the Civil Rights movement, and arguably, into the
current day. In her essay “Midnight Rangers: Costume and Performance in the Reconstruction-Era,” Elaine Frantz Parsons argues that the use of theatricalized violence by the Klan was not only an assertion of white racial superiority but also was an attempt to reclaim the conquered Southern philosophy that promoted institutionalized slavery. KKK members unwilling to accept racial equality could, through costume, summon the Confederate dead soldiers who, awakened, were then able to fight again (Parsons 820).

Spray painted statements make overt associations between Confederate symbolism and racist agendas. For example, the Richmond Jefferson Davis Monument has been the object of many interventions that visibly challenge white superiority values (see figs. 4.5, 4.6, 4.7). This one monument has received painted messages of Nazi swastikas, a Black Lives Matter\textsuperscript{14} declaration, and a reference to the Trump election as a hate crime. Also, the 2017 “Unite the Right” rally saw the alt-right join ideals with neo-Nazi and the KKK, while counter-protesters argued for the removal of the Charlottesville Robert E. Lee statue.

\textsuperscript{14} Black Lives Matter is an activist collective formed in 2013 in response to the murder of Trayvon Martin, a 17-year old African American male killed by policeman George Zimmerman. The acquittal of Zimmerman led to the formation of the group to call attention to violence committed on African Americans.
Figure 4.5. “Spraypaint Marks Jefferson Davis Monument,” 1980.

Figure 4.6. (left) “Black Lives Matter’ was written on the west side of the Jefferson Davis monument on Monument Avenue,” 2015.
The highly visible presence of David Duke, former Grand Wizard of the KKK, at the protest draws a clear connection between Confederate values and the Klan. Duke, present at the 2017 alt-right Charlottesville rally and counter-protest, shows he is cognizant that his presence implies KKK support for the Trump administration. In an interview with NBC News, Duke directly makes this link by explaining his presence, he says:

For the people of this country, we are determined to take our country back. We are going to fulfill the promises of Donald Trump. That's what we believed in, that's why we voted for Donald Trump. Because he said he's going to take our country back and that's what we're going to do. (Duke)

Buoyed by the election of Donald Trump to the presidency, there is a marked difference in the boldness of the KKK shown in Charlottesville. At public gatherings in previous decades, the KKK members seemed motivated to keep their identities hidden from public view. Bolstered by a platform of Confederate values the KKK satin robe of invisibility comes off and gone is the tradition of anonymity. Charlottesville does represent a change as Duke suggested. Aware of the media presence, a Klansman dressed in his satin garb, wearing only
sunglasses, his face unconcealed, stares directly into the camera (see fig. 4.8). It appears as if he holds no fear of losing employment or of being socially ostracized.

Figure 4.8. “Members of the KKK are escorted by police past a large group of protesters during a KKK rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, in July this year,” 2017.

The examples in this chapter describe visuality as having several functions. Visuality allows us to see the way that protesters in public space, when convened, create counter-monumental forms with their bodies in opposition to traditional monumental forms. Also, visuality informs the way that the media represents the repeated violence against African Americans. Through the lens of visuality, acts of “vandalism” on Confederate monuments create a counter-monumental aesthetic that signal a rejection of authority.
Chapter Five: State of the Union | A Curatorial Conclusion

To date, there are no federally funded monuments acknowledging the United States’ role in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. The United States must publicly accept its grievous role in the enslavement of Africans brought from the continent as well as their descendants. America must acknowledge the repercussive trauma that federally sanctioned actions caused. Only then, can power imbalances between the races begin to equalize.\(^{15}\)

Alternatively, the Charlottesville counter-protest drew the world’s attention to Confederate monuments, prompting change at the individual, collective, and corporate levels. Airbnb canceled accounts linked to white nationalists in order to deny associations with racist or alt-right clients (Bromwich), and both GoDaddy and Google banned a neo-Nazi reporting site from working with their businesses (Mettler). The New York Times reported that universities like Yale and Brown are being scrutinized for their profound legacies associated with slavery (Schuessler). Donald Trump’s refusal to condemn white nationalists at the Charlottesville rally, another The New York Times article reported, prompted the resignation of “all 16 of the prominent artists, authors, performers and architects on the President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities” (Pogrebin). The Arts and Humanities committee included a subversive message in their resignation letter; the first letter of each paragraph spells out “RESIST” (Kinsella) (see fig. 5.1). The President’s inability to publicly admonish racist protesters at the Robert E. Lee statue in Charlottesville has also attracted the attention of the United Nations (UN) Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD). They have “called on high-level politicians and public officials of the United States

\(^{15}\) I am aware of the discussion and action to remove Confederate monuments from public space, and the suggestion that preserving them in an archival space would make clear this foundation of Black subjugation upon which Confederate monuments are built.
to unequivocally and unconditionally reject and condemn racist hate speech and crimes in Charlottesville and throughout the country” (“UN Rights”). The United States President has been admonished by human rights experts from around the world for his refusal to publicly reject racism at sites memorializing the Confederacy.

