

Everyone present in a talking circle would have the opportunity to share what is in their heart as they gaze at these objects. (We'd need the usual ground rules: no interrupting, a respectful silence between each intervention.) We'd break into small groups and return to the larger circle. In so doing, we'd enact anew the hard work of democracy—a strange enterprise, in the words of political theorist E. E. Schattschneider (1975), devoted to the “socialization of conflict.” For that is the deepest promise of museums: that in the presence of objects and those who seem so unlike us, we can together learn to encounter one another and the world around us on new terms, and like young children playing with a newly discovered toy (Winnicott 1971), rediscover the profound, life-transforming mysteries of the Self and the Other.

These critical processes of refashioning the public square through civil debate and the work of objects, I suggest, cannot be achieved solely through the physical relocation of Lost Cause iconography. They require the intervening mediation of serious, innovative works of art, compelling us to perceive the bloodied American historical landscape through new eyes. Consider the newly opened National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama, commemorating the horrific murders of more than 4,400 victims of lynching. As visitors descend into this unbearably painful memorial space, they pass underneath 816 metal columns, marking the counties in which the Equal Justice Initiative has documented acts of lynching. These suspended oxidizing slabs are themselves latter-day reliquaries, honoring our martyred fellow citizens while evoking dangling corpses, inescapable reminders of the nation's far-too-long-untallied legacy of white supremacist violence. Might these uncanny metallic hulks also be read as the transmogrified traces of Neo-Confederate statuary, gathered from public squares across the nation, melted down and recast, in effect, as ritual intermediaries or structural operators, suspended somewhere between signifiers of perpetrators and victims? Walking through the memorial enacts in microcosm the difficult terrain we must now traverse as a nation, through serious reflection and critical self-examination. We must acknowledge both the whispered, enduring presences of the silent icons that long normalized violent white privilege and the long-obscured presence of the tortured and the

abused. Simultaneously, we must enact, through our moving bodies, the possibility of emerging from our long, common nightmare into an alternate, rejuvenated space of compassion and equal justice.

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#### RACIST MONUMENTS ARE KILLING US

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I am both professionally and personally exhausted with discussions over monuments and whether they should be removed from public spaces in United States cities. Often, as anthropologists we become engrossed in thought experiments, epistemological theorizing, and cultural relativistic historical reframings, attempting to apply this kind of thinking to understanding human responses to pressing social issues such as the removal of Confederate monuments. There are deep fissures between the factions of people interested in preserving history and those who support removing racist monuments from public spaces, and these camps cannot simply be brought together through academic discourse and roundtable discussions. From here, as some of my colleagues have outlined, the challenge of staying attuned to history while also understanding the problems that

monuments present for people of color, especially black Americans, becomes an epistemological enigma for scholars. But it should not.

As a black woman, every time I pass a Confederate monument I am offended. I am not only reminded of my ancestors who gave their lives fighting for my freedom, but I am insulted by the fact that the city and country that I love continue to honor a violent faction of the country that devalued my life. More important than how monuments provoke me affectively, the perpetual assaults are unequivocally deteriorating my health and shortening my life span. What follows is a brief attempt to enhance this “keep them or chuck them” argument and offer a more palpable contribution to this discourse that focuses not on history but on corporeality.

As a black feminist activist-scholar focused on medicine and health disparities, I am often hesitant to harangue my students and colleagues about the intersections of racism and health. Nevertheless, public health research reveals a striking and consistent narrative about the ways racism and discrimination affect health—a narrative that is often obscured after people learn that race is a social construction. Black Americans have higher mortality rates than white Americans for 12 of the 15 leading causes of death in this country (Cunningham et al. 2017). Sociologist David Williams has shown that black Americans not only get sick at younger ages but also have more severe illness over their life spans (Williams and Mohammed 2013; Williams et al. 2016). While poverty and low education (both of which overwhelmingly plague black communities) contribute to this phenomenon, race has been shown to be a key determinant of a person’s allostatic load.

Allostatic load is the cumulative “wear and tear on the body” when individuals are exposed to chronic stress over a long period of time. This “wear and tear” or weathering means that black Americans experience premature aging, chronic stress, and faster health deterioration than whites. This deterioration spans an individual’s lifetime but also across generations (Bailey et al. 2017; Cunningham et al. 2017; Geronimus et al. 2006). Researchers have found that black Americans have higher allostatic load scores than whites at all ages, and these scores increase with age (Cunningham et al. 2017). Geronimus and colleagues (2006) found that black women in particular bear a

larger burden of allostatic load than black men, white women, and white men. The reasons for increased allostatic load are numerous and interrelated. They include neighborhood segregation, conscious and unconscious bias, internalized racism, institutionalized discrimination, systemic racism, environmental stressors, and psychological trauma.

What does all of this have to do with Confederate monuments? Everything. Black Americans’ perpetual exposure to educational and residential segregation, economic injustice, state-sanctioned violence, political exclusion, stereotypes in media and popular culture, racial slurs, and negative imaging in the form of monuments are psychosocial stressors that lead to deleterious health outcomes. Social epidemiologist Nancy Krieger has shown that for people of color, discrimination is “embodied inequality” (Krieger 2012). Both Clarence Gravlee and Krieger outline how race and racism, as social inequality, become biology and quite literally have the power to make us sick (Gravlee 2009; Krieger 2012). The evidence exists and is beginning to demonstrate that contemporary and historical power imbalances that marginalize black Americans cannot be diluted into new paradigmatic traditions but instead must be recognized as social constructions that are harming bodies. Thus, Confederate monuments are not simply history or heritage; they are quotidian and tangible reminders of black people’s illegitimacy, inferiority, and insignificance in the United States of America.

In August 2017, three days after a deadly white nationalist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, President Trump tweeted: “Sad to see the history and culture of our great country being ripped apart with the removal of our beautiful statues and monuments.” The removal of these monuments is another step toward liberation for black people, but the president of the United States is “sad” about their removal. Does the president understand that the people who were protesting the removal of a statue of Robert E. Lee from Emancipation Park were white supremacists, white nationalists, neo-Confederates, Klansmen, and neo-Nazis? Protests against the removal of Confederate monuments by such groups are unequivocally racist. Racism not only deteriorates health but is also the reason black Americans are still dying younger than white Americans. The perpetual assault of racist messaging, images, and symbols

contributes to this reality. Is the preservation of monuments more valuable than black people's lives? "Discrimination is a hellhound that gnaws at Negroes in every waking moment of their lives to remind them that the lie of their inferiority is accepted as truth in the society dominating them," Martin Luther King Jr. once said.

Although I am immensely exhausted, I fervently believe that organizing and movement building is necessary to develop a communal consciousness of the perils of symbolic monuments. How can we change our culture so that people recognize the dangers of these monuments? Clifford Geertz wrote, "[Culture] denotes an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms, by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life" (Geertz 1973, 89). If symbols have the power to communicate, perpetuate, and develop human knowledge, we must create new symbolic meanings that are not focused on maligning specific groups of people. Is a Confederate monument worth preserving if it yearly weathers a black student during frequent fieldtrips to Emancipation Park? Is a Confederate monument on the steps of a courthouse in Virginia worth preserving if it contributes to the historical trauma and stress that a 50-year-old black woman endures as she seeks justice for her son who was slain at the hands of the police? I would hope not. I would hope that as a culture, as a human race, and as a nation we instead

choose to value health equity and ameliorating the health of all people more than historical symbols that sanction hatred, bigotry, and racism.

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