"Turning Rubble and Memory into Seeds"[1]
Visions of Democracy in Monument Removal

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[1] Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2002), 197.

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<u>Abstract</u>

If social movements to remove monuments to racist, colonial, or otherwise oppressive figures from the past are successful, does the removal of such monuments risk undermining such movement's other demands for structural change? The dissertation argues that social movements must negotiate, challenge, and fight against the slippage of monument removal being addressed as a policy end to the exclusion of monument removal operating as an opening for democratic transformation. The Take 'Em Down New Orleans (TEDN) and #RhodesMustFall (RMF) movements raise new questions about contesting the language of public memory as it is claimed for state legitimation *and* activist instigations. Thus, the first chapter examines how social movements rely on public memory in their attempts to dismantle structures of race without fully allowing sympathetic state institutions to pull activist efforts into the realm of official public memory. Focusing on TEDN and RMF situates this interplay between local politics and memory protests within the conditions of race and capital. Studying these cases together reveals the creativity and tensions that emerged in their different challenges to sympathetic, if flawed, public institutions and how their protests took on different characteristics of their national legacies of race, colonialism, capital, and democratic institutions. The second chapter focuses on overlapping concepts of monuments and monumentality to consider how the specificity of monument removal offers creative alternatives for contesting the limitations placed on racialized bodies. The third chapter turns to RMF to examine how "fallist" politics connect colonial pedagogies to struggles for worker justice and gender equality. Fallists turn against institutions of higher education in order to express these grievances and find ways of channeling disruption and betrayal into more radical understandings of democracy. And the final chapter turns to TEDN to examine its connection to longer tradition of Black left organizing against police violence and how this presents challenges for situating monument removal in relation to state leadership. The chapter considers how the dynamics of popular toppling brought out this tension during the 2020 George Floyd protests and how it leads to both creative mass engagement and also a dissolution of TEDN's political cohesion.

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I. Introduction: Holding the Empty Plinth Open

In a summer 2015 open letter to the community of New Orleans, the newly formed "Take 'Em Down Coalition," which would later be known as Take 'Em Down NOLA (TEDN), identified a group of statues as obvious manifestation of "white supremacist ideas…which permeates US society and result in actual discrimination and murder," both by the police and by the steady, damaging poverty that haunts Black life in New Orleans and elsewhere with little public action. The group made the case that any hope of real change would require a "collective will to address entrenched oppression." Such a will, they explained, could emerge through immediately removing the statues of Confederate Generals Robert E. Lee and P.G.T. Beauregard, or the Liberty Place Monument[2] by a community-driven process, where communities could pinpoint other manifestations of white supremacy.

At nearly the same moment, students in South Africa were building a new political movement in the aftermath of the removal of the statue of Cecil Rhodes from the steps of the University of Cape Town in April 2015. The group, known as #RhodesMustFall (RMF), operated throughout March to put pressure on the university to fulfill its promise to remove Rhodes. After Rhodes fell in April, students and workers re-formed in October 2015 under the new banner #FeesMustFall (FMF) in response to a set of proposed increases to tuition. This time, the protests spread across the entire Western Cape university system, and they incorporated a much wider range

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[2] The Liberty Place Monument commemorated "an attack on an integrated police force at the hands of the Crescent City White League." The monument was established in the 1890s in order to honor the White League's uprising against the Reconstruction-era government and made explicit reference to their upholding of white supremacy. Kevin Litten, "Efforts to Remove Confederate Monuments Go Back Decades," *Times-Picayune*, March 14, 2017: https://www.nola.com/news/politics/efforts-to-remove-confederate-monuments-in-new-orleans-go-back-decades/article_752f52c2-54b1-5541-ab1d-deef8f98c95d.html#:~:text=While%20it%27s%20been%20nearly%20two,their%20efforts%20to%20the%201950s.

of students, workers, and artists. Where the spring air was filled with chants of "Rhodes Must Fall,"

the cheers turned to a chorus of "Fees Must Fall."

In one sense, the purpose of taking down monuments is to clear away public reminders of

Black subordination through different systems of racialization. These reminders became salient at

moments of violence against and protest by Black people in the US and South Africa. These

moments include the murder of striking miners outside Johannesburg in 2012 and the rebellions in

Ferguson in 2014 and Baltimore in 2015 that helped crystallize the Movement for Black Lives. But

in another sense, the call for removing monuments occurs as sympathetic public institutions are

exploring the present-day significance of historical injustice and asking what it would mean to repair

damage that was, until recently, mostly unacknowledged. Thus, the call to remove monuments

engages with those institutions on questions about public representations, political activities that

could contribute to such repair, and how remembering the past produces other claims as part of

pursuing racial justice.

Reading these movements separately generates important ideas about specific approaches for

addressing the living historical veneration of white supremacy.[3] While some authors have argued that

the removal of statues represents a "process of physical change [that] will begin to provide concrete,

tactile shape to the intangible changes and transformations," others stress how activists raise

awareness about how statues concealed histories of slavery and colonial power.[4] By contrast, other

commentators point to the importance of thinking comparatively about monument removal at the

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[3] A. Kayum Ahmed, "#RhodesMustFall: How a Decolonial Student Movement in the Global South Inspired Epistemic Disobedience at the University of Oxford." *African Studies Review*, 63(2), 281-303; Clint Smith, "The Young Black Activists Targeting New Orleans's Confederate Monuments," *The New Republic*, May 18, 2017: https://newrepublic.com/article/142757/young-black-activists-targeting-new-orleanss-confederate-monuments.

[4] Brian Kamanzi, "Rhodes must fall"—Decolonization symbolism—What is happening at UCT, South Africa?," *The Post Colonialist*, March 25, 2015: http://postcolonialist.com/civil-discourse/rhodes-must-fall-decolonisation-symbolism-happening-uct-south-africa/; Mary Niall Mitchell, 'We always knew it was possible': The Long Fight Against Symbols of White Supremacy in New Orleans. *City: Analysis of Urban Change, Theory, and Action*, 24(3-4): 589.

global scale. Terms like "urban fallism" and "decolonial de-monumentalization" illuminate monument removal as a critical gesture for destabilizing oppressive senses of place in favor of more egalitarian ways of marking, knowing, and making the social world.[5]

But while these studies offer excellent insights into the critical dynamics of public memory discourse, they spend less time wrestling with dilemmas that arise when elected officials or sympathetic administrators respond to protest by supporting monument removal. In New Orleans, Mayor Mitch Landrieu worked to gain City Council approval of removing four Confederate monuments in December 2015; and the University of Cape Town Senate approved the removal of Rhodes in April 2015 with limited debate.[6] In both cases, officials accepted some of the challenges raised by activists and endorsed the demand to make public spaces more diverse and open. Rather than trying to understand monument removal only as oppositional, events in New Orleans and Cape Town raise questions about the political considerations that arise when social movements are forced to address how official seats of power grant partial, negotiated, or seemingly take over such commemorative gestures. What new challenges arise from the official embrace of monument removal, and how might this change the expressive intentions or strategic construction of public memory protest efforts? Building on Jenny Wüstenberg's question of "what happens to state institutions when they become imbued with the logic and values of activists," this project considers how grassroots contest, negotiate, and re-frame shortcomings and partial victories as their efforts

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[5] Sybille Frank and Mirjana Ristic, "Urban Fallism: Monuments, Iconoclasm and Activism," *City: Analysis of Urban Change, Theory, and Action* 24(3-4): 552-564; Manuella Badilla and Carolina Aguilera, "The 2019–2020 Chilean Anti-Neoliberal Uprising: A Catalyst for Decolonial De-Monumentalization." *Memory Studies* 14(6): 1226–1240.

[6] Daniel Victor, "New Orleans City Council Votes to Remove Confederate Monuments," *New York Times*, December 17, 2015: https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/18/us/new-orleans-city-counil-confederate-monuments-vote.html#:~:text=New%20Orleans%20City%20Council%20Votes%20to%20Remove%20Confederate%20Monuments,-Give%20this%20article&text=The%20New%20Orleans%20City%20Council,to%20be%20"public%20nuisances." "UCT Council Votes in Favor of Removing Rhodes Statue," *UCT Newsroom*, April 8, 2015: https://www.news.uct.ac.za/article/-2015-04-08-uct-council-votes-in-favour-of-removing-rhodes-statue;

become realized by state institution. How movements respond to this dynamic provides insight the creative responses needed to bridge public memory to struggles for democratic empowerment.[7]

To be clear, activists face sincere and vicious reactions from people who support keeping such monuments in place. Substantial effort went into preventing the removal of monuments to Rhodes or Confederate-era figures.[8] Furthermore, despite the successes of such movements, the vast majority of monuments targeted for removal still remain standing today.[9] Instead, the dissertation asserts that sympathetic institutional agreement on the desirability of monument removal played a consequential role in re-directing how these movements advocated for and explained the importance of monument removal to public audiences. The dissertation explores the extent to which such agreement detracted from positioning monument removal as a "beginning" of critical reflection rather than it becoming "an end" achieved by negotiated settlement.

The problem of sympathetic institutions treating monument removal as an issue to be settled as an end itself is not purely about cooptation or such acts becoming "official" memory. The political problem for activists with "official" memory, in the sense that official memory is about silencing opposition, consolidating state power, or denying historical losses, is one that is already implied by their focus on monument removal in the first place.[10] In fact, there are certainly good things that come from the state taking up the specific work of removing monuments. In one sense, these institutions *are* responding to grievances from communities that have historically been ignored

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[7] Jenny Wüstenberg, *Civil Society and Memory in Postwar Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 28.
[8] Natasha Robin, "Save Our Circle Group Reacts to Landrieu's Place for Monument Sites," *Fox 8 Live*, March 8, 2018: https://www.fox8live.com/story/37682854/save-our-circle-group-reacts-to-landrieus-plans-for-monument-sites/
[9] Kathleen Tipler, Tyler Johnson, Tyler Camarillo, Andrea Benjamin, Ray Block, Jr., Jared Clemons, Chryl Laird and Julian Wamble, "93 Percent of Confederate Monuments Are Still Standing. Here's Why," Washington Post, December 16, 2019: https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/12/16/percent-confederate-monuments-are-still-standing-heres-why/; Michael Race, "Cecil Rhodes statue will not be removed by Oxford College," *BBC News*, May 20, 2021: https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-oxfordshire-57175057
[10] Sheldon Wolin, "Injustice and Collective Memory," in *The Presence of the Past: Essays on the State and the Constitution* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 34.

or treated with hostility. And even if some hypocrisies emerge, it cannot be denied acts like getting rid of a statue of Robert E. Lee and renaming the statue's former location "Harmony Circle" makes improvements that many citizens desire.[11]

I contend, however, that the slippage between seeing such actions as political goods with a distinctive "end" reveals something critical about the politics of public memory. The gap between the structural critiques of activists in New Orleans and Cape Town, on the one hand, and official pronouncement about monument removal, on the other, indicates the limitations of public memory to serve as driver of social change. Endorsements of monument removal flatten activist efforts into a formula: pull the worst monuments down now, debate the others, and search out experts to "clean up" public memory to ensure only tolerable monuments remain. While the public is often consulted for their ideas in such efforts, it is not clear how such ideas become actions. And in a moment where claims on public memory are increasingly used to debate terms for racial reconciliation, reparation, or global justice, this conversion of the expressive potential of monument removal into something that is exclusively about how states will address the monument itself raises questions about what kinds of political action must accompany illuminating difficult pasts in order to build popular support for broader social transformation.

Or, from a different angle, accepting state acts of monument removal and renaming as a positive intervention into public memory does not mean that such acts do not create barriers to addressing more complicated political problems going forward. Treating monument removal as an end does more than impede the momentum of grassroots antiracist movements; it provides a level of "cover" for state actions through defining the purpose of monument removal. By defining the

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[11] Paul Murphy, "Lee Circle in New Orleans Officially Renamed," *4WWL*, April 22, 2022: https://www.wwltv.com/article/news/local/orleans/former-lee-circle-site-name-changed-to-harmony-circle/289-bbc982c5-b6fe-476a-a171-ccb84c2b725f#:~:text=NEW%20ORLEANS%20—%20The%20name%20Robert,now%20be%20called%20Harmony%20Circle.

purpose as reconciliation or "making straight what has been crooked," the monument again becomes an "out of line" object to be corrected rather than an examples of social forces that made and kept such an object in place.[12] Thus, a glaring problem with monument removal becoming an end, or rather becoming something that the state can perform and be done with is that it draws an association between the displacement of a monument with the unifying logic of state power: removing a monument represents a singular purpose, fulfilling a task that strengthens how states can use reflection or accountability for their strategic political gain. In this sense, states *are* able to deploy public memories of objects no longer present, or what J. David Maxson calls, "residual memories."[13] States are well-equipped at finding ways to justify their actions or invoke historical figures who are absent to ventriloquize their interests. Thus, the challenge for monument removal activists is to hone their own approaches of keeping empty plinths open in a way that furthers examination and might expand the possibilities of fighting for universal housing, public education, or carceral transformation through public remembrance.

I. a. The Contentiousness of Monument Removal

In an interview with the *Times-Picayune* in 2015, Mitch Landrieu described being confronted with startling questions raised by jazz great Wynton Marsalis: "in that most prominent space in the city of New Orleans, does [Robert E. Lee's presence] reflect who we were, who we want to be or who we are?"[14] The question left Landrieu speechless, "thinking about those questions for the first time, though he'd walked, jogged or driven past the monument his entire life."[15] Landrieu's

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[12] Mitch Landrieu's Speech on the Removal of Confederate Monuments in New Orleans," *New York Times*, May 23, 2017: https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/23/opinion/mitch-landrieus-speech-transcript.html
[13] J. David Maxson, "Second Line to Bury White Supremacy: Take 'Em Down NOLA, Monument Removal, and Residual Memory," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 106(1): 51-52.
[14] Robert McClendon, "Landrieu Coaxed to Evolve on Lee Statue," *Times-Picayune*, June 25, 2015.
[15] Robert McClendon, "Landrieu Coaxed to Evolve on Lee Statue," *Times-Picayune*, June 25, 2015.

wordlessness, whether genuine or contrived, does exhibit a shock of seeing the continued public

embrace of Lee's statue.[16] Such shock is also symptomatic of Lee's statue representing a newly

contentious issue, where emerging interests are now competitive in a way that gives pause to anyone

attempting to explain that friction aloud.

What causes old explanations of political order to give way to new fights over issues that

represent a previously entrenched problem? Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow's account of

"contentious politics" provides a framework for interpreting how movements like TEDN and RMF

are able to turn monument removal into a new kind of political issue with room to redefine the

terms of the debate. They argue that, during moments of social upheaval, "familiar claim-making

routines dissolve" and produce new demonstrations or "repertoires of contention" that render older

responses either irrelevant or unacceptable.[17] Upheaval in the US revolved around the growing

frustrations with murders of Black people by police or white vigilantes and the lack of political

response to these tragedies. After the acquittal of George Zimmerman for Trayvon Martin's murder

and the failure to prosecute the murderers of Michael Brown and Freddie Gray, the Movement for

Black Lives captured this mood of popular discontent in the United States. And the murder of nine

church members at Emmanuel AME in Charleston, South Carolina, in June 2015 inspired new

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[16] While this project is fairly critical of Landrieu, there are interesting parts of his political role in New Orleans that might lend to sympathetic portrayals. Landrieu's father, Maurice Landrieu, ensured that Beauregard Square was renamed Congo Square in 1974. Further, Mitch Landrieu worked as Lieutenant Governor of Louisiana to facilitate racial reconciliation discussions with the assistance of the William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation. That these plans were disrupted by Hurricane Katrina suggests that the group had not developed enough robust cooperation to handle the enormity of state and federal failures in the response to the hurricane. Yet Landrieu remains the only mayor of New Orleans to actually push actively for the use of a 1993 statute that gives the power to remove monuments from public places to City Council.
http://www.welcometableneworleans.org/process_our-story/; James McWilliams, "Take 'Em Down: A VQRTrue Story Essay," *Virginia Quarterly Review* (Fall 2017): https://www.vqronline.org/essays-articles/2017/09/take-'em-down
[17] Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 19. Sidney Tarrow defines a "repertoire of contention" as "not only what people do when they are engaged in conflict with others but what they know how to do and what others expect them to do." Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 3rd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 39.

demands to clear public spaces of symbols of racial hatred. In this same moment, South Africans witnessed the murder of miners striking in Marikana, a kind of state-sanctioned violence reminiscent of apartheid government's approach to labor disturbances. The murders further destabilized President Zuma's hold over the African National Congress (ANC) and their governing coalition, and significant political opposition emerged in new political parties like the Economic Freedom Fighters. Thus, it is understandable how in the midst of these moments of political instability new questions emerged without well-scripted responses.