A Curatorial Statement

Throughout the writing of this thesis, I have crisscrossed time periods, selecting items for analysis from past and contemporary research, performing a temporal hopscotch between then and now, moving circularly in resistance to a uni-directional timeline. I argue for a disjunctive visual literacy that considers narratives across time, disciplines, and historical perspectives. Here, there is no continual or straight shot from the question to the answer. This associative contextualizing informs my curatorial practice and lends itself to the interdisciplinary consideration of ideas. Clearly, researching and writing a thesis is not the
same as a curating an exhibition. As a curator, I hold that it is my prerogative to extrapolate perhaps one theme from this research and support its ideology by organizing artists who deal with like-minded subject matter. The following is an example of how I conceive of an exhibition based upon this research.

My curatorial practice lies in the place between visual and performance art, where experimental works redefine medium, discipline, and social constructs. This liminal space lends itself to interdisciplinary thinking as I gather works from multiple perspectives and mediums, providing various access points for diverse audiences. I think form should follow the idea, threading through this multiplicity. All of this is to say, that to be inclusive of many voices that shape a full range of human identity and experience is to truly reflect the world we exist in and observe. Artists who explore the human condition are vital because—through sensuous materiality or experiential presence—they engage with vulnerability and an empathic need for connection, whether they explore experimental forms or traditional technique. Equally, I am interested in artists who investigate how we fail these humanist impulses. Along with the formal and conceptual considerations of the work, I also examine its relationships to its society and culture. My research plumbs many histories (art, women’s, social, labor, etc.) to examine present-day conditions, so that all the exhibitions I organize possess some historical conditionality and temporal dimension.

An Associative Trip through Time and Memory

There is no one place or time that inspired this research and thesis. On a trip to NYC in October 2017 I came upon an Ai Weiwei site-specific installation under the Washington Arch in Washington Square Park, commissioned by The Public Art Fund. The mirrored
refracted light and my own reflection, passing through and under the monumental arch, created an illusion of moving in and through time (see fig. 5.2). Incorporating the spectator within it, the installation integrated performative considerations. I thought back to my time living in Los Angeles, 2013, when the Los Angeles County Museum transported Michael Heizer’s “Levitated Mass” through the streets of LA.16 “Levitated Mass” by Michael Heizer is a 340-ton rock seemingly suspended above ground where, underneath it, spectators could walk and pass by. The enormous rock sitting on a flatbed truck traveled at a snail’s pace through LA’s various neighborhoods—police escorts in front and behind—and with news reports showing live coverage. At the time, it immediately reminded me of OJ Simpson’s escape route through LA, one of—if not the—earliest examples of a slow-moving police chase documented by television news media.17 Within the space of a moment, I had linked together in my mind my experience moving through Ai’s piece as a complicit contributor; my own spectatorship of OJ on television, questioning his guilt while also feeling compassion for his dead wife; and lastly, being stopped in traffic as Heizer’s monumental rock was given priority within LA’s stop-and-go traffic. The movement of my body in one space in time triggered memories and associations between the treatment of two men, one white and one Black, represented as a rock and a car, moving through the streets raising questions about access and privilege.

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16 I wrote about this piece previously for an artist project commissioned by the MCA Denver.
17 O.J. Simpson, the former National Football League running back was suspected and acquitted of the brutal murder of his estranged wife Nicole Simpson and her friend Ron Goldman (“Simpson Held”).
Plenty of people protested the accusations against OJ, viewing them as biased, racist treatment of an African American celebrity. Though people were annoyed, no one really protested the embodiment of Heizer’s monolithic white male ego that held up traffic (a mortal sin in Los Angeles). I thought about the public responses to both and then linked them to the Occupy Wall Street protests in 2015, in which masses of people took over the streets, behaving as if they were monumental.

“Space Is the Place! Renegotiating Monuments through Mourning and Memory”

As public protest advocating for and against the removal of Confederate monuments in public space throughout the South is featured in the national news and social media outlets, spectators question the validity of the values and authority these mostly privately-
commissioned monuments (in public space) aim to convey. “Space Is the Place” invites artists to explore issues of racism, emotional affect, visibility, collective memory, and space to provide oppositional gestures that strategize a reclaiming of power through self and collective expression, activism, and autonomy. The term “monumental” can refer to the form or scale of a thing whereas, in this exhibit, “monumentality” is given new meaning as a series of political, social, and emotional conditions that morally outweigh statuary form. All of the artists included investigate some aspect of counter-memorial aesthetics as they demand recognition for their human value and redefine monumentality. I have in mind over twenty artists I would include in this exhibition, but in the interest of concluding this thesis, I offer only a few examples.

