EXPANDED COMMENTARY

IN WHOSE HONOR?
On Monuments, Public Spaces, Historical Narratives, and Memory

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ABSTRACT

Recent organized protests have incurred outrage over monuments commemorating Confederate military leaders; in some cities, such as Baltimore, statues of Confederate military leaders have been removed overnight. In this context of charged public discourse, we ask: Does the immediate removal of these statues and monuments truly change the representation of histories and heritage? This expanded commentary, emanating from a Late-Breaking Roundtable Session at the American Anthropological Association's 2017 annual meeting, is a discussion of the nuances and more obvious manipulations of power exercised through public spaces, representations, place names, and the production of historical narratives embedded in material forms of cultural memory. Research in the field of museum anthropology offers analysis pertinent to this subject, as well as intentioned practices to support communities addressing the violences, disparities, and racisms embedded in American history, and its material forms of cultural memory. In organizing the session, we suggested participants might explore the significance of "dissonant" or "negative" heritage; the narratives, counternarratives, and contestations highlighted in these controversies; or offer comparative perspectives from contexts other than the United States. [public spaces, historical narratives, heritage, representation, museums, Confederate monuments and statues]

As we write, the New York City Mayoral Advisory Commission released its recommendation report for three monuments and one historical marker in New York City that pay homage to our country's racist past and present. One of the monuments is a large bronze statue of Theodore Roosevelt on horseback, flanked by a Native American man in a headdress and an African American man draped in cloth, revealing his well-muscled body. Roosevelt remains fully clothed, exposing only his face and hands to the elements, one hand hovering over his pistol. We mention this particular statue because it stands outside the American Museum of Natural History. Although the history of its placement and connection to the building behind it is ambiguous, it has in the past few years been the site of collective, grassroots efforts to decolonize museums and rethink our histories. As Donna Haraway's illuminating analysis of patriarchy on display in the museum suggests, we should consider how such imagery impacts the experiences of visitors to a natural history museum, where hierarchical depictions of African and Native peoples alongside the taxidermied trophies of white men are already so problematic (Haraway 1984). As anthropologists who work in and with museums, we are particularly attuned to the political dynamics and symbolism involved in the interpretations of monuments, the preservation of historic sites, and the shaping of public spaces intended to inform and direct our physical, emotional, and intellectual lives.

In the ensuing months after white supremacists in Charlottesville, Virginia, attempted to claim public space in a display of violent theatrical entitlement, municipalities around the country began organizing the removal of public monuments honoring Confederate military leaders. While calls for the removal of statues and efforts from local activists were catapulted into the national spotlight for an all-too-brief moment, the legacy of monuments and statues continues to impact our communities. "Normally they commemorate events or experiences in the past," writes Anderson, "but at the same time they are intended, in their all-weather durability, for posterity. Most are intended to outlive their constructors and so partly take on the aspect of a bequest or testament. This means that monuments are really ways of mediating between particular types of pasts and futures" (Anderson 1990, 174).

At this particular moment, it is time to question how these monuments continue to inhabit public spaces and normalize racisms, first by ignoring the Indigenous lands upon which the United States exists and second by choosing to minimize the impact of a long trajectory of industrial capitalism that enslaved

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and brutalized hundreds of thousands of people forced to come to this country (Byrd 2011). It is in this context that we understand the recent violence committed by white supremacists. Bringing the discussion of monuments, memorials, historic sites, and the recent violent displays of white supremacists to a roundtable at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association seemed critical in this context. A late-breaking session allowed us to convene a group of scholars from the Midwest, South, and East Coast regions to present at the meeting.

As anthropologists, we have much to offer in leading discussions on race, gender, history, and representation. As anthropologists focused on museums and cultural heritage, we felt that members of the Council for Museum Anthropology (CMA) were particularly well-placed to debate the ways these issues are manifested through material culture and physical space. We sought to discuss the nuances and more obvious manipulations of power exercised through public spaces, representations, place names, and the production of historical narratives. The past twenty years of research in the field of museum anthropology offer analysis pertinent to this subject (Adams 1997; Coombes 2003; Curtis 2011; de Jong and Rowlands 2007; Girshick 2004; Handler and Gable 1997; Joyce and Gillespie 2015; Karp et al. 1992; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998, 2004; Meskell 2002; White 1997), as well as intentioned practices to support communities addressing the violences, disparities, and racisms embedded in American history and its material forms of cultural memory (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2007; Lonetree 2012; Lynch 2011; Peers and Brown 2003; Smith 1999). We also felt, as many museums and arts organizations have since January 2017, that we had an obligation to confront difficult contemporary political issues head-on. As CMA asserted in an official statement in March 2017:

> Museums are spaces where peoples of different backgrounds, cultures, and faiths join together to promote dialogue and understanding. Museum anthropology is dedicated to the work of anthropology—of human understanding across cultural differences—in museums and related institutions. The Council for Museum Anthropology Board affirms our sustained commitment to human diversity and academic

freedom. We pledge to advocate on behalf of threatened community members and against discrimination. We aim to use our work in museums and cultural heritage to promote cross-cultural understanding and positive change.

Or, as a student considering graduate school in our field asked, "What are museum anthropologists doing to influence policy and politics?" We hope that our efforts here are one small move to address that question.