Such upheaval seems to reflect a rising contentiousness of the sort that Tilly and Tarrow describe. To think about monument removal in terms of contentious politics is to examine clashes over interests in the arrangement of social power, while acknowledging monument removal itself as constitutive of potentially new political identities. This approach animates a series of questions: What interests are involved in the maintenance or dismantling of Confederate statues? What agents or groups are able to make such monumental spaces appear conflictual? Much of the public debate surrounding monument removal has tried to capture the essence of this contentious claim-making. Some commentators have suggested that monument removal is contentious in terms of its assertion of historical truth against the "untruthful" use of monuments meant to mystify domination as a basis for political community.[18] Tyler Steim contends that "the protests [about monument removal] at bottom, are about facts—the historical truth of colonialism, slavery and patriarchy, and the contemporary truth of people they still marginalize." The "contentious politics" of monument removal, in a sense, might be seen as a struggle over asserting that the dominant view of history is unjust; or it might also be about demanding that public commemorations deemed uncontroversial

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[18] Nicholas Mirzoeff, "All the Monuments Must Fall #Charlottesville," *The Funambulist Magazine* 37: August 31, 2021.

ought to be re-examined in the light of contemporary public standards.[19] On a different level, commentators have noted contention over the monuments' role in creating a stratified public sphere. They note that visual representations of white supremacy embed racial hierarchy in daily living by functioning as instruments of racial division, tourist attractions, or destinations for capital investment.[20] Further, maintaining such monuments might be interwoven with a masculine version of national identity symbolized by military figures on horseback.[21] What these claims share is that they presume stability in the meaning of the monuments as representations of constituencies from the past that sought to actively undermine political equality across time; and they suggest that the removal of such monuments represents a broad social consensus that such historical narratives are no longer acceptable.

Each of these examples draws out different ways in which these monuments reflect interests in a discredited racial order. In this light, to remove them is to assert that those who benefit from that order have been stripped of that position or privilege. But such an approach risks presuming to know what it means to have such monuments in place and what it means to take monuments down. Deeper consideration of specific examples, by contrast, reveals the partial, negotiated, sometimes coincidental relationships involved in monument removal.

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[19] Johannes Schulz, "Must Rhodes Fall? The Significance of Commemoration in the Struggle for Relations of Respect," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 27(2): 166-186; Kirk Savage, "No Time, No Place: The Existential Crisis of the Public Monument," *Future Anterior* 15(2): 146-154.

[20] Adolph Reed, "Monumental Rubbish: With the Statues Torn Down, What's Next for New Orleans?" *Common Dreams*, June 25, 2017: https://www.commondreams.org/views/2017/06/25/monumental-rubbish-statues-torn-down-what-next-new-orleans; Stephen McFarland, Samantha L. Bowden, and M. Martin Bosman. "'Take 'Em Down Hillsborough!': Race, Space, and the 2017 Struggle Over Confederate Iconography in Neoliberal Tampa." *Southeastern Geographer* 59(2): 172–95; Sharon Macdonald, "Is 'Difficult Heritage' Still 'Difficult'? Why Public Acknowledgment of Past Perpetration May No Longer Be So Unsettling to Collective Identities," *Museum International* 67(1-4): 6-22.

[21] Karen L. Cox, *No Common Ground: Confederate Monuments and the Ongoing Fight for Racial Justice* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2021); Erin L. Thompson, *Smashing Statues: The Rise and Fall of America's Public Monuments* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2022).

To think about the political relationships involved in monument removal, like who supports monument removal and to what extend they support it, some public opinion data may be useful. Several surveys taken after the issue gained some level of public awareness suggest removing monuments does not garner majority support.[22] But, this has not completely stopped public institutions from pursuing monument removals, name changes, and other commemorative revisions to address representations of racial violence.[23] Surveys about monument removal tend to consider it alongside other possible proposals for amending troubling commemorations, such as more inclusive representations meant to balance the visual landscape or installing placards to contextualize certain monuments.[24] So given the weak endorsement of monument removal that this data seems to present, activist efforts have been especially successful in convincing institutions and elected officials of the importance of confronting racist monuments. It is true that the partisan political environment still seems to decry the "erasure" of national heritage to effectively garner support of those who are

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[22] Chris Kahn, "A Majority of Americans Want to Preserve Confederate Monuments: Reuters/Ipsos Poll," Reuters, August 21, 2017: https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-protests-poll/a-majority-of-americans-want-to-preserve-confederate-monuments-reuters-ipsos-poll-idUSKCN1B12EG; Elon University Poll, "N.C. residents support keeping Confederate monuments in place," November 20, 2019: https://www.elon.edu/u/elon-poll/elon-poll-confederate-statues-and-monuments/; "Creating More Inclusive Public Spaces: Structural Racism, Confederate Memorials, and Building for the Future," *E Pluribus Unum*, September 28, 2022: https://www.unumfund.org/creating-more-inclusive-public-spaces-survey/. Polling in South Africa is much more affirmative of removing monuments, even though the debate over what should be done with monuments once they leave their plinth is still contentious. Sharlene Swartz, Benjamin Roberts, Steven L. Gordon & Jare Struwig, "Statues of Liberty? Attitudes Towards Apartheid and Colonial Statues in South Africa," in *Exchanging Symbols: Monuments and Memorials in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, ed. Anitra Nettleton and Mathias Alubafi Fubah, (Stellenbosch: African Sun Media, 2019), 1-30.

[23] It is also important to note that while over 100 had been removed by 2020, there were efforts to protect at least 28 monuments across the US. Rachel Treisman, "Nearly 100 Confederate Monuments Removed In 2020, Report Says; More Than 700 Remain," *National Public Radio*, February 23, 2021: https://www.npr.org/2021/02/23/970610428/nearly-100-confederate-monuments-removed-in-2020-report-says-more-than-700-remai

[24] More specifically in the US context, the Unum Fund Survey reported super-majority preferences for "public spaces and buildings [as] open and welcoming to people of all races and backgrounds" and for public spaces that demonstrate a community's diversity. It is also worth noting that the majority of survey respondents, regardless of partisan preference, stated they supported "repairing the damage done by past violence or discrimination against racial minorities." What kinds of policies these preferences signal, though, is underdetermined. Given the preference in other surveys for statues remaining in place, it seems that given the choice of leave in place or removal, the former is still preferable. But given the opportunity to contextualize or reproduce other forms of commemoration does seem to have wider support than monument removal.

opposed to such actions, or as a signal for a broader set of reactionary commitments.[25] But it is critical to notice how *agreement* over monument removal has also been re-narrated to address contentious battles between established interests, such as campaign slogans or broad commitments to "restoring the nation's soul."[26] For example, the US Congress's removal of statues from the Capitol emphasized how such statues are emblems of "hate" that defines all those who opposed their removal.[27] This functions as a way for bringing monument removal into political projects that are more acceptable to public opinion and map more easily onto existing political preferences for either liberal openness, formal equality, or reverence for political tradition.[28] The University of Cape Town, for example, assured alumni that the removal of the Rhodes statue actually reflected the university's prior consensus on Rhodes as a divisive figure who had no right to be placed in a location of prominence.[29] However, such re-narrations also seem to have the effect of "detaching [monument removal] from demands and aspirations for radical social change."[30] Examining the effect of official endorsements of monument removal offers insights into the political dynamics that

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[25] Peter Baker and Helene Cooper, "Trump Rejects Renaming Military Bases Named After Confederate Generals," *New York Times*, June 10, 2020: https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/10/us/politics/trump-rejects-renaming-military-bases.html; "DeSantis Vows to Restore the Name of Fort Bragg, Named for Confederate," *Tampa Bay Times*, June 10, 2023: https://www.tampabay.com/news/florida-politics/elections/2023/06/10/desantis-vows-restore-name-fort-bragg-named-confederate/.

[26] Examples of this might include some campaign materials produced in South Africa that said, "Zuma Must Fall," or in the US when Joe Biden's electoral campaign took up images of Charlottesville to embrace monument removal as a way to frame his challenge to President Trump.

[27] Alana Wise, "'Homage to Hate': Pelosi Calls For Confederate Statues Removed From U.S. Capitol," *National Public Radio*, June 10, 2020: https://www.npr.org/sections/live-updates-protests-for-racial-justice/2020/06/10/874417376/homage-to-hate-pelosi-calls-for-confederate-statues-removed-from-u-s-capitol.

[28] There is some evidence to suggest that public opinion may also be shaped by the mode in which removing monuments is decided; for example, relying on referendum rather than representative voting may provide more satisfaction even for those who opposed the referendums final decision. Tyler Johnson, Kathleen Tipler, and Tyler Camarillo, "Monumental Decisions: How Direct Democracy Shapes Attitudes in the Conflict over Confederate Memorials," *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 52(4): 620-624.

[29] Notice here as well that the monuments are separable from the public space or the communal body, they are merely remnants that sit unnoticed and unfamiliar with the daily life that surround it "Answers to alumni FAQs re: Rhodes statue" *UCT Newsroom*, June 22, 2015.

[30] Aziz Choudry, *Learning Activism: The Intellectual Life of Contemporary Social Movements* (Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 78.

monument removal activists are wrestling with and how state interests diverge from these

multifaceted movements.

These endorsements of monument removal attempt to legitimize something that is not

popular, but they may reflect some level of willingness to build new coalitions to challenge

entrenched racial injustice.[31] But the framing of monuments as a shared affront to the present

renders monument removal as a somewhat shallow signaling rather than an empowering form of

education; the monuments become instruments for articulating the civic pride in the present, not

about questioning its motivations.[32] Unlike the coalitions imagined by the political establishment,

these movements aim to both edify the public about the presence and harm caused by such

monuments and to use such edification as a way to mobilize support for present political causes that

emerge from the histories such monuments mean to represent. Focusing on the signaling function

of monument removal alone obscures questions about how present-day communities are complicit

and potentially able to act together to resist whatever remains even if certain monuments are

removed. To concretize this dynamic, we turn now to how monument removal activists bring *other*

political problems into conversation with the demand for monument removal. This will help clarify

how the appearance of official support overshadows activists' wider goals of mobilizing support for

monument removal into actions that dismantle racial hierarchy.

To examine this point, I consider some of the shared demands made by TEDN and RMF.

At a broad level, they both endorsed critiques of capitalism, focusing on issues like the neglect of

workers' living conditions or divestment of resources from Black communities into policing. In their

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[31] Andrea Benjamin, Ray Block, Jared Clemons, Chryl Laird and Julian Wamble, "Set in Stone? Predicting Confederate Monument Removal," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 53(2): 237-242.

[32] The nineteenth-century monument followed the French *philosophes'* commitment to exposing the masses to "powerful images" meant to convey "the right kind of virtues [to] transform [them] into good and useful citizens… [Monuments were] instruments of education, progress, and liberal social reform." Lars Berggren, "The 'Monumentomania of the Nineteenth Century: Causes, Effects, and Problems of Study," in *Memory & Oblivion*, ed. Wessel Reinink and Jeroen Stumpel (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999), 562.

initial statement, Rhodes Must Fall demanded that workers "must be able, without penalty of any kind, to refuse work that is a danger or hazard to their health and safety," along with an increase in the minimum basic wage of all workers at UCT. RMF invoked "the spirit of Marikana" when they connected their campaign to the 2012 murder of striking mine workers. Similarly, TEDN highlighted city priorities that neglected the well-being of Black and working class communities: "the budget of the city of New Orleans only invests 3 percent into children and families and a measly 1 percent into job development. At the same time, 63 percent of the same budget goes to cops, jails and reactive measures. This is NOT the way to Build 'Em Up… (Figure I. 5)."[33]

Additionally, they both embraced the liberatory potential of public education, not as a form of liberal enlightenment, but as an oppositional capacity for deconstructing Black subordination. As the Rhodes statue was being removed, RMF leaders issued a statement that this removal would not placate them; nor should it be seen as an end to their movement, which included "launching a campaign around the financial and academic exclusion of Black students" from UCT.[34] This exclusion included problems of rising fees, narrow curriculum design, and the need for "pedagogical decolonization." Whereas New Orleans' dismantling of public education leads to disparate outcomes for Black students, TEDN paired the "revolutionary education" of learning about Black histories of resistance to "equitable educational practices in each and every school in Orleans Parish."[35]

And finally, both movements connected the removal of statues to the racial stratification of space. They challenged notions of private property that speak to geographically specific forms of dispossession and violence such as unlivable housing projects or settler entrapment of indigenous communities. TEDN emphasized the toxicity of the land used for public housing in New Orleans,

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[33] Angela Kinlaw, "Take 'Em Down and Build 'Em Up: Symbolically and Systematically," *Roots Rising*, Vol. 2, 13.
[34] UCT Rhodes Must Fall, Facebook post, April 9, 2015.
[35] Angela Kinlaw, "Take 'Em Down and Build 'Em Up: Symbolically and Systematically," *Roots Rising*, Vol. 2: 11, 13.

advocating for relocation and compensation for communities exposed. As the conditions shifted at UCT, RMF activists framed their work around the university's location on "dispossessed land" and then more actively tried to "reclaim" university land as colonial holdings that should be used to care for students previously denied access; they also embodied this connection by addressing their work to struggles of students, workers, and landless peasants outside Cape Town.

If these political aims are seen as indictments of the present, it is critical to see how these movements imagined them as interwoven with removing monuments. As fallists argued, the removal of the Rhodes statue could not be considered the endpoint of the mass mobilization; instead it was deeply embedded in new ways of organizing against the "alienation and disempowerment" that defined public life in South Africa for Black communities.[36] In New Orleans, Angela Kinlaw explained, "Build 'Em Up NOLA… needs Take Em Down NOLA to really have a chance at progress. In order to build in any way, we have to embrace true, honest, and uncomfortable history… We must bring an end to what harms us and simultaneously build what keep us healthy and whole. Both are necessary."[37] Thus, both groups demanded removal as essential, while being clear that it should not outweigh all other goals.[38]

Although RMF and TEDN diverged in terms of the specificity of their programs, priorities, and key organizing concepts, they shared a sense of the place of monument removal relative to the social stability of race. Structures of race rely on the historical accumulation of habits, practices, and ideas to validate disparities that make Black lives disproportionately vulnerable. Monuments, it seems, have played a stabilizing role as a feature of public memory: shoring up political imaginations

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[36] "UCT Rhodes Must Fall Mission Statement," The Johannesburg Salon, Vol. 9, *The Johannesburg Workshop in Theory and Criticism*, 2015: 6-8.
[37] Kinlaw, "Take 'Em Down," *Roots Rising*, Vol 2.: 9-10.
[38] "As long as the Louisiana Supreme Court is part of such a system, there is no statue removal that is ever going to fully reflect the systemic change that we ultimately seek as Take Em Down NOLA" Take 'Em Down NOLA, "ED White removal and Renaming Commission Statement."

of the nation or support for unity at the expense of accountability in the wake of conflict.[39] For both movements, this embrace of public memory as a means of building up social solidarity only does so by prioritizing bonds defined by entrenched racial stratification of social, economic, and political power. Without deconstructing the social function of how monuments produce social stability, there is no historical re-interpretation or public memory installation that will make turning to the past efficacious in dismantling racial hierarchy. Thus, the critical contention for these movements is fighting to keep removing monuments as a part of creating opening to practice new forms of social solidarity.

I. b. Memory (and) Activism: Possibilities and Pitfalls

In order to analyze the limits of what monument removal can accomplish, I argue that we need to more deeply understand how public memory maps out a framework for politics. Recently, acts of public memory have opened up new ways for audiences to return to harmful past events as a way of preventing, learning from or at least better addressing historical injustices.[40] However, public refrains of "never forget" or "honor the dead" are often not synonymous with commitments to structural change. This section explores how the disconnection between commemorative dimensions of monument removal and its capacity to provoke larger social transformation may be a function of the politics of public memory more broadly.[41] While it is certainly the case that grand

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[39] Erika Doss, *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 26-27; Mihaela Mihai, *Political Memory and the Aesthetics of Care: The Art of Complicity and Resistance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press 2022), 199-200.

[40] "In the best-case scenario, the cultures of memory are intimately linked, in many parts of the world, to the processes of democratization and struggles for human rights, to expanding and strengthening the public spheres of civil society… But even where cultural memory practices lack an explicit political focus, they do express a society's need for temporal anchoring when in the wake of the information revolution and an ever-increasing time-space compression, the relationship among past, present and future is being transformed beyond recognition." Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 27-28.

[41] Two such concepts that examine desires to account for the past have sparked much literature in the study of memory: "the politics of regret" and "cosmopolitan memory." The former refers to Jeffrey Olick and Brenda

gestures of historical re-narration are by no means guarantees that there will be immediate change to the structure of society, the mapping of boundaries between the aspirational vision of and practices the emerge in response to public memory interventions does better locate gaps, consequences, or openings for further political interrogation.

At one level, the global emergence of new paradigms of public memory reflects an acknowledgment of the connections between present political strife and historical injustice. These connections are often attributed to a century of global terror, paradigmatically the Shoah and totalitarian violence of the mid-20th century, or more recently the development of international programs of transitional justice and the resurgence of public histories of slavery.[42] As Jenny Wüstenberg explains, memory politics operates at an important crux of democratic government: whereas many state-led commemorations are often broadly meant as *representative* projects that are meant to reflect majority self-understanding, the rise of more contentious uses of public memory revolve around developing *normative* arguments about how the past should be seen to shore up democratic values, like equality or pluralism.[43] For much of the late 20th century, Wüstenberg argues, public memory projects simply conflated the representative with the normative. The way forward as a nation is to embrace those things most common and self-evident about shared historical

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Coughlin's argument that the wide-spread turn to self-reflection or "disgust" with one's national history reflects the collapse of old regimes of shared meaning-making; regret as a social project for communal accountability fulfills that same desire for meaning. And the latter is Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider's argument that globalization of technology and multi-media sharing enable "de-territorialized memory" in the wake of the collapsing significance of the nation-state. This combination of easily transportable images and a vision of political community not tied to the territorial state led helped produce commitments to translating historical injustices (particularly Shoah) into ways of addressing local grievances. The relationship between these concepts and the emergence of memory activism may serve as a useful place to expand future research. Jeffrey Olick and Brenda Coughlin, "The Politics of Regret," in *Politics and the Past: On Repairing Historical Injustice*, ed. John Torpey (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2003); Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2005).

[42] Aleida Assmann, "The Holocaust—a Global Memory? Extensions and Limits of a New Memory Community," in *Memory in a Global Age: Discourses, Practices, and Trajectories*, ed. Aledia Assmann and Sebastian Conrad (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Crystal Marie Fleming, *Resurrecting Slavery: Racial Legacies and White Supremacy in France* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2017).

[43] Wüstenberg 8-10.

narratives. But as members from activist groups were selected for formal seats of power in Germany's public memory institutions, public memory in Germany shifted from these representative projects to projects that designed to actively confront the public with normative demands about rethinking or even rebuking events from the past.[44] But, how does the state, as a political institution, shape what can be pursued in this *normative* approach to public memory? And to what extent are activists able to articulate normative claims through public memory that diverge from the state's interest in retaining control over such practices?

Along with the rise of "more democratic" public memory, new groups of citizens using this expanded sense of public memory to articulate their own sense of what justice should mean for the contemporary polity became known as "memory activism." As Wüstenberg observes, much of the scholarship on the politics of public memory has "neglected the work of grassroots civic organizations, which have played a central role in determining the evolving landscape" of public norms or laws surrounding public memory.[45] Memory activism operates in two ways: citizens make evident how present political ills are a result of past events, or they articulate how past events are unjustly neglected in the present. Both operations emphasize a shared belief that the processes of making the past publically visible, creating new ways of "seeing" public memory, bears strong normative demands that can transform their publics.[46] But this raises the question of the relationships between visibility of the past and normative demands: how are they shaped by the state's willingness to engage or assertiveness in engaging these projects?

Wüstenberg's conception of "memory activism" interprets struggles over public memory as a means of opening up state processes to inclusive, democratic control. Wüstenberg theorizes the

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[44] Wüstenberg 19-20.
[45] Wüstenberg 4-5.
[46] Yifat Gutman and Jenny Wüstenberg, "Challenging the meaning of the past from below: A typology for comparative research on memory activists," *Memory Studies* 15 (5): 1070-1086.

relationship between grassroots and state practices of public memory in this gloss: "The boundary between state institutions and civil society is *a category of practice*. [Memory activists] define and imagine this boundary through their contentious interaction."[47] This tension is not sustained in oppositional antagonism, but by a more permeable sense of state institutions incorporating activist views, logics, even the actual labor that shifts public memory practices. While she emphasizes the institutional and normative shifts in German democracy led by the incorporation of activists into state institutions, such as national museums, parks, or archives, Wüstenberg acknowledges the "professionalized nature of [such] public remembrance" raises tensions over defining the *normative* challenges of public memory. In this way, memory activists who "refuse to play by the rules" of the state are often exposed to heightened hostility or discredited status. This raises important questions about the costs of being seen as representative of official memory and who is most likely to bear them.[48]

From a different context and perspective, Elizabeth Jelin describes memory activism as "entrepreneurial," operating by seeking out uncertain or unexplored sites to release tensions between "official" history and opposition to the state.[49] Jelin examines how South American human rights

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[47] Gutman and Wüstenberg situate memory activists are categorically defined by their status as external to, or at least not formally seen as incorporated into the state. While much of Wüstenberg's argument in her text on post-war Germany is about how this contentious relationship leads to imbrication and hybridization of the work of activists and the state, her later work clarifies at least a relevant commitment to understanding memory activism as incongruent with state objectives. That being said, there are still important traces of this political claim in Wüstenberg's work, drawing from the 2017 text: "I conceive of civil society as a kind of 'imagined community; a sphere that activists [define through] the appeal to solidarity and community purpose" against the aims of state, which are left somewhat vague. Wüstenberg 29, emphasis original.

[48] Wüstenberg 24-26.

[49] Elizabeth Jelin, *State Repression and the Labors of Memory* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, 2003). Jelin points out that her use of the concept of "entrepreneur" may strike some as odd or too fraught with consumer imagery to be useful. But the association of the term with both Howard Becker's notion of "moral entrepreneurs" as figures invested in provoking social energies towards otherwise unremarked "deviance" situates the economy of power understood here as primarily affective or bodily in nature. Additionally, it is worth noting that Jelin understands "entrepreneur" to be a social or collective form of subjectivity that is distinct from "militants of memory" who rely on repetition of traumatic scenes to generate their affective commitments, but only among a pre-determined group of "victims." Entrepreneur, in Jelin's sense, implies both a division of labor that includes creative initiatives for renewing approaches to memory and social hierarchies and mechanisms of control that can be exercised by the entrepreneurs themselves. While I won't deal directly with this distinction between

movements challenge transitional regimes to confront legacies of authoritarianism in ways that demand both legal and moral accountability for perpetrators. In these transitional contexts, opposition groups draw continuities between the previous regime's repression and the current regime's official silence or refusal to pursue historical inquiry. Jelin argues that this kind of political fight is a threat to the rule of law and other state institutions in the wake of toppling dictators. "Ongoing disputes about who can promote or demand what, about who can speak, and in whose name" is too much for new structures to bear, says Jelin.[50] Thus, memory activists "[widen] scales and scopes" of public memory, in order "to create new projects and open new spaces" for public memory to emerge in civil society, rather treating public memory as a zero-sum political struggle.[51]

While Jelin's vision of "memory entrepreneur" emphasizes how memory activism produces positive memory discourses by expanding *beyond* the state to preserve the possibility of political stability, Yifat Gutman sees memory activism as a way to *avoid* the state in order to pursue political change. In her study of walking tours among different activist groups in Israel/Palestine, Gutman theorizes memory activists' public memory interventions as strategically framing their work as cultural dialogue in order to avoid being considered as "political." In this context, Gutman suggests that Israeli security institutions are attentive to way public memory projects are critical of Israel, particularly among Palestinian groups that want to gain access to contested sites like Jerusalem while working places in the West Bank that bring them close to Israeli forces. Groups that want to pursue a more radical challenge to Israeli settlements or dispossession of Palestinians risk losing their access or being detained as insurgent threats. Instead, Gutman observes that memory activists' critical labor

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entrepreneur and activist/activism here, it is clear that: a) the versions of political action implied by these terms have importantly different imaginations of democratic politics; and b) later work on "memory activism" builds on and connects with Jelin's work without necessarily questioning the political assumptions that go into this terminology's shifting implications for political subjectivity.
[50] Jelin 44.
[51] Jelin 45.

was more "a history-writing agency more than a legal platform, [and yet] the activists viewed [the tours] as an alternative route to peace…to reframe the public debate on the past and to influence people's views toward present political issues and project a vision for the future."[52] Palestinian memory activists rely on languages of reconciliation and historical justice in order to fit their desires for liberation into more familiar cultural repertoires.[53] And yet Gutman notices that "what distinguishes [Palestinian] memory activism from formal political initiatives [in Israel-Palestine] is the idea that collective memory as a medium for consciousness-raising is the only weapon available for Palestinians…that the state cannot disarm."[54] Insofar as this "weapon" of memory activism remains outside of formal state institutions, avoiding the most coercive techniques of colonial disarmament, public memory becomes the "only remaining [form] of resistance that the state cannot seize." As Gutman clarifies this arrangement, "this cultivation of memory is liberating but also very fragile."[55]

In these instances, memory activism attempts to wrestle with the power of the state by redirecting or submerging their own political claims deep within practices that reflect what is understood to be public memory. But this strategy raises questions about where legibility of public memory is lost, particularly as memory activists try to emphasize the present implications of their work. How does this desire to avoid direct confrontations with the state come into conflict with their desires to advocate for stronger normative confrontations with the present political order, particularly when addressing legacies of colonization and race?

I. c. The Past as a Contentious Question: The Politics of Black Memory

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[52] Yifat Gutman, *Memory Activism: Reimagining the Past for the Future in Israel-Palestine* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2017), 12.
[53] Gutman, 83-84.
[54] Gutman, 83-84.
[55] Gutman, 83-84.

If we pay attention to the framing of monument removal by activists, it is clear that they are foregoing some of the techniques other memory activists used to move beyond or avoid state confrontation. These movements seem to find accounts of liberal inclusion in state functions or civil society's protections to be unsatisfactory places from which to dismantle structural racism. For example, Rekgotsofetse Chikane, a prominent RMF activist from the University of Cape Town, insists that public memories of apartheid are often invoked merely as "footnote[s] for the future" by the present regime.[56] What Chikane means by this is that instead of articulating apartheid's lasting, visceral effect on South African daily life, public memory becomes stylized as "cautionary tales" that are used to "pacify activism by critics" who challenges the ANC's approach to housing, education, and economic inequality.[57] In this way, public memory of apartheid retains a pedagogical function of teaching the present about the dangers of neglecting common humanity, while also being used to stifle activist voices who trace the presence of apartheid in contemporary South Africa. For Chikane, even though these public memories can help protect certain rights won in the struggle for liberation, they disconnect apartheid from the contemporary ills of land consolidation and racial and economic inequality.[58]

But this dulling effect of public memory's radical potential need not define all public approaches to the past. Jenn Jackson contends that prominent strands of militant memory exhibited by Black-led movements around the world, including RMF and TEDN, reveal strategies to combat the routinized ignorance of public memory.[59] For Jackson, routinized ignorance occurs out of a "willful disregard for how the facts [of life facing Black people] related to larger structural threats

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[56] Rekgotsofetse Chikane, *Breaking a Rainbow, Building a Nation: The Politics Behind #MustFall Movements*, (Johannesburg: Picador Africa, 2018), 35.
[57] Chikane 35.
[58] Chikane 35-36.
[59] Jenn Jackson, "The Militancy of (Black) Memory: Theorizing Black-led Movements as Disjunctures in the Normativity of White Ignorance," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 121(3): 482-483.

and harms."[60] Jackson suggests these habits of ignorance are racialized: they produce white subjects who embrace ignorance as a way of freeing themselves from burdens of holding the past in view of the present, while making it more difficult for Black subjects to frame the validity of their political demands.[61] But, this dynamic of public memory does not mean there is no hope of using public memory to contest racial hierarchy. Instead, Jackson suggests that Black-led social movements have embraced public memory as an opportunity to theorize the world they want for themselves, rather than only trying to vindicate Black historical achievement in the eyes of white communities: "we are only bound by what we can imagine for ourselves, our kin, our comrades, and our communities."[62] It is this kind imaginative reorientation of democratic belonging that TEDN participant Sam Barton discerns in monument removal: "I think people might start to realize that if you can remove a statue, you can change a lot more."[63]

One way to build on Jackson's embrace of the term "Black memory" is to think of it as a comparative category that reaches across national borders without simply appealing to universalizing categories like humanity. Michael Hanchard suggests that Black memory emerges out of communities that have not been able to access such categories as "human rights" or "dignity" to appeal for their protection or promotion of livelihood. "Global" connections among different strands of Black memory emerge from resistance to the legacies of colonialism and capitalist extraction. As Hanchard makes clear, however, in states like South Africa or Jamaica, where Black post-colonial political leadership is the norm and Black-majority polities exist, Black memory cannot exist in eternal opposition to state memory. Instead, Hanchard posits that "forms and representations of Black memory persist both inside and outside the parameters of state-constituted

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[60] Jackson 479.
[61] Jackson 478.
[62] Jackson 486.
[63] Fiona Grathwohl, "New Orleans Takes Down Confederate Monuments" *Tulane Hullaballo*, June 28, 2107, https://tulanehullabaloo.com/26752/news/new-orleans-takes-down-major-monuments-across-city/.

national histories… The inclusion of Black actors and symbols of national patriotism…helps to underscore the tensions between territorially nationalist symbols and non-territorial rituals within Black-life worlds."[64] For Hanchard, the collective memory of the nation-state, or what we have been calling "public memory," operates according to territorial or "vertical" relations of power, where the emphasis is on reconciling division in the name of generating singular origins or narratives of community. Hanchard writes that while people may have competing narratives of identity, "a national-state can only have one narrative about the nation's origins, founding, and maintenance without appearing contradictory, feeble, or indecisive."[65] In distinction, Black memory operates through "horizontal" accounts of relationship or solidarity that are not only traced through national origins, but instead through the institutional practices of "racism, slavery, reparations, nationalism and anti-colonial struggle, and migration." This kind of remembrance "arranges seemingly disparate signs and symbols into coherent narratives" rather than accepting these experiences of dispossession or violation as isolated tracts for constructing modernity.

Both state and Black memory share one affective assumption: that the unalterable past can be re-presented to produce new senses of community through feeling.[66] Whereas state memory tends to protect and project visions of the past that support the status quo, Black memory involves the imagination of alternative institutions. Hanchard concludes that Black memory demands "collectivities of the choices each generation must make when faced with the unbearable weight of racial and national oppression—accede or quit, fight or negotiate, just as their forbearers did."[67] In these different remembrances of Black memory, Hanchard sees political alternatives to nationalist

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[64] Michael Hanchard, "Black Memory Versus State Memory: Notes toward a Method" *Small Axe* 26 (June 2008): 46.
[65] Hanchard 47.
[66] Hanchard 55.
[67] Hanchard 52.

projects; yet he seems more certain that Black memory cannot fully divest itself from the territorial

boundedness of the state if it hopes to ever change global structures of race.

Saidiya Hartman and Stephen Best, on the other hand, contend that Black memory is

constituted by what they call "fugitivity," or an elusiveness that remembers the demand for justice as

always paired with the "impossibility of redress" by states or any official acts of politics.[68] In other

words, Black memory cannot merely be a recollection of those that survive and their story of

resistance that provide a balm in liberation. Instead, it simultaneously looks back at what cannot be

recovered, the cost of the belatedness of abolition.[69] But rather than only focusing on the bottomless

pit of slavery's violation, Best and Hartman imagine how "the possible" means something new "in

the face of the irreparable," which may open up new conceptualizations of redress.[70] The fugitive

justice of Black memory cannot accept the vision of reconciliation that revolves around declarations

or apologies that imagine repair as closure. This, for Best and Hartman, does not seriously

interrogate what the injury actually was and is, nor does it adequately account for the irreversibility

of such an injury.[71] In a sense, public memory may resemble the petition for recognizing the

humanity of the enslaved. As Hartman writes elsewhere, "it is difficult not to grovel or think of

freedom as a gift dispensed by a kind benefactor" when the petitioner asks for recognition of

grievance against the dissolution of their status as a human being.[72] Rather than merely seeing the

recognition baked into public memory as an "act of state worship," the vision of fugitive justice

holds out the possibility of imagining what it could mean to see "the enslaved as our

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[68] Stephen Best and Saidiya Hartman, "Fugitive Justice," *Representations* 92 (Fall 2005): 3.
[69] The haunting moment for Best and Hartman is that at the moments of petition to stave off racial domination, "it was already too late. It was not too late to image an end to slavery, but it was too late to image the repair of its injury."
[70] Best and Hartman 3.
[71] Best and Hartman 3.
[72] Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 169.

contemporaries." Black memory, in this sense, insists on meeting the "demand of the slave in the present" with more than "back wages or debt relief," but instead "the reconstruction of society."[73]

I. d. Dreaming Memory, Envisioning the Political: Removal and Beyond

The lessons drawn from theorists of Black memory do not necessarily open themselves to direct or clear repertoires of contention. Can "horizontal" associations produce concrete political change? Or does engagement in "vertical" encounters with public memory always negate Hartman's provocative image of seeing the enslaved as contemporaries? As Sam Tenorio articulates, the role of institutionalized state power may flatten intricate renderings of Black memory into "closure through inclusion, of repair through democratization," offering only individual accounts of transformation and foregoing any meaningful structural change.[74] But as Hartman and Best point out, it may be the case that a gap between reparative images and structural transformation, or between the "compensatory" justice of removal and the irreparable "pain" which demands total social reconstruction, is constitutive of any political approach.[75] While justice may be something that requires perpetual dissatisfaction with any political response, this does not mean that all political action is devoid of meaning or antithetical to freedom. After all, to recall the irreparability of the slave past does not deny that resistance was a critical, life-affirming part of that past as well.

Black memory offers an alternative to the politics of recognition insofar as it embraces the generative power of refusal. Refusal seeks out "possibilities of habitation" in the midst of impossible or unresolvable tensions, and finds out what *can* exist in small, localized patterns of daily living, forged through fighting against harms that are systemic and persistent.[76] To imagine seeking out

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[73] Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, 169-170.
[74] Sam C. Tenorio, "White Carceral Geographies," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 121 (3): 524.
[75] Best and Hartman 1-2.
[76] Best and Hartman 2.

ways of making life livable that do not depend first on state recognition may point us towards

aspects of monument removal that go beyond the fight over where the statue stands, and drawing

connection between empty plinths and the social relations needed to continuing fighting against the

less obvious "monuments" of institutionalized racism. But can the deconstructive centering that

comes from embracing removed monuments build towards possibilities like housing, health care,

and economic redistribution?

Monument removal can function as a radically expressive political moment when it is

stretched, dramatized, and extended into divergent forms of claim-making that go beyond the

confines of thinking about public memory as selecting historical figures to be etched in stone.

Monument removal, in this sense, is at once a way of forging spaces for new demands that cannot

be made with more conventional genres of commemoration that require valuable victims, heroic

exemplars, or simplified narratives of national purpose.[77] Two example that bring attention to this

notion of monument removal stretched in public art and kindling of the "possibilities of habitation"

are Sethembile Mszeame's public display as an embodied monument and Angela Kinlaw's vision of

a second line "burial of white supremacy."

Jenn Jackson argues that Black memory is capable of "weaponizing" public memory insofar

as it can tap into the disruptive potential of "multigenerational freedom dreams."[78] Such freedom

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[77] Peter Carrier, "Historical Traces of the Present: The Uses of Commemoration." *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* 22 (2): 436-438; Mihai 13-14.

[78] It is important to note that the "dream" Halbwachs [the preceding discussion of Halbwachs is gone, so this note should either be reframed to offer a brief account of Halbwach's account of memory or deleted] is referring to is the kind of cognitive processes that goes on during sleep, whereas Jackson and Kelley are using dream in a more literary sense. However, as Freud and the wider tradition of psychoanalysis make clear, dreams that occur during sleep are not necessarily individualized, purely cognitive process, but instead ways in which the unconscious is able to "escape" the socially-conditioned powers of repression that make subject capable to living in the world. In this sense, the "dream" of Halbwachs can be seen are related to the "dream" of Jackson and Kelley in the sense that they both speak to those experiences of trying to escape those social constraints that make life smooth. The primary difference then is that Halbwachs is not necessarily endorsing repression as bad or good, he is merely trying to locate the sociological frameworks by which memories become possible. Jackson and Kelley on the other hand are recalling sociological frameworks and lived experiences in order to find new sources of freedom.

dreams, as Robin D. G. Kelly writes, are central to Black political thought, particularly in moments where the "total transformation of society" is considered in the "most imaginative, expansive, and playful" ways.[79] The freedom dream, for Kelley, "interrogates what is 'normal'" by plumbing the completeness of experience, digging through the depths of the unconscious even, in order to give voice to revolts against sedimented ways of speaking, thinking, and living.[80] Rather than treating this as a "romanticization of the past," Kelley insists that the work of social transformation cannot proceed without contesting those barriers imposed and exhibited in the mind. Individual experiences of hope, despair, and rage become signals that can unlock "how we imagine a New World" paired with "how we reconstruct our social and individual relationships…unleashing our desire and building a new future."[81] These desires, for Kelley, come from "turning rubble and memory into seeds of a new society."[82]

This tension between what can and cannot be remembered is evident in the language of "dream" and the sense of betrayal that define much of the criticism of South African political institutions. One of the protest signs that was routinely brought to demonstrations during #RhodesMustFall protests, as well as subsequent Fallist efforts, read: "Our parents were sold a dream in 1994; We're here for a refund." Beyond a pervasive sense of betrayal that defines much of South African politics following the formal end of apartheid and the ANC's inability to fully embody the dream of 1994, the sign may speak to a kind of dream-work going on amongst fallists: resisting its obvious meanings, uncovering its latent desires, and burrowing deeply into the crevices of the dream to extract something emancipatory.

Comparing the larger significance of these "dreams" and how they shape political outlooks on social transformation may be a productive avenue to continue this research. Jackson 482. 487.

[79] Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2002), 5.

[80] Kelley 9.

[81] Kelley 193.

[82] Kelley 197.

One such example of this is dream-work is Sethembile Msezane's meditations on South African public memory and the removal of Cecil Rhodes. Throughout her artistic repertoire, Msezane positions herself as "a protagonist of Black womanhood" who quite literally stands in the spaces of "ongoing erasure and silencing of her sisters."[83] As Mihaela Mihai notes the "political memory of the resistance against apartheid is…armed and gendered male and aesthetically dominated by the figures of Mandela, Biko, and Tambo."[84] Msezane developed her interventions in public memory through a series of live art displays during civic holidays in South Africa in order to intervene in the "masculinist embodied spectacle" that such remembrance encourages.[85] Between 2013 and 2015, Msezane performed her own version of the "living memorial."[86] Mszeane's living memorials are composed of symbolically rich yet enigmatic portrayal of African femininity, almost invariably depicted with a beaded veil, aiming to inject the Black female body into the public landscape to contest the "visible absence of our existence…within memorialized public spaces."[87] Her work provokes a reflexivity in the way it "re-historicizes, problematizes, critiques and re-remembers the concealed violence" that are at the core of South Africa's shared past.[88] Msezane becomes an embodiment of the monument. Her representation of public memory draws her gendered and racialized body into view to contest the landscape of public memory.

Msezane says her monumental presence produces disruptions within herself. After discussions began to remove the Rhodes statues at UCT, Msezane started having recurrent dreams

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[83] Tamar Garb, "Falling and Rising: In the Wake of Cecil John Rhodes," *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art* 44 (May 2019): 35.

[84] Mihai 200-201.

[85] Mihai 200.

[86] Post-World War II saw a global rise in 'useful' public buildings and spaces that Erika Doss describes as "living memorials" where the emphasis was on adorning daily life with remembrance of the dead, rather than ignoring the horrors of two global wars by enshrining commemoration in conventionally heroic aesthetics. Doss 40-41.

[87] Matthias Pauwels, "Agonistics Entanglements of Art and Activism: #RhodesMustFall and Sethembile Msezane's Chapangu Performances," *de arte* 54 (1): 19.

[88] Kopano Maroga, "The Poetics of Remembrance as Resistance: The Work of Sethembile Msezane," *Artthrob,* February 27, 2017, https://artthrob.co.za/2017/02/27/the-poetics-of-remembrance-as-resistance-the-work-of-sethembile-msezane/.

"about a bird. And so, I started conjuring her mentally, spiritually and through dress." Paired with

her process of constructing "wearable sculptures" from detailed historical and cultural sources, this

attentiveness to her dream-life reflects a critical aspect of how she creates an imaginative form of

public memory.

(Figure I. 1)

Msezane's dream of the bird, which later she actually "became" as part of both the removal

of Rhodes and her film entitled, "Falling," speaks to this elaboration on dream-life and struggles

against colonial dispossession (Figure I. 1-2). The bird from Msezane's dream, "chapungu" or

Zimbabwe's national eagle, was connected to a famous soapstone sculpture that was taken by Cecil

Rhodes and that remained on display in his Cape Town residence. The image of Msezane lifting the

wings of the chapungu as Rhodes was lifted from his plinth reiterates the meaning behind the

"mythological belief that there will be unrest until the final bird is returned."[89] However, this vision

of an alternative future is also wrestling with the psychic costs of holding onto memories of

ancestors dishonored, of violence unmitigated, of hopes betrayed. Msezane's work sits between the

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[89] Sethembile Msezane, "Living sculptures that stand for history's truths" *TEDGlobal* (2017):
https://www.ted.com/talks/sethembile_msezane_living_sculptures_that_stand_for_history_s_truths?language=e
n.

revolutionary excitement of Kelley's freedom dreams and the "refunded dream" of fallism, offering

her own embodiment of democratic powers meant to evade the wearying repetition of public

memory as nationalist aspirations.

(Figure I. 2)

  Msezane's expansion of removal is shaped by the relationship she establishes between public

memory and the dream-world. Msezane's intervention exposes memories of coloniality as a pivotal

force for generating consciousness about the pressure and liveliness of new habits of public

memory. Msezane publically presents a kind of memorial violence that appears to reproduce the

kind of physical and psychic violence she is critiquing. Msezane recalls that during her performance

of *The Charter,* she often experienced all kinds of "hatred in relations to [her] body," whether verbal

assault or unwanted touching or exoticization. But what Msezane sees as central to both her

conceptual work and the intended effects of her art, her lingering persistence and commitment to

the painfulness of standing in public provokes a psychic breaking down within the space she holds:

"when [the viewer's] start to 'see' the person inside the body in relation to symbols in the landscape

and in dress. At times, *their own insecurities become revealed to them.* They start to comment on the society we live in and the effects of symbols such as statues living among us.[90]

Msezane's work produces a different kind of remembering in public through her bodily interrogation of the monument. Rather than engulfing her viewers, silencing them in overpowering speech of towering figures and engravings that impose themselves on the public, Msezane's bodily statuary demands a response.[91] Rather than speaking for others, Msezane moves into and out of the public view, always insisting on the realness of her image as a tired but insistent statue and holding out the tension of an imaginable world that is consistently denied in daily practice. In this sense, Msezane's performance transforms the meaning of monument removal into an embodiment that transfers, provokes, and differentiates spaces of public memory.

Another example of the dream-work of monument removal emerges in New Orleans during the second line procession hosted by Take 'Em Down NOLA that celebrated the city's removal of the four Confederate monuments.[92] The event illuminated the joy, hardship, and political power behind the larger movement to take down the monuments.

In the summer of 2017, the city of New Orleans planned to remove Confederate monuments, after years of litigation and political fighting over the logistics of such an undertaking. The city elected to remove the Lee statue in the late-night hours in order to avoid confrontations

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[90] Bankole Oluwafemi, "Standing for Art and Truth: A Chat with Sethembile Msezane," *TEDBlog*, September 18, 2017: https://blog.ted.com/standing-for-art-and-truth-a-chat-with-sethembile-msezane/, emphasis added.
[91] "Great monuments are erected like dikes, opposing the logic and majesty of authority against all disturbing elements: it is in the form of cathedral or palace that Church or State speaks to the multitudes and imposes silence upon them." Georges Batallie, "Architecture-The Essay," in *Documents #2*, May 1929.
[92] In short, the second-line jazz funeral is deeply connected to New Orleans' traditions within Black communities. According to Helen Regis, the term "second-line" refers to the parade often sponsored by groups who march behind the "first-line" which is typically those calling the group to assemble and the brass band providing the music for happening. The second-line, though, is not a set group of people, but instead it is defined by those who join in and participate when such parades come by; with only a group and a brass band, there is no second-line. Most second-line processions are usually sociable, part of community celebrations or holidays, but historically they have been used as Black resistance to the forces of white supremacy in New Orleans. Helen Regis, "Second Lines, Minstrelsy, and the Contested Landscapes of New Orleans Afro-Creole Festivals," *Cultural Anthropology* 14 (4): 473-474.

with counter-protestors and mitigate threats posed by militant white nationalists and neo-Confederates. TEDN organized the "People's Celebration and Second Line to Bury White Supremacy" in order to coincide with the removal of General Lee's statue from the city center, which was scheduled during the city's annual Jazz Fest Week (Figure I. 3). This coordination emphasized the group's challenge to city officials to treat these monument removals as moments for historical honor, rather than "cowering in darkness" by removing monuments at night away from an otherwise celebrating public.

Angela Kinlaw challenged the city's cautious turn to removal: "what does it say to the Black youth? What does it teach the white youth?" to claim that the "safety and protection" of the project requires avoiding public acknowledgement of such events.[93] The late-night removals were inconsistent with Kinlaw's vision of multigenerational learning that valorizes struggles for liberation, freedom and equity.[94] Her turn to second-lining created a public spectacle of celebration and mourning, which bridged absence, death and loss as a constitutive part of "building 'em up." On the planned route that ran down Iberville Street, Kinlaw narrated the spaces where monuments no longer stood, emphasizing the absence alongside the sounds of The New Creations Brass Band, holding participants together in a second-line procession.[95] "As we move forward, to the left, be reminded that's the former location of the white supremacist monument," she proclaimed through the megaphone.[96]

In forming the second line, Kinlaw insists that the city's removal of the statues cannot capture the full meaning of such an event. Instead, Kinlaw draws the movement together on

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[93] A special thanks to J. David Maxson for allowing me to use his transcriptions of speeches from the Second Line to Bury White Supremacy march. J. David Maxson, unpublished field notes, "Second Line to Bury White Supremacy: Congo Square Speeches," May 7, 2017.
[94] Kinlaw, "Take 'Em Down and Build 'Em Up," *Roots Rising: The Take 'Em Down NOLA Zine* Vol.1: 8.
[95] Maxson: 48-49.
[96] Maxson, unpublished field note, "Second Line to Bury White Supremacy."

and establishing its own sense of purpose, second line planning involves intentional focus on its route through the city. Often the second line is designed to make stops at sites of significance that signal the kinds of "social networks [that] bind the living into groups defined by shared descent."[102] As Michael "Quess" Moore notes, one of TEDN's original forms of protest was to hold weekly marches that began at the Lee statue, a site of Black pain, and ended in Congo Square, which represents a space of healing and joy among Black and Native populations in the city.[103] The group used this route as a way to remap New Orleans' commemorative spaces, to prefigure the removal of monuments as a process of confronting pain to achieve some sort of healing.[104] What is interesting about Kinlaw's second line is that it moved counter-cyclically to the route established as part of the repertoire of TEDN. The second line started at Congo Square and moved to Lee's plinth, marching from healing and joy to the site of pain. This reversal suggests an attentiveness to monument removal as a disruptive patterning that instigates new thoughts, new imaginations for building the world, even if it is only processed through the bodily sensation of those moving within the group's usual patterns. As one writer put it, "The repetition inherent in the second line, then, demonstrates that which has come to pass will inevitably come again, yes, but through its passage, it opens up a space for new ways of remembering."[105] The repetitions, reversions, and sensations of the second-line work on multiple levels to produce a fully engaging kind of public memory, especially for its participants. Additionally, the organizers made clear that signs reading "Bury White Supremacy" and "Power to the People" were carried by those designated as "elders," and they were meant to hold together a crowd that was susceptible to division in the face of counter-protestors or the dismissive

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[102] Regis, "Blackness," 756.