Figure 5.3. (left) “Of My Body I Will Make Monuments In Your Honor,” 2013.
The exhibition would include artists who draw from a range of disciplines as they research and create their art forms. For gallery installation, I would include two-dimensional and three-dimensional works, or works that are object-based. For example, I would include Nona Faustine’s two-dimensional self-portraits, iconic images of her naked body that reiterate Black mourning at pre-existing sites of antebellum African burials and graveyards (see figs. 5.3, 5.4), while reclaiming the public space for the visibility of the African American female body.

African American visual artist Levester Williams creates three-dimensional minimalist sculptures that use specific vernacular alluding to the prison industrial complex and its exploitation of incarcerated Black labor. Using uncleaned linens from a Virginia penitentiary and black tar he creates monumental forms that make larger statements about Black male identity and subjugation (see fig. 5.5).
In addition to an installed exhibition, I would organize an accompanying performance and public engagement program. I imagine a commission by a female performance artist who to re-perform an iconic 1971 lecture, “The Power of Words,” by composer, jazz musician and poet Sun Ra, whose famous album, “Space is the Place” provides the title of this exhibition. Ra often used the metaphor of “space” in variable ways but always engaged it as a temporal dimension where one could live in freedom from oppression. He often referred to Egypt as the originator of (all) language and through his understanding of Egyptian vocabulary, he could enlighten listeners and spectators to (his) current-day social and cultural conditions. Following the performance, I would have contemporary performance artist and DJ Sadie Rock lead a listening party featuring Sun Ra’s music. Ra’s theatrical performances envisioned space as a metaphor for a place where African Americans existed apart from the
racially-biased times in which he lived. There are also many African American poets on the scene now who engage a sense of urgency, fluidity, and temporality. Claudia Rankine comes to mind, as well artist Kamaria Shepherd, whose raw, unfettered poetry and paintings demonstrate interdisciplinarity.

If I were to extract from this thesis a reference to the African and African American tradition of decorating graves through the antebellum period (and onward), I immediately think of the monumental forms of Nick Cave’s “Soundsuits,” which combine “fashion and sculpture—that originated as metaphorical suits of armor in response to the Rodney King beatings and have evolved into vehicles for empowerment” (“Nick Cave”). Nick Cave’s “Soundsuits” make gender, race, or class invisible. Cave first conceived of them as a political response to being racially profiled as an African American by police. In a proposed sketch, I have photoshopped an imagined protest featuring protesters in “Soundsuits” marching around the base of a Confederate monument (see fig. 5.6). This protest aims to challenge Confederate values in an effort to take back racialized public space from a dominant society. To include local participation within the protest, I propose we partner with a community organization that could arrange a public workshop in which spectators would construct their own “Soundsuits,” inspired by Cave’s work.
I envision “Space Is the Place” as a traveling exhibition that follows public discourse to cities where the debate over the presence of Confederate monuments continues. I also recognize that recent contemporary art exhibitions at major United States art museums have been criticized for their tone-deaf inclusion of works that resonate negatively for communities of color. An inclusive partnership with local organizations and academic institutions would provide the opportunity to stir discourse not only around national issues with contemporary art but also local issues as well.

While “Space is the Place” is not quite antitodal, this exhibition will attempt to acknowledge the bias of cultural institutions and will consciously work against it. This curatorial effort represents a small step toward building racial equality. It also embraces the spirit of the protests which erode the monumentality of the Confederate monuments. I believe that by engaging multiple disciplines and artists who approach their practice and research in
interdisciplinary ways, I can provide opportunities for expanded audience engagement, and ultimately, understanding. This thesis is my counter-monument.
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**Fig. 3.5** Baynard Woods, “Activists atop the Lee Jackson statue base,” *Twitter*, 16 August 2017, 3:19 AM, www.twitter.com/baynardwoods/status/897734603540189184.

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Fig. 3.11. “Crowd in front of Court House, Vicksburg, Miss., when the news was received of Pres. Lincoln's assassination. Picture taken April 16th, 1865,” 16 April 1865, The Mississippi Department of Archives and History, www.mdah.ms.gov/arrec/digital_archives/series/cooper/detail/21247.


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Figure 4.5 “Spraypaint Marks Jefferson Davis Monument,” 15 June 1980, Valentine Museum Archives.

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Figure 5.4 Nona Faustine, “From Her Body Sprang Their Greatest Wealth, from the “White Shoes” series,” 2013, nonafaustine.virb.com/.

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