In that vein, we asked our contributors to respond to the following questions: (1) In consideration of your work and experiences, what do you think is the key issue that best illuminates the root causes of the protests over monuments to Confederate military leaders? (2) How do we support change, and is change possible? What is the hard work that needs to be done, and how do we do it? We allowed each of our speakers to answer the first question in a more formal, short presentation and then allowed the remainder of the session to proceed with debate and audience questions while putting our second question to the panelists in a roundtable format. Our original panelists who contribute here are Alex Barker, Bailey Duhé, Eric Gable, Richard Leventhal, Diana Marsh, and Gwendolyn Saul. (The panel also included Monique Scott, who was unable to attend, and Rosemary Joyce, who was unable to contribute here.) Our audience contributors to this commentary emanating from their responses to the panel are Chelsea Carter, Courtney Lewis, and Mark Auslander.

In the following pages, our panelists and invited audience members offer insight into how monuments for Confederate military leaders and the ensuing protests and rallies in Charlottesville speak to the very foundations of our nation-state. Our contributors focus, in particular, on topics of race and anti-blackness in the United States and how racialized public sentiment enters these debates about monuments and memorials.

Duhé challenges us to decenter "whiteness" as the entry point for thinking and discussing the assault people of color experience from monuments to Confederate military leaders, while Barker brings attention to the difficult truth that simply removing monuments, statues, and names from institutions

does not undo the structural inequalities that made them possible in the first place. Barker also encourages us to consider the difference between the past (what actually happened) and heritage (what we make of it and how it is experienced today). Lewis reminds us that South Carolina and other Southern states have enacted alteration bans on monuments, spurring the question: How do we move forward when no changes can legally be made to public monuments? Or further, how does a ban on altering monuments reify hegemonic narratives or complicate monuments' ability to address multiple histories and perspectives of different populations in these communities?

Carter articulates the mental, emotional, and physical toll of racist ideologies promoted by the presence of Confederate monuments and endured by people of color. Auslander provides the much-needed perspective of a museum director, cautioning against suggestions that such monuments be removed and placed in museums, spaces that are inherently imbued with their own politics and ideologies. Leventhal, on the other hand, suggests that museums and universities might be exactly the right spaces for intellectual dialogue, while acknowledging that "as we think about these monuments and the protests, we need to prioritize people and their meanings for these monuments. Our work is not about monuments but rather about people and communities." Where else can diverse audiences converge at the crossroads of opinion and background, to contemplate their relationships with one another and confront those complexities and at times uncomfortable truths?

Gable describes the landscape and demographics surrounding monuments in Richmond, Virginia, and presses us to ask: Who are the supporters of these monuments? How do we ask working-class white Americans to engage in these conversations without further polarizing and alienating this increasingly enraged population? On the other hand, our panelists asked whether there is even room for that conversation, or whether those conversations further marginalize the voices of people of color or cater to racist ideologies.

Elsewhere the commentaries address questions that emerged in our session and roundtable discussion: How do we effect change from people in our communities who support a racist ideology? Whose responsibility is it to make things better, and how do we go about it? Should museums acquire removed or "orphaned" monuments (Leventhal and Daniels 2012, 347), and if so, what museum would actually take such collections? How can we effect change in our public spaces and institutions to intervene in the production of historical narratives and push for more inclusive representation and recognition of community histories? Can museums work with local groups to assist in the interpretation of monuments that remain? Is it the role of outsiders to become involved at all, or should they contribute to grassroots organizations that can address issues locally?

It is our opinion that museums have an obligation to address the issues embodied in these monuments, brought to the surface by their placement in public spaces with the memories and reactions they evoke. Beyond an understanding that statues of Confederate military leaders were largely constructed during the time of Jim Crow laws, decades after the close of the Civil War, the issue of their presence in American cities and towns offers a crucial moment to pause, to comment and critique, to tussle out a way forward, and to assess current museological practice and the politics of recognition. While not the focus of this commentary, Native American scholars and friends at the roundtable and afterward made the point that these sculptures stand on Native lands and that the very founding of the United States is based on "pursu[ing] happiness through the acquisition of Indigenous lands" (Byrd 2011, xxi). The ongoing failure to acknowledge this "absent presence" (Carpio 2008, 291) creates a fertile ground for normalizing violence, whiteness, and racism.

Last, we must note that with the exception of two scholars of color, our original roundtable consisted of white academics and museum professionals. Audience member and medical anthropologist Carter, who attended our session, shares in her eloquent commentary here, "I am both professionally and personally exhausted with discussions over monuments and whether they should be removed from public spaces in United States cities." Carter's words remind us that the underlying racisms represented by public monuments have long been part of discussions (and everyday life) in local communities and among people of color, however novel they might seem to academics. This point is reinforced by Duhé: "the time

for handwringing is over," and as she aptly points out, we must put our words into action.

We hope these contributions inspire and motivate our readers to be good allies, and reassure our friends, colleagues, and people of color whose perspectives are raised here that we are ready to listen and to follow. As the common cliché goes, everyone should have a seat at the table. We argue that everyone should be invited to help build the table, too.

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DECENTERING WHITENESS AND REFOCUSING ON THE LOCAL: Reframing Debates on Confederate Monument Removal in New Orleans

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To start this discussion of Confederate monument removals, I need to state my own beliefs: (1) the Civil War was fought over slavery; (2) the monuments need to come down (and street names, etc., need to change); (3) community members where these