[103] A Scribe Called Quess, "Action Tracking," *Roots Rising: The Take 'Em Down NOLA Zine*, Vol. 1: 21

[104] A Scribe Called Quess, "Action Tracking," *Roots Rising: The Take 'Em Down NOLA Zine*, Vol. 1: 21-22.

[105] Jay Jolles, "Sound, The Second-Line, and the Politics of Post-Katrina Memory," US Studies Online: Forum For New Writing, *British Association for American Studies*, December 18, 2020: https://usso.uk/2020/12/18/sound-the-second-line-and-the-politics-of-post-katrina-memory/#_edn4.

gaze of those unwilling to participate (Figure I. 4).[106] Images of protests surrounding other

monuments, like scenes from Avery Alexander's confrontation with the police and Klan members in

New Orleans in 1993 or scenes from the campus of UCT as Rhodes was lifted into the air, were also

displayed strategically throughout the procession. The call from Kinlaw and Moore to maintain "one

band, one sound" is not a militant call for uniformity, but instead a challenge to listen carefully for a

democratic voice that emerges from holding together all these complex, interwoven expressions of

death, grievance, and vibrancy in this Black-led celebratory mode of parading and reclaiming the

streets.[107]

But by the end of the performance, it is worth asking: what of white supremacy is "buried"

here? And what "victory" can be proclaimed in light of the city's refusal to expand removal beyond

the four Confederate icons? These challenges make clear that memory activism always bumps up

against its own fragility. Much like Gutman's observations from Palestine, the imaginative potential

of something like a second-line claims a cultural power that the state cannot really appropriate or

fully dispense with. Such actions may get others to participate, even feel something new, but this is

still a good distance from undoing the structural arrangements they seek to change. But the joyous

celebration of participants, many of whom resented Lee's visage on their daily commutes or during

the lunchbreaks, waving goodbye with laughter cannot be discounted. This kind of experience, Badia

Ahad-Legardy writes, offers a kind of self-governance, one defined by "lacing the gaps of historical

memory with pleasure-inducing affect—not by rewriting the past [but] by embracing [the]

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[106] While Regis contends that "the second line resists commodification because it demands participation," I am more skeptical about the kind of public celebration become an affective magnet capable of undoing hostility on its own. While this does speak to the intended vision of such a performance, I want to also be clear that such performative aspirations do not become replacements for the kind of organizing efforts that accompany such thoughtful cultural politics. Regis, "Second lines, Minstrelsy," 496; Maxson, 64.
[107] Regis, "Blackness and Politics of Memory," 757.

imaginative capacity to rehabilitate the black historical past and refashion the present."[108] Those in

the second line, as Regis puts it "became moving monuments made of flesh and blood," pulling

apart the commemorative space otherwise held by white supremacy's monuments.[109]

(Figure I. 3)

(Figure I. 4)

[108] Badia Ahad-Legardy, *Afro-Nostalgia: Feeling Good in Contemporary Black Culture* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2021), 8-9.
[109] Regis, "Blackness and the Politics of Memory," 765.
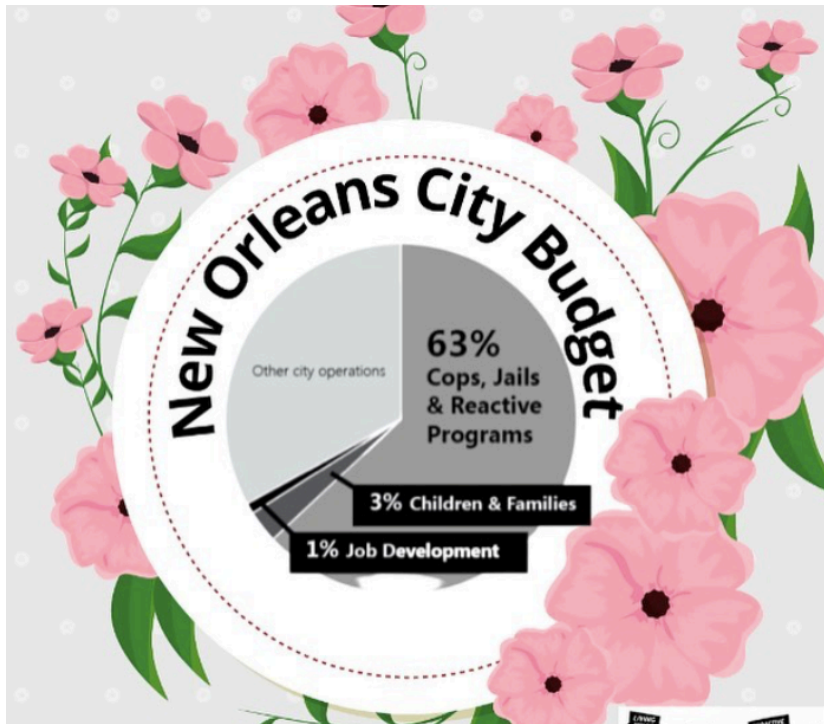
(Figure I. 5)

I. e. Chapter Outline

If "successful" monument removal always risks undermining claims for structural change, why remove statues at all? While there is a good in taking down figures who represent violence, exploitation, and dispossession, such actions may renew public acceptance of state powers that are bound up in the same logics that promote structural racism. The dissertation argues that social movements *are aware of this danger*, and I trace their attempts to negotiate, challenge, and fight against such slippage between monument removal as an end and a social vision of democratic transformation to gain perspective on the politics of public memory.

The remaining work of the dissertation builds on and extends political theory studies of the connection between memory and democratic politics. W. James Booth argues that insofar as public memory provides legible social identity, it entails a duty of repairing harm done against those who

also share in that community.[110] PJ Brendese contends public memory becomes democratic through the pursuit of "collective efforts to respond to contemporary political dilemmas."[111] Thus, the dissertation examines how social movements wrestle with the tension over public memory and democratic politics in attempts to dismantle structures of race while contesting the very basis on which sympathetic institutions attempt to pull such efforts into the realm of official public memory.

In this sense, the two cases that the dissertation studies represent efforts at thinking about the possibilities of public memory as a form of political contestation. Although the popular defacement or removal of monuments is a widespread phenomenon,[112] focusing in on these two groups reveals the interplay between local politics and global protests over conditions of race and capital. RMF and TEDN were clearly learning from one another both practically and theoretically.[113] Both cases emphasize the rich intellectual and political legacies of confronting white supremacy across global scales, which provides useful nuance in distinguishing how competing claims on public memory filter different imaginations about freedom, justice and democracy. But perhaps more critically, studying these movements together emphasizes the challenges of maintaining the wider horizons of democratic transformations that do cut across national lines without being captured by the practical realities of addressing the diverse constituencies that make up such Black-led social movements. Thus, studying these cases together reveals the creativity and tensions that emerged in their different challenges to progressive institutions and how their protests took on different characteristics of their national legacies of race, colonialism, capital, and democratic institutions.

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[110] W. James Booth, "The Work of Memory: Time, Identity, and Justice," *Social Research* 75(1): 254.

[111] PJ Brendese, *The Power of Memory in Democratic Politics* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2014), 23.

[112] Some examples might include Chilean protests surrounding new constitution, Spain over the removal of Franco's body, or denazification/de-Stalinization throughout Europe.

[113] For example, images of RMF appeared at TEDN's "Second Line to Bury White Supremacy" demonstration, Bree Newsome acknowledged her desire to be in solidarity with RMF, and BLM activist Derecka Purnell went to Cape Town to meet with RMF leadership on question of on decolonial thought, abolition, and Black memory.

From here, the dissertation moves through three chapters. The next chapter focuses on the overlapping concepts of monuments and monumentality. Rather than merely countering the "Lost Cause" or the "Cult of Rhodes" that are often emphasized, the chapter focuses on how monument removal aims to shape the daily maintenance of racial order. The chapter considers how monument removal offers creative alternatives to monumentality through artistic representations of what it would mean to democratically contest the limitations placed on racialized bodies.

The third chapter turns to Cape Town and the Rhodes Must Fall movement to examine how "fallist" politics connect colonial pedagogies to struggles for worker justice and gender equality. I ask how activists challenge the extent to which democratization of post-apartheid South Africa has failed to meaningfully challenge the structural and psychic remains of colonialism. The activists turn against institutions of higher education in order to express these lingering problems and find ways of channeling disruption and betrayal into more radical understandings of democracy.

And the final chapter turns to Take 'Em Down New Orleans to examine the longer tradition of Black left organizing against police violence and how this presents challenges for situating monument removal in relation to sympathetic, if flawed, state leadership. The chapter considers how the dynamics of popular toppling brought out this tension during the George Floyd protests and how it leads to both creative mass engagement and also a dissolution of its own political cohesion.

II. Monumentality: Counter-Memory and the Fight for Democratic Space

On August 19, 2017, roughly two months after the New Orleans city government finally

fulfilled their promise to remove four Confederate monuments, Take 'Em Down New Orleans

(TEDN) organized a march to the city's statue of Andrew Jackson.[114] The crowd of thousands

chanted "we won't get no satisfaction 'til we take down Andrew Jackson," filling the streets with a

"carnivalesque" sea of people.[115] Many carried signs with a wide range of messages, the most

prominent being "Black Lives Matter," "End White Supremacy," "Tear it down," and a large banner

reading "Power to the People."

The New Orleans protest was part of a longer, transnational movement to reckon with

complex networks of monuments that sustain the interconnections of race and nation and that

obscure the legacies of empire. Such monuments, activists contend, present the past as a distant

memory that can be safely contextualized in the present, even though there is no cessation of the

structural violence the monuments celebrate.[116] This idea that such monuments edify as one might

retrain an immune system to recognize disease with a vaccine contrasts with the educative ethos

proposed by those who fought to remove such monuments. Rather than using monuments to

promote virtuous citizenship, these social movements used monuments to illuminate the ways

structures of inequality define daily life.

In March 2015, two years prior to the New Orleans demonstration, students and workers

filled the steps of University of Cape Town to call for the removal of a statue of Cecil Rhodes that

seemed to guard the entrance of higher education in South Africa and "keep out" Black

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[114] "See all 4 Confederate Monument Removals in New Orleans in Photos and Video," *Times-Picayune*, originally published May 20, 2017, updated July 22, 2019, https://www.nola.com/news/politics/article_3a11f27b-bce2-5a2c-98ac-53ab0d67d259.html

[115] James McWilliams, "Take 'Em Down: A #VQRTrueStory Essay," *VQR: A National Journal of Literature and Discussion*, Fall 2017, https://www.vqronline.org/essays-articles/2017/09/take-em-down.

[116] Kevin Bruyneel, *Settler Memory: The Disavowal of Indigeneity and the Politics of Race in the United States* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2021), 138-139.

participation. In the summer of 2016, organizers gathered in New Orleans for the Take 'Em Down

Everywhere summit, where TEDN hosted activists from Florida, Mississippi, and across the

Caribbean to learn how others cultivated political urgency for structural change through monument

struggles.[117] Activists throughout the Atlantic world have persisted in their demand for removing

symbols of white supremacy through petitions, city council meetings, disruptive art, gatherings,

poetry, music, and direct actions against the statues. The aim of such efforts is not only to take these

statues down but also to "stretch out" the experience of removing monuments. Beyond a singular

event, organizers focus on removing monuments as an intentional experience of "people power"

that bridges structural analysis with democratic participation. Activist Michael "Quess" Moore

framed removing monuments as a "teachable moment…to understand that symbols reflect systems"

of oppressive power and, perhaps more importantly, to imagine where such actions might lead.[118]

While certain activists have seen removing monuments as way to connect past and present

political struggles, it is worthwhile to examine what the claim presumes about the political learning

their protest actions mean to provoke. In popular media accounts, the call to remove monuments

functioned like a prism, refracting multiple public discussions on questions related to historical

revisionism, the legal status of monuments, and the ethics of remembering difficult pasts.[119] This

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[117] Angela Kinlaw, "Take Em Down Everywhere Conference," *Vimeo*, August 18, 2020:
https://vimeo.com/449035983

[118] Michael "Quess" Moore quoted in Bill Arceneaux, "Roots Rising, From Print to the People: An Interview with
Take 'Em Down NOLA," *Big Easy Magazine*, January 25, 2019,
https://www.bigeasymagazine.com/2019/01/25/roots-rise-from-print-to-the-people-an-interview-with-take-em-down-nola/.

[119] For example, Tyler Stiem, "Statue Wars: What Should We Do with Troublesome Monuments?" *The Guardian*,
September 26, 2018: https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2018/sep/26/statue-wars-what-should-we-do-with-troublesome-monuments. Wanda Rushing, "Removing Confederate Monuments Is About Setting the Record
Straight on America's Past," American Politics and Policy blog, *London School of Economics: US Centre*, December 30,
2017: https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/usappblog/2017/12/30/removing-confederate-monuments-is-about-setting-the-record-straight-on-americas-past/; Michael Hirsch, "If Americans Grappled Honestly With Their History, Would
Any Monuments Be Left Standing?" *Foreign Policy*, June 24, 2020: https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/06/24/america-statues-monuments-washington-jefferson/; Adolph Reed, "Monumental Rubbish: With the Statues Torn Down,
What Next for New Orleans?" *Common Dreams*, June 25, 2017:
https://www.commondreams.org/views/2017/06/25/monumental-rubbish-statues-torn-down-what-next-new-orleans.

diverse array of conversations often returns to the problem of historical injustice: what are the right ways to recollect the past in the fight against oppression? This chapter considers possibilities and pitfalls of using the past to teach, asking: What *political* capacities are connected to specific practices of removing monuments? Is there something particular about monument removal that contributes to the democratic dismantling of racial hierarchy?

One way to address these questions is to consider what it means that these monument removals are taking place across a wide variety of contexts. These movements do not focus on the same historical figures; and even when there are shared figures, these movement do not necessarily agree about why the monuments were put up, what functions they serve, or who wants to keep them up today. Rather, what these protests share is a capacity to generate dissatisfaction with other approaches to public memory and to reimagine social life that dismantles long-standing investments in white supremacy. Thus, this chapter attempts to zero in on how the practice of removing monuments enriches different visions of recollecting the past that have political consequences for the present. The chapter thinks comparatively about monument removal and considers how different movements interpret the construction of monumental space in order to accentuate their own visions for expanding democracy's mandate to contest the social and economic forces that continue to discount Black people's livelihood.

The chapter addresses these broad conceptual and theoretical questions about monument removal and democracy in three parts. Overall, the chapter argues that the political innovation of these movements is how they embrace monument removal as a creative opening for refreshing perspectives on the possibilities of democracy. Removing troubling monuments is not primarily about re-establishing historical veracity in public debates over racial pasts, but about exploring the political consequences of such debates. Although not every attempt at monument removal has been successful in achieving empty plinths, it is important to notice how the wide range of organizing

protests and community building associated with monument removal all signal this effort to make new arenas for democratic politics visible.

The first part asks what sort of political objectives are most commonly intended when individuals or groups challenge dominant forms of historical narratives with their own unsettling claims about the past. Foucault's formulation of "counter-memory" is illuminating because he explores how unsettling previously agreed-upon historical narratives, particularly for people who feel represented by such dominant versions of the past, can create uncertainty that is ripe for transformation. Counter-memory's role in the "destruction of the subject" elaborates how people open up to more than learning new facts or appreciating the past's complexity, but even further can be "undone" by the reality that feelings of certainty grounded in the past involve violence. What makes this counter-memory politically productive is not the "undoing," but instead how the "history of the present" can channel what one learns about one's complicity into actively participating in contesting where that past hits the present.

The second section considers the tension between democratic theory and the desire to cultivate public memory as a way of building social solidarity among citizens. Although democracy is often defined in institutional or deliberative terms, understanding the role of public memory in self-rule requires attending to democracy's affective-aesthetic dynamics. Affective-aesthetic dynamics prioritize how experiences, emotions, or other kinds of visceral reactions are produced by encounters with the daily challenges of democratic living. These encounters might include navigating bureaucratic services, arguing with the police, civic ritual or symbols like voting or speaking at a city council meeting, or marching down the center of a normally busy street. This section focuses on how the daily experience of city design and public art establish the possibilities of rethinking democracy from the perspective of these affective-aesthetic experience in order to better understand

how monument removal movements contribute by bridging different questions about public space, equality, and the meaning of the past into a concerted approach to democratization.

And the final section considers how monument removal could fulfill the aims of counter-memory by imagining an approach to democratization that relies on those affective-aesthetic experiences to guide how we should tackle issues of housing and land reform, worker justice, the enrichment of social life through art and education. The chapter argues that we should pay attention to the importance of "monumentality" as a constructive framework for *targeting the social construction of space and bodies*. As monument removal activists have demonstrated, the work of getting statues removed illuminates an array of struggles regarding the public uses of space and their connection to institutions that promote bodily harm, malnourishment, or conformity, which would be better addressed by an expanded vision of how self-rule might allow communities to fight back.

II. a. Foucault and the Political Channels of Counter-Memory

As people around the world have wrestled with making sense of monument removal, or how best to incorporate "difficult pasts" into present political consciousness, the political scope of such historical reflection remains uncertain.[120] What are the critical elements of returning to the past? How does returning to the past in a public way add new wrinkles to forming political responses to the ills experienced in contemporary life? How does reexamining the past change those who uncover it, relive it, or reproduce it for publics to see and experience? One might suggest that a

[120] Some examples of this challenging of the canon of official accounts of the past through different deployment of "counter-memory:" Veronica Tello, "Counter-memory and and–and: Aesthetics and temporalities for living together," *Memory Studies*, 15(2), 390–401; Muireann Prendergast, "Witnessing in the echo chamber: From counter-discourses in print media to counter-memories of Argentina's state terrorism," *Memory Studies*, 13(6), 1036–1057; Joanne Kidman & Vincent O'Malley, "Questioning the canon: Colonial history, counter-memory and youth activism," *Memory Studies*, 13(4), 537–550; Jarula Wegner, "Rethinking Countermemory: Black-Jewish Negotiations in Rap Music, *Memory Studies*, 13(6), 1219–1234; Matthew Cook, "Counter-Narratives of Slavery in the Deep South: The Politics of Empathy Along and Beyond River Road," *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 11(3), 290–308; Kim Wale, "Falling Through the Cracks of South Africa's Liberation: Comrades' Counter-Memories of Squatter Resistance in the 1980s," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 42(6), 1193–1206.

mock funeral held by women working in the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory performed "counter-memory" by using the deaths of co-workers during a factory fire to illuminate how legacies of poor working conditions, gendered divisions of labor, and regimes of poverty and capitalist greed actually "caused" the disaster.[121] Returning to Michel Foucault's formulation of counter-memory offers a useful way of assessing how returning to the past reveals and conceals power in the present.

Writing about the genealogical approach to history in distinction to more conventional historical approaches, Foucault describes "counter-memory" as an instantiation of genealogy that "[uses] history [to] severs its connection to memory… [counter-memory is] a transformation of history into a *totally different sense of time*."[122] Foucault contends that counter-memory demands that practitioners see how conventional uses of the past are still part of the desire to use knowledge, historical or otherwise, to grasp at power.[123] Freedom cannot be won with more knowledge alone, as this strategy is already better played by those in positions of dominance; counter-memory, then, aims to constructs a new way to get subjects to see how they are sustained by violent pasts, which inform their present desires to enact multiple forms of control. In this way, counter-memory hopes to bring about "uncertainty," disrupting comforting narratives or explanations about why history unfolded in such ways, or how present forms of oppression are just bad behaviors chosen by individuals alone.

But the uncertainty that counter-memory produces is not an end in itself. By revealing the intersecting powers that come together to give us "the past," counter-memory points to how daily experiences that seem quotidian or unrelated may actually enact domination; counter-memory moves from seeing these as mere accidents of the past into treating them as targets for imagining forms of resistance. The content of counter-memory, the actual practices or histories that are

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[121] Heather Pool, "The Politics of Mourning: The Triangle Fire and Political Belonging," *Polity* 44(2): 190-191.
[122] Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977) 160, emphasis added.
[123] Foucault 162.

reviewed or revealed in studying how systems of oppression came to be entrenched, can channel feelings of uncertainty into new political projects of resistance.

So how does this relate to monument removal activism? Even though many white supremacist monuments remain in place today, activists have been successful reframing public understanding of their original purposes. Monuments targeted in South Africa and the United States have been recast as "representations that fostered European identities and celebrated imperialist achievement" or that maintained obedience to racial hierarchy.[124] Often, these values are disguised as "heritage" or "cultural pride"; or the monuments are figured as lessons in maintaining social harmony.[125] Activists have worked tirelessly to reveal these public monuments as more than public displays of gratitude for the great men of history, and instead to pull out how they were designed to obscure their society's own violence and construct comforting ground on which to plant political identity.

This work of unsettling familiar historical narratives or interpretation of monuments resembles Foucault's "counter-memory." But Foucault also warns that some of the vicious dimensions of conventional history, like objectivity, rigorous analysis, and consensus-building politics, can creep their way into projects designed to uncover seemingly "forgotten pasts."[126] Even as knowledgeable experts have contributed greatly to justifying monument removal, the reliance on historical expertise to ground such critical historiographical work does generates new commitments to defending the objectivity of such claims about the past.[127] While these practices of turning to the past may serve admirable roles for appealing to city councils or justifying political protest to the

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[124] Sipokazi Madida, "Troubling Statues: A Symptom of a Complex Heritage Complex," in *Exchanging Symbols: Monuments and Memorials in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, ed. Anitra Nettleton and Mathias Alubafi Fubah, (Stellenbosch: African Sun Media, 2019), 89-90; Erin L. Thompson, *Smashing Statues: The Rise and Fall of America's Public Monuments* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2022), 44.
[125] Thompson 49-51.
[126] Foucault 157-159.
[127] Foucault 159.

public, Foucault points out that these practices may also numb practitioners to how restrictive the limits on what kinds of feelings, frustrations, desires, or imaginations must be kept out in order to maintain the political standing for monument removal.[128]

The caution Foucault raises here is that critical historical work does not fully divorce itself from the temptation to prematurely resolve the uncertainty provoked by counter-memory. Activists may turn to metaphysical appeals to ground their work, like battling for the "heart" or "soul" of the nation, which may avoid some of the discomfort of the "uncertainty" associated with counter-memory. But these appeals do so at the expense of re-establishing reverence for the past that these projects aim to destabilize. Rather than seeing Foucault as deconstructing all that is solid and unmasking every projection of power in order to deny all appeals to social solidarity, his analytic turn is meant to create footholds for "insurrectionary knowledges" to better attack those forces that dismiss the radical consequences of practicing counter-memory.[129] In other words, practicing counter-memory is radical not because it cuts through manipulations to uncover the real truth of history, but because it creates the conditions for people to see how they have been formed by social logics of the past, and connects those logics to present subjugation. Counter-memory is about building bridges between the experience of unsettling one's sense of identity and finding ways of resisting where those same settled identities are causing harm in the present.

When debates over monument removal become fights about source material, standards of evidence, or the artistic value of specific monuments, the larger political struggle can get lost. Foucault's account of counter-memory suggests that this shifting of focus is a function of power to divert away from the more radical implications of monument removal. Returning to Foucault helps imagine how removing monuments might be generative of something more politically inventive in

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[128] Foucault 163.

[129] Geo Maher, *Decolonizing Dialectics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 1-22.

responding to problems of oppression. Although practices of historical documentation and public

justifications are necessary, they need not reduce the movement to the work of historians and

lawyers. Instead, as Take 'Em Down New Orleans and #RhodesMustFall have demonstrated, the

appeal to remove monuments can become a source of renewed community around a host of issues

like universal education, housing injustice, worker empowerment, and police violence. Such issues

have interwoven historical roots, but more importantly, the removal of monuments may help

construct historical knowledge that is useful for attacking the layered complexity of subjugating

practices that operate in the present. The groups have used monument removal as a way to practice

a "totally different sense of time" that Foucault imagines: the moment that the statues come down

from the plinths is thus not the only important stop on the activists' timeline. Exposing such

monuments through art and public protest around them, or re-creating the moments of monument

removal does not mean that monument removal goes in one temporal direction. Rather these

practices constitute variegated strands of new political beginnings; monument removal promotes

resistance as multiplying sites of struggle far beyond a single stone edifice.

II. b. The Affective-Aesthetic Dynamics of Democracy and Race

In order to think through how such multiplicitous ways of resisting can make up more

sustained, collective forms of social life, we turn our attention to the possibilities and limits of

reproducing such experiences within democratic institutions. This requires considering how such

institutions might embrace both the aspects of feeling and experiences that shape social encounters

with counter-memory and the political commitments necessary to create self-rule.[130] If our approach

to democratization is guided by these affective-aesthetic dynamics of layered social and psychic

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[130] Stephen White, *A Democratic Bearing: Admirable Citizens, Uneven Justice, and Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 10-11

experiences of how people live with difference in community, then we can more clearly discern ways of combatting the entrenchment of racial pasts.[131] Yet this appeal to the affective-aesthetic cannot fall back on transcendent or generalized accounts of human emotion or "pure" experience to ground this meaning of democracy. Instead, the affective-aesthetic should be seen as a way incorporate more difficult questions about how Black people have often been excluded from such universal categories. Attending to legacies of racial hierarchy that emerge within democratic polities, and specifically the differential experiences of white and Black citizens in making claims on public is critical to imagining alternative practices of democratic living.

In one sense, there are moments where popular struggle within democratic polities have attempted to center Black experiences of injustice, and there are moments where majoritarian rule has been used to justify violence against Black communities. Certainly, democratic institutions are capable of reproducing oppressive social conditions. As Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw makes clear, the dilemma of many Black reformers has been that democratic institutions do not provide adequate protection from hostile majorities, leaving appeals to rights language as the most reliable political feature to help preserve Black lives.[132] But, as Crenshaw points out, by focusing on racialized social connections that sustains such dynamics, or what she calls "white race consciousness," there might be better traction gained in reshaping democratic institutions.[133] This, it seems, may require thinking more carefully about how such social dynamics need to be diagnosed and counteracted to produce a more egalitarian society.

As PJ Brendese argues, for democracy to produce an egalitarian society it must be guided by more than majoritarian rule. Citizens, especially white citizens, must be guided by "remembering

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[131] White: 89 fn4, 160-162
[132] Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, "Race, Reform, and Retrenchment: Transformation and Legitimation in Anti-Discrimination Law," *Harvard Law Review* 101 (7): 1380-1385.
[133] Crenshaw 1380.

what others cannot forget."[134] In other words, mutual empowerment in a democracy requires citizens who remember the injury, losses, and isolation of others as a way to build social solidarity. Brendese argues sharing power that affects one's own life and the lives of others, a defining feature of democratic rule, requires both an ability to recalling others' pain *and* memories of when such pain was overcome by shared efforts, or as Brendese calls it, when the "impossible was achieved."[135] This is especially true when thinking about the role of race in structuring political community in the US and South Africa. Remembering how the impossible seemed possible in struggles to dismantle slavery, Jim Crow, and apartheid is central to narratives of democratic resilience. Thus, public memory becomes a critical condition for collective struggles to realize equality. And yet, as Jacques Rancière points out, remembering such political invention that went into dismantling racial policing is conflated with the institutionalization of what such remember can or cannot mean.[136] This conflation matters because it ignores how the process of *rule-making* becomes a means for sneaking those social dynamics of hierarchy or control back into pubic memory, thus *negating* how one might be inspired by remembering such inventiveness from the past.[137] So, to better conceptualize the task of democratization, we need to unpack how thinking about institutional and practical dimensions of democracy cannot be done at the expense of discounting the affective-aesthetic foundations of public memories of community, struggle, and failure to subvert racial domination.

Institutional, deliberative, or rights-based approaches to democratization have often not adequately addressed Crenshaw calls "white race consciousness," the ongoing importance of white supremacist ideologies to shaping the social dynamics of political interpretation.[138] While many

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[134] PJ Brendese, *The Power of Memory in Democratic Politics* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2014), 16-17.
[135] Brendese 22-23.
[136] Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetic* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2015), 60.
[137] Rancière 55.
[138] "The most prevalent threat was not that [race-neutral] ideology would be exposed as fraudulent and that whites would attack the ideology, but that there would be a white backlash against Blacks and against institutions perceived as sympathetic to Black interests… There was something significant about affirmative action and other

theorists have identified democracy as an indispensable tool for managing shared problems or

conflicting views,[139] critics have raised concerns that these approaches to democratization are built

on prevailing assumption about liberal democracy and are not well equipped to combat racism.

Carole Pateman suggests that treating democracy as a means for containing competition among

elites prioritizes stability over participation. Pateman clarifies that institutional views of democracy

often exclude those voices of non-elites whose views may be deemed disruptive or ill-equipped for

political deliberation.[140] Similarly, James Tully suggests that deliberative practices that are central to

democratic governance are often homogenizing, setting the terms appropriate for "winning an

exchange with opponents" in a manner that reproduces existing racial dynamics.[141] More specifically,

Amarpal Dhaliwal contends that, at the core of even the most progressive forms of democracy is

"liberalism's dualist metaphysics [that wants] to make everyone a 'self,' a citizen…[which] always

needs and is often manufactured in opposition to the 'other(ed).'"[142] These critiques share a

suspicion that liberal notions of individualism, self-interest, and rational decision-making, are treated

as definitive of democracy. This criticism establishes that liberal forms of democracy may also

incorporate social relations of hierarchy and ignore the effects this has on evaluating whether liberal

political commitments, like non-discrimination or due process, are actually being achieved.[143]

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civil rights policies that gave rise to a crisis in a way that other more devastating or more common ideological disputes have not. This suggests that the relatively subordinate statue of Blacks serves as stabilizing function in this society. At least one consequence of this 'stabilizing' function is that special attention is directed towards the status of Black so that ideological deviations arising out of racial issues do not evade popular detection" Crenshaw 1362.

[139] Some central figures of these defenses include Robert Dahl, Bruce Ackerman and James Fishkin, and Hélène Landemore.

[140] Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 2. For a similar argument with more attention to the geopolitical context of the Cold War, see Kyong-Min Son, *The Eclipse of the Demos: The Cold War and the Crisis of Democracy before Neoliberalism* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2020).

[141] Tully quoted in David Held, *Models of Democracy, Third Edition* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 243.

[142] Amarpal K. Dhaliwal, "Can the Subaltern Vote? Radical Democracy, Discourses of Representation and Rights, and Questions of Race," in *Radical Democracy: Identity, Citizenship and the State*, ed. David Trend (New York: Routledge, 1996), 44.

[143] Dhaliwal 53-56.

So, how might we reframe public memory to think differently about democratization, or about guiding democratization to address more directly dynamics of social solidarity? Scholars of race in democracy help clarify how democratization unfolds without addressing the root concerns with racial hierarchy. But rather than discarding democracy as a hopeless political form or an unachievable dream, these scholars point out the importance of using affective-aesthetic aspects of human experience to reinterpret the scope of democracy's project in order confront how race binds practices of citizenship and promotes disavowal of race's hierarchical nature in contemporary polities.[144]

Cathy Cohen, for example, argues that democratic responses to racial injustice are plagued by a vicious cycle of assigning deviance to Black youth, thus devaluing their contributions to society, which leads to increasing political alienation among Black youth.[145] Cohen contends that such a cycle of deviance, devaluation and alienation emerges from stereotypes about Black poverty and Black promiscuity that define Black youth culture. These images operate at a visceral level of identity formation in both Black and white communities, and they are further compounded by "more neoliberal approach to governing" that prioritize markets over state intervention as better equipped to produce systemic outcomes that are "fair, sensible, and good."[146] Her point here seems to be that by ignoring this cycle of alienation, deviance and disgust, democratic interventions that might credibly counteract racial inequality through economic reconstruction, such as social safety-nets or affirmative action, are increasingly vulnerable to criticisms from neoliberal voices that might call these intervention irrational or inefficient. But by starting with the primacy of alienation and deviance in addressing the wide range of Black living and the importance of making spaces for

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[144] Here, my use of disavowal is tracking with Bruyneel's definition: "an active form of deflection from the implications to attend to what one knows [about the past and present]," 3.

[145] Cathy J. Cohen, *Democracy Remixed: Black Youth and the Future of American Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 48-49.

[146] Cohen 11.

possible support in democratic politics, these neoliberal claims might be seen as irrelevant or secondary at best.[147] Cohen writes, "in the history of Black people in America, governments, organizations, vigilante groups, and average citizens have referenced what was construed to be the abnormal and deviant behavior of Black people as a reason to deny them full citizenship status and rights, as well as to routinely target them for both physical and cultural violence."[148] As Cohen makes clear, democratic government that is increasingly privatized and stripped of more effective tools to combat racial inequality will reproduce this cycle of deviance and disgust that circulates about and between Black youth, only further pushing them into already narrow lanes of claiming political agency.[149]

While Cohen focuses on how denial of the importance of economies of affect and moralization allows institutional shifts in economies of capital and state power to proceed uncontested in their effects on Black youth as democratic citizens, Lawrie Balfour explains that the possibility of fulfilling "the realization of democratic promise" requires establishing the importance of the "interior lives of its citizens" to their understanding of injustice.[150] For Balfour, democracy's promise is not simply achieved by recovering a "core" consciousness of the common good; this return to "core" consciousness is premised on there being a pure experience from the founding that might be untainted or recoverable to better achieve freedom or liberty as universal terms of US citizenship. Rather such an admirable goal of establishing a common good that can be retrieved from the past, such reflection must be premised on historical interrogation of how received racial consciousness imagines the borders of such a commonality, a commonality that is frequently

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[147] Cohen 11.
[148] Cohen 47.
[149] Cohen 195.
[150] Lawrie Balfour, *The Evidence of Things Not Said: James Baldwin and the Promise of American Democracy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 138.

"denied to victims."[151] In her reading of James Baldwin, Balfour sees room for political responses to

"the peculiar vulnerability of democratic societies to the prejudices of its members."[152] Thus, it

requires the role of the citizen, particularly white citizens, to interrogate the ways in which their

affective-aesthetic formation shapes what their commitment to equality, freedom, and the state

actually mean in light of white supremacy's living past. To be clear, Balfour's main point is certainly

focused on an epistemological interrogation of the kinds of racial knowledge that are treated as

worthy or important for democratic self-understanding. But it seems that this kind of epistemic

work relies on artistic, interpersonal, and dramatizations of those knowledges to fully embrace the

scope of what such epistemological reflections actually mean for re-thinking democratic living. All

commitments to commonality, core consciousness, or even interrogating social epistemologies

meant to reform universal social bond for democratic living must find ways of recreating and

reworking the habits of racialized control through experiences of story-telling, artwork, and other

mediums that challenge and provoke new capacities to imagine.

As Balfour insists that white citizens must shed their unearned status of "innocence" in

order to rightly wrestle with how legacies of racism inform democracy, Joel Olson suggests that the

problem is bound up in the "figure" of the white citizen: "The democratic problem is not simply the

legacy of slavery and racial exclusion or the failure of American democratic practices to live up to

American democratic ideals. The democratic problem lies in the white citizen itself" as a figure of

public standing.[153] Olson seems to mean by "figure" an idealized social status that is practiced

through affective-aesthetic experiences of the rules, rituals, and mores about how to make meaning

out of living with a full range of legal and expressive political power. This "figure" is like the genetic

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[151] Balfour 108-110.

[152] Balfour 108, 136.

[153] Joel Olson, *The Abolition of White Democracy* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 44.

code for how citizens know what it means to cherish citizenship or fear its opposite, a loss of social status to no longer be able to move, act, or think without impediment.

For Olson, this figure of citizenship is white, meaning citizenship is defined also by histories of racial inclusion in political power. For Olson, histories of including new people in politics was predicated on their willingness to perform the duties and defense of "producer privileges," staving off "threats" posed by rumbling masses of poor whites and enslaved people that resented how elites used their bodies to gain comfort and status.[154] If we follow Olson's construction of the affective-aesthetic layers of historical experience that shape contemporary politics, then the problem of democracy is about dismantling historical alliances forged as whiteness in order to discard the social norms restricting who can exercise political power and towards what ends. Olson argues achieving such subversion requires leaving the past behind: there is no "usable past" of whiteness for rebuilding an alternative sense of "white identity." The only appropriate strategy to confront the figure of the white citizen is pursuing its abolition.[155] But what does this abolition mean, and how is it connected to monument removal? In one sense, it seems that Olson's pursuit of abolishing the white citizen seems to follow what Cohen and Balfour recommend, which is an attentiveness to ways in which bodies are differentially treated with care, support, hostility, or revulsion. To abolish the white citizen means to interrogate how certain forms of thought, consciousness, or practices rely on subjugation in order to motivate people to act and give up on such motivations.

In a related way, Olson's abolition may also connect with other expressive measures of democratic participation that simultaneously build up new practices and new ideals to inspire political transformation, like Jason Frank and Judith Butler who propose alternative affective-aesthetic figures of democracy to counteract the white citizen: the people and the assembly. For

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[154] Olson 43-44.
[155] Olson 80.

Frank, mass demonstrations or building up barricades serves as another space to see and recall the otherwise elusive authority of "the people" in "both their concrete material existence as well as their continuous persistence across time."[156] And for Butler the "refusal to disappear" of protestors seizing public buildings or streets enlivens the democratic figure of assembly by performing a kind of social solidarity that focuses on bodily interdependence.[157] Thus, abolishing the white citizen may require creating new figures of democracy that can be practiced, shared, and inspire new feelings of motivation or belonging not defined by subjugating others.[158]

Yet, as Olson suggests, there is no usable past for the white citizen, which suggests why dismantling figures of the past is a critical condition for creating new figures of democracy. Angela Davis points to the uses of the past to imagine abolishing white democracy by clarifying how histories of racial violence or state repression in the hands of official commemorations often become "abstracted objects" that horrify liberal democrats, but rarely expose the structural conditions that brought about such violence.[159] In other words, recalling histories of lynching or chattel slavery can produce "national horror" that still does not become a figure of democracy that makes attending to structural racism more plausible.[160] In this sense, Davis suggests that activists committed to abolition democracy interrogate the ways community identification forged through whiteness tries to erase "fissures" over how "race, gender, class and sexuality affect the way human relations are structured in the world."[161] The practices of antiracist activism becomes a kind of public memory, that for Davis, seems central to building political coalitions capable of pursuing equality in

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[156] Jason Frank, *The Democratic Sublime: On Aesthetics and Popular Assembly* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 4.

[157] Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 97.

[158] Butler 97

[159] Angela Y. Davis, *Abolition Democracy: Beyond Empire, Prisons, and Torture* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2005), 76.

[160] Davis 77.

[161] Davis 97-98.

a substantive manner by learning how those fissures point to contemporary problems that must be faced together.[162]

II. c. Democratizing Space and Bodies: Monument Removal's Monumentality

Rather than seeing these affective-aesthetic dynamics of political identity as independent from their environment, monument removal turns our focus to how "pastness" becomes a feature of the built environment that further entrenches practices of racial domination. Monument removal activists demonstrate how monuments provide an opportunity for linking their sense of political identity to how statues consolidate longer histories of racial disparities that shape daily living. Angela Kinlaw, co-founder and prominent leader in Take 'Em Down New Orleans, identifies multiple audiences and confounding struggles of working with the city government to actually remove Confederate monuments. New Orleans city officials made clear they would support the removal of Confederate monuments, but only if the work was done during the night, when they could control crowds more effectively and stave off counter-demonstrations.[163] Kinlaw addresses the tension between celebrating the removal of the monuments and the disappointment with how the removal was happening. "What does it say to Black youth? What does it teach white youth" to celebrate the "historic occasion" of long-contested monuments being removed in the dark, without public celebration or fanfare?[164] And Kinlaw asks what can we make of the city's repeated appeals to enforcing security and protecting contractor workers when there is little evidence of such regard for

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[162] Davis 97-98.

[163] Merrit Kennedy, "Under Cover of Night, New Orleans Begins Dismantling Confederate Monuments," National Public Radio, April 24, 2017: https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/04/24/525413502/under-cover-of-night-new-orleans-begins-dismantling-confederate-monuments#:~:text=Newsletters,Under%20Cover%20Of%20Night%2C%20New%20Orleans%20Begins%20Dismantling%20Confederate%20Monuments,city%27s%20racially%20integrated%20police%20force.

[164] Angela Kinlaw cited in J. David Maxson, "Second Line To Bury White Supremacy: Take 'Em Down NOLA, Monument Removal, and Residual Memory" *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 106(1): 63-64.

the majority of the working class, particularly those deemed "essential" labor?[165] Kinlaw and TEDN argue that removing these monuments helps illuminate how security is the primary language of the state, whereas their celebration of monument removal prioritizes the lived experiences of "those who built New Orleans, whose heritage is leveraged for profit and who are being displaced."[166]

In similar manner, South African activist Chumani Maxwele exclaims "Where are our heroes and ancestors?" as a refrain to get people to see that the university was not built to enrich Black people's experience walking through the campus at UCT.[167] Like Kinlaw, Maxwele attempts to visualize the kinds of state interventions that leave him with painful questions about how South African democratic institutions prioritized security over Black livelihood. During his protest, Maxwele wore a helmet to invoke the legacies of striking miners of Marikana who were killed in 2012 by state agents. Maxwele used feces from street toilets in Khayelitsha, a poor Black township outside cosmopolitan Cape Town, that meant to emphasize outsourcing of public utilities as an efficiency that cost Black people health and dignity.[168] Maxwele's protest exposed the full range of Black life in South Africa that seemed invisible at UCT, except when the university's security was threatened.

Insofar as monument removal intersects with official state institutions and discourses about reckoning with the past, can activists' protests that focus on monument removal actually realize an alternative sense of social solidarity to ground new practices of self-rule? To pursue this question, it is worthwhile to distinguish cultural history of the monument as a contested figure of public

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[165] "People's Celebration & Second Line to Bury White Supremacy," *Take 'Em Down NOLA*, originally posted May 7, 2017, last accessed August 1, 2023:
https://web.archive.org/web/20190228192530/http://takeemdownnola.org/events/2017/5/3/peoples-celebration-second-line-to-bury-white-supremacy
[166] "People's Celebration."
[167] Eve Fairbanks, "The Birth of the Rhodes Must Fall," *The Guardian*, November 18, 2015:
https://www.theguardian.com/news/2015/nov/18/why-south-african-students-have-turned-on-their-parents-generation.
[168] Fairbanks.

memory from structural analysis of "monumentality," a larger conceptual framework that examines how the movement of bodies through space co-constitutes particular forms of power. While the legacy of the monument is informed by artistic expressions of sculpture that aim to imagine or renew affective-aesthetic commitments to a way of living, monumentality refers to a much wider repertoire of practices that shape what bodies do or where they can move in order to access space. To say it differently, if the monument reflects the demands of specific artists or communities that they want to see in the world, monumentality names a way in which individuals or communities operate as social objects through bodily or spatial practices.

To think in terms of monuments describes how renderings on a large scale, mostly personified representations, reflect the artistic order of the day. But, the monument as public art ought not to be seen in the same way we might understand a fossil or footprint, as a sign of something that was once living that has already happened. Instead, the monument "confides to the ear of the future the persistent sensation embodying an event: the constant suffering of men and women, their re-created protestations, their constantly resuming struggle."[169] To put it differently, if the monument is an artwork, it is the kind of artwork that is meant to inspire viewers to see, perhaps even follow, a vision of the future that is rendered through a snapshot of an evocative past, or even more succinctly, a posing stone figure. The monument in public memory depends on recovering figures, persons, bodies of the past that can be valorized in the present. But, of course, monuments do not intend to represent the past "as it was;" monuments have men sitting on horses they never rode, standing in positions they never assumed, and often wearing wardrobes from a different era.[170] The monument as public memory, then, depends on historical repertoires of visual commentaries

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[169] Gilles Deleuze cited by Rancière 178.
[170] H. W. Janson, "The Rise and Fall of the Public Monument," *Andrew W. Mellon Lectures* (The Graduate School Tulane University, New Orleans, 1976), 47-48.

that project commonality across time, either by anachronism or by artistic imaginations about what it looks like to represent the ideals of the present in a body "shared" with the people.[171]

So when we consider the monument as a tool of racial domination, the future vision channeled through this kind of public memory is wrapped up in those selected for personifications. The hierarchies that operate in these visual commentaries are translated in universal terms, like beauty, pride, or honor. These hierarchies become essential affective-aesthetic tools of western thought and art. These visual commentaries bear witness to *both* the aspirations, hopes, and struggles of people attempting to sketch out new commitments in political life *and* the role of sculpting political community in a manner that excludes racialized bodies.[172] According to Kirk Savage, monuments derived from "classical sculpture served as the benchmark of whiteness and, indeed, served that function over and over again in the writings of the racial taxonomists. The importance of the affective-aesthetic dimension of racial theory is crucial to the visual standards for representing bodies in sculpture.[173] The vast majority of public monuments in the US—including Confederate monuments--were erected during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, especially between 1900 and 1930.[174] The explosion of Confederate commemoration has largely been connected to the collapse of Black political power following the withdrawal of federal support for Reconstruction, but it also reflects tightening labor market conditions and white anxiety around the status of national identities.[175] Such anxieties shaped the affective-aesthetic dynamics of the figure of the white citizen,

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[171] Janson 50-52.

[172] Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 8-9.

[173] Savage 11.

[174] Erika Doss, *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 26-27; Southern Poverty Law Center, "Whose Heritage? Public Symbols of the Confederacy," February 2019: https://www.splcenter.org/20190201/whose-heritage-public-symbols-confederacy

[175] Erin Thompson recalls that "monument dedications, reunions [of ex-Confederate soldiers] served to unify white Southern population. Their atmosphere of festive celebration and near-exclusive whiteness drove home their organizers' message" of providing a model for social order restored." Thompson 8-12. Also see, Adolph Reed, "Monumental Rubbish."

turning to control over land or national boundaries as a means of reestablishing the certainty of white identity.[176]

Yet even as Europeans and Americans were becoming tired of such monumental figures, their use in colonial spaces continued to flourish.[177] Monuments in colonial Africa were meant to affirm the colonizers' power, both by locating white populations as colonial leaders within a wider political geography of empire, and by embedding the monumental figure in the landscape. The statues thus provided a critical visual linkage between structural relations of colonization and the affective-aesthetic identification of settlers with colonized space.[178] Just as apartheid attempted to contain Black communities' in South Africa, in order to control their labor without admitting any political power to guide the national economy, the erection of monuments reflected "an achieved at-homeness [for settlers]…[which] had the effect of producing [settler] nationalism whose claim on the nation was articulated through the landscape."[179] The celebration of the beauty or wildness of the South African landscape connected with the language of the monument, as a way of noting an experiential connection with the land settlers believe could serve as a basis for community between settler and native.[180] The monument uses the same set of symbolic projections to integrate the landscape into a seamless identification between history, nature, and colony and to obscure its

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[176] Ghassan Hage, *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society*, New York: Routledge, 2000: 58-59, 66-67.

[177] Critics like Robert Musil opined about the invisibility of such monuments and their dwindling ability to inspire a sense of publicity. Robert Musil "Monuments (1936)," *Robert Musil: Selected Writings*, trans. Burton Pike (New York: Continuum Publishing, 1986), 320-322.

[178] Laragh Larsen, "Re-placing Imperial Landscapes: Colonial Monuments and the Transition to Independence in Kenya," *Journal of Historical Geography* 38 (2012): 46; Bhakti Shringarpure, "Swarm, Demolish, Destroy: Rage Against the Monuments from Mali to Martinique" *The Funambulist Magazine* 11, published May 4, 2017: https://thefunambulist.net/magazine/11-designed-destructions/swarm-demolish-destroy-rage-monuments-mali-martinique-bhakti-shringarpure; Jeremy Foster, "Landscape, Character, and Analogical Imagination," in *Washed with Sun: Landscape and the Making of White South Africa* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh, 2008).

[179] Daniel Herwitz, "The Genealogy of Modern South African Architecture," in *Race and Reconciliation: Essays from the New South Africa* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 133-134.

[180] Foster 2-4.

participation in justifying its colonial control over land.[181] The overlapping uses of symbolic

repertoires of colonialism and the artistic imagination of the monument come through clearly in

Njabulo S. Ndebele's architectural description of the stunning visual aesthetic of the Rhodes statue's

location on the campus of University of Cape Town: "Standing at the edge of these green lawns, the

Summer House behind you, you can see clearly the line of symmetry cutting through Rhode's statue,

giving a place of honor you may never have imagined."[182] The symmetry and centering of Rhodes

against the mountainous backdrop thus naturalizes colonial claims on control over land as well as

knowledge.

From this cultural history, scholars have established how monuments perform as public

memory, and artistic representations of political ideals reproduce racism.[183] These are all parts of the

struggle for monument removal, but they do not exhaust its democratizing potential. The specific

insistence that monuments *must come down* speaks to the wider counter-memory of the project.

Taking down the monument is not exclusively about its historical or artistic characteristics, but also

speaks to its powers as an object that evokes feelings of "pastness." Unsettling the experience of

feeling "at-home" that comes along with yearning for a past that is produced in public spaces where

such monuments reside, whether on the steps of a court house, down a main street that evokes

nostalgia, or in the middle of a busy commercial district where wine and laughter sit alongside stone

faces of enslavers. In this sense, it is worth considering how monument removal functions as a

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[181] David Bunn, "Whited Sepulchers: On the Reluctance of Monuments," in *blank_____architecture: Apartheid and After*, (Rotterdam, Netherlands: nai010 publishers, 1998), 3-4.

[182] Njabulo S. Ndebele, "A Story of Time" in *Viewpoints: University of Cape Town and its Treasures* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 2013), 2.

[183] Nicholas Mirzoeff, "All the Monuments Must Fall #Charlottesville," *The Funambulist Magazine* 37 (August 2021); Sam Tenorio, "White Carceral Geographies," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 121(3): 522; Thuli Gamedze, "Heritage for Sale: Bronze Casting and the Colonial Imagination," *Artthrob*, November 20, 2015: https://artthrob.co.za/2015/11/20/heritage-for-sale-bronze-casting-and-the-colonial-imagination/

counter-memory intervention that unsettles the construction of public space, one that demands a

new way of configuring bodies and space together, or rather a new "monumentality."[184]

      Henri Lefebvre offers a useful conceptualization of "monumentality" as a way of analyzing

how space and bodies do not exist independently, or with one determining the other, but rather how

these two social objects are shaped together. Lefebvre's overall analysis builds around the notion

that "bodies—deployments of energy—produce space and produce themselves" according to the

"structure" of space, or what is possible within space as a field of usable resources and limitations.[185]

This reciprocal relationship between bodies and space, at the most basic sense, means that the places

we walk through or inhabit are qualified by how bodies act or work in that place. This, for Lefebvre,

disposes us to stop seeing space as a blank medium in which bodies are directly encountering other

bodies or leading the sole charge to define the "blank canvas" of places however the user of that

space sees fit.[186] And at the same time, Lefebvre suggests that as spaces are built, changed, or

consumed according to bodily movements, those "gestures" acted out by bodies in space actually

"modify a person's orientation and points of reference."[187] This relationship suggests that looking at

monuments as structures, expressed in the term "monumentality," may offer different perspectives

on how removing monuments influences the construction of social order.

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[184] This contemporary struggle over monumentality, however, is not completely new. The notion of a "new monumentality" emerged during architectural debates in the late twentieth century: over how the building and managing of space could be used to creates new ways of life that could avoid the horrors that came from fascism's uses of modern architectural sciences. Organizations like The Architectural Review and The International Congresses of Modern Architecture (ICMA) debated the failures of the "pseudo-monumentality" that enshrined fascist built environments, re-committed themselves to "rebuilding in the uncomfortable, if not stimulating, light of self-consciousness." Figures such as Sigfried Giedion, a prominent figure with the ICMA, sought to imagine new approaches to architectural design without wholly abandoning monumentality as an "aid in the formation of community and allow free social interaction." "In the Search of a New Monumentality: The Symposium," *The Architectural Review*, 104 (624) September 1, 1948; Mechtild Widrich, *Performative Monuments: The Rematerialization of Public Art* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2014), 146-148.
[185] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 1992), 171.
[186] Lefebvre 174.
[187] Lefebvre 174.

For Lefebvre, the intersecting forces that exist between bodies and space form the basis of monumentality. Monumentality does not refer to the built environment's artistic or cultural attributes, but rather provides an analytic concept for mapping the "structure" of space as it appears through the "gestures" of bodies. Lefebvre describes monumentality as a gestural space that is bound together with a "world possessed of its own symbolic system."[188] Or in other words, monumentality refers to how symbols and conventions used in monumental design are meant to make up, define, and even limit the kind of "world" meant to be experienced by those who entered into such monumental space. For Lefebvre, monumentality describes spaces in which members of a society are given a "social visage" of what it means to look upon something that looks like them, or to see outside of themselves something that looks like belonging to such a place. Again, this does not mean who is on the pedestal, but rather how such space is built to tie together the symbolic with the formal aspects of designing space. In this sense, Lefebvre cautions against reading monuments only according to representative symbols or images crafted by artists. Looking at monuments as artistic renderings alone misses how the matrices of space and bodies *act apart from* the intentions of those who built or planned such spaces.

Monumentality, then, "constitutes a chain of actions" that reflect at least three ways that spaces and bodies are shaped in their interactions with the artistic rendering of the monumental. These interactions are all related in producing social order.[189]

First, monumentality "stretches outwards towards bodies…and extends them into places affected by opposing qualities."[190] In this sense, monuments seem to "creep" beyond their pedestals, where their presence valorizes an emphasis on a consistent "rhythm" of study or reverence (Figure III. A). One example of this seems to be operative in the legacy of John McDonogh Day as part of

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[188] Lefebvre 216-217.
[189] Lefebvre 226.
[190] Lefebvre 226

the school curriculum in New Orleans. Starting in 1875, a yearly ritual to honor McDonogh, a primary benefactor who funded public schools in New Orleans, included students bringing wreaths to his downtown monument in order to celebrate their school system's "founder."[191]

 (Figure III. A)

Every May, students were asked to place wreaths at the statue and then greet the city mayor to receive ceremonial keys to the city. The ceremony was segregated, leaving Black students to wait for white students to finish their pilgrimage, mirroring the tacit acknowledgement that the funding of public education came from buying and selling enslaved people. This civic ritual is meant to have participants and audiences see children of all races demonstrating a reverence for white supremacy. And at the same time, the visibility of such reverence attempted to ensure its performance was fully received by all, insisting that Black students must wait to participate until all white students fulfilled their civic duty of wreath laying.

Second, monumentality overwhelms ordinary places under "principles of coexistence dictated from above," where activities of daily living become harmonized with an otherwise violent or powerful vision of social order (Figure III. B).[192] One way of concretizing this is to think about how Brenda Schmahmann describes excited soccer fans embellishing the Rhodes statue after

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[191] Take 'Em Down New Orleans, *Roots Rising: The Take 'Em Down NOLA Zine*, Vol. 1, 25-26.
[192] Lefebvre 226-227.

matches with glasses, necklaces, or team-specific scarves, or even using the Rhodes statues as a meeting place to congregate after matches.[193]

(Figure III. B)

While Schmahmann contends that Rhodes is conscripted into these performances of carnival temporarily "blocking Rhodes' mastering gaze," it seems equally plausible to consider how the organization of this space dictates the terms on which people can assemble.[194] The unifying message of sports, surrounding masculinity and competitive allegiance, becomes the justification for re-scripting Rhodes, rather than people frustrated with state negligence of poor migrant communities or racist violence perpetrated by students. Although UCT does allow these other, more subversive kinds of political protests to happen, the use of Rhodes as a site for soccer celebration is treated as a civic ritual, as a regular feature of daily living that needs no further justification. In this way, Rhodes subsidizes this kind of coexistence because it does not meaningfully undermine the daily activities of racial stratification, whereas Maxwele's poo protest that defamed Rhodes as a source of Black pain got the university to threaten Maxwele with legal sanction.[195]

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[193] Brenda Schmahmann, "The Fall of Rhodes: The Removal of a Sculpture from the University of Cape Town," *Public Art Dialogue*, 6 (1): 106-107.

[194] Schmahmann 108.

[195] "University spokeswoman Patricia Lucas said the institution was unaware of the protest. 'The university has procedures in place to allow students to hold peaceful and safe protests on issues that concern them. The protesters did not follow such procedures, and by dumping excrement in a public place they violated the law. They did not inform UCT of their intention to demonstrate, nor did they issue a statement to the university about the reasons for this protest. 'UCT is investigating this action and we will take legal steps if it is established that there

And third, monumentality produces borders or zones that more easily detect the kinds of groups or individuals that can access the space, attentive to who is "permitted or forbidden" from participating in the rhythms of the space itself (Figure III. C-1 & 2).[196] The statue of Andrew Jackson that TEDN frequently targeted as their example of what the city was not willing to consider as part of monument removal was constructed with iron gating to secure its space. So, even as demonstrations and counter-demonstrations arose, the space required partitioning by the police to preserve public order or defend the reverential use of the space. Thus, to properly access the space, one had to follow respectful ways of talking, walking, or gathering.

(Figure III. C-1)   (Figure III. C-2)

Lefebvre's account of monumentality is helpful for assessing these examples because he allows us to trace often unnoticed forms of power operating through and against those who encounter monumental spaces. He discerns the "language" of monumentality in how spaces incorporate bodies into new rhythms that reflect a singular, top-down structure, predicated on excluding those who violate the structure's logic. In other words, monumentality does not always require our attention to shape our sense of social relations. Lefebvre also pushes us to think beyond

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was unlawful behavior.'" Junior Bester, "Protestor Throws Poo on Rhodes Statue," *Independent Online*, March 10, 2015: https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/western-cape/protesters-throw-poo-on-rhodes-statue-1829526.
[196] Lefebvre 227.

the intentions of the sculptors, the benefactors who paid for the monuments in the first place, or the figures they represent in order to imagine other ways of perceiving monuments.

Yet Lefebvre's monumentality has less to say about how the *hierarchies* of shaping space. Monument removal then adds its own account of what it means to consider how certain bodily gestures are illegible or illegal in certain spaces. In this sense, monument removal activism may offer a broad indictment of the illegitimate forms of power that monumentality occupies. Nicholas Mirzoeff, for instance, argues that "whiteness does not adhere to any particular aspect of these sculptures but rather to the entire monumental form."[197] In a similar way, Sam Tenorio posits that the "ideological cover of the monumental form" is its ability to conceal the powers of whiteness and private property, naturalizing them as inevitable features of social life that liberal democracy can help to alleviate but never eliminate.[198] And yet, returning to Foucault, the approach of counter-memory is not to dismiss all forms of authority in favor of a generalized openness to experience, but rather to reconfigure precarious practices of acting together towards the aim of instituting equality.

Monument removal, in this sense, claims a power of redefinition by illuminating how space and bodies can be reconfigured to allow equal access to the common places of social life. The practices of monument removal are built around the importance of unlearning, disorientation, and dismantling public places to generate new ways of identifying what counts as democratic participation. What follows if we look at the practices that make up the "stretched out" work of monument removal as struggles between the monumental and monumentality? Or in other words, how is the work of monument removal attempting to respond to how space structures daily living under racist social order? Are monument removal efforts working to find alternative symbols or artistic visions that might crack existing spatial designs to find new ways of working together? To

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[197] Nicholas Mirzoeff, "All the Monuments Must Fall #Charlottesville," *The Funambulist* 37, August 2021.
[198] Sam Tenorio, "White Carceral Geographies," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 121(3): 522.

consider these questions, the chapter concludes by thinking about two different experiments in "stretching" monument removal in South Africa and the United States: the creation of "Shackville" as a monument to Black pain at University of Cape Town and the spatial remapping of New Orleans in TEDN's "Roots Rising" zine.

(Figure III. 1)

After the Rhodes monument was removed from University of Cape Town's campus in April 2015, there was a series of related protests throughout South African universities under the banner of #FeesMustFall (FMF) that culminated in a hostile encounter between protestors and police on the steps of the Union Buildings in Pretoria. Skirmishes also continued on university campuses throughout the country. One critical example of such conflict was when #RhodesMustFall (RMF) activists constructed an impromptu "shack" at the foot of then-Jameson Hall, not far from the site of where the Rhodes statue used to sit, in February 2016 (Figure III. 1).[199]

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[199] While many other insurgent forms of protest went on from the movement's start in March 2015, occupying administrative buildings, shutting down street access to universities like Wits and Stellenbosch, as well as some historically Black universities, such as Tshwane University of Technology, Shackville represented an escalation in confrontation over the use of space for protest at UCT.

At the start of the term in February 2016, RMF was increasingly frustrated with UCT's continued failures to meet student demands on housing, the outsourcing of labor on campus, a general lack of resources to support students in need and a specific accusation of racial preference for white students in housing allocations. In response, RMF returned to a familiar tactic, occupying Avenue House, an administrative building associated with housing and student resources, and insisting on control over the university resources. UCT administrators rejected student participation in negotiations, making it clear they would be using harsher legal recourse for these occupations, as well as maintaining the presence of private security forces that had been on campus since October's rising fee protests.[200]

When UCT signaled their intended escalation of disciplinary responses, RMF activists moved their political focus from occupation of administrative buildings to the disruption of university's operational space. Activists proclaimed that this rugged structure (Figure III. 1) represented "Black dispossession, for those who have been removed from land and dignity by settler colonialism, forced to live in squalor."[201] The Shackville Occupation was installed as "*a monument to the oppression* that has been enforced on black people by the likes of Jameson and all manifestations of the white supremacist capitalist patriarchal system."[202] Their monument was placed along the road just below Jameson Hall, which blocked a critical thoroughfare for university business. The Shackville initial statement made clear:

> UCT cannot continue as normal when outsourcing has not ended and workers are left unclear as to the conditions of their employment… UCT cannot continue as normal when it has lied to us about exclusion, and chased people out of residence, denying students the means to study. 2016 is the year of Free Decolonized Education and the return of stolen land. Izwe Lethu [the land is ours].[203]

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[200] Rekgotsofetse Chikane, *Breaking a Rainbow, Building a Nation: The Politics Behind #MustFall Movements*, (Johannesburg: Picador Africa, 2018), 215-218.

[201] UCT: Rhodes Must Fall, Facebook post, February 15, 2016.

[202] UCT: Rhodes Must Fall, Facebook post, February 15, 2016, emphasis added.

[203] UCT: Rhodes Must Fall, Facebook post, February 15, 2016.

The monument evokes memories of continued displacement of landless subjects residing

throughout Western Cape. The use of corrugated metal and a portable toilet connect struggles for

land and sanitary services with education access as the dream of democratization after 1994.[204]

Nomusa Makhubu suggests that this imagery attempted to regather the Left in South Africa on one

"monument," whereas the foci of struggle are scattered throughout South Africa's social movements

(to regain land, wealth, public education, nationalizing mines, political freedom of expression, etc.),

the structure holds together a variety of placards, including "UCT Housing Crisis," "Rhodes Must

Fall," "Nationalizing for Free Education," "Outsourcing is UCT's Living Slave Memorial," and

"Max Price for Black Lives?"[205] Together, they challenge the post-apartheid status quo, even

parodying the monumental placards at other heritage sites, emphasize how taking up public

memories of Black pain requires attention to possibilities for embracing democratic rule of social,

economic, or cultural facets of society.

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[204] For an example of shack dwelling as political imaginary in South Africa, see Anne-Maria Makhulu, *Making Freedom: Apartheid, Squatter Politics, and the Struggle for Home* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press 2015), 156-157: "Shack dweller organizations… now made demands on the state for basic infrastructure on behalf of communities (populations in need of biopolitical management) in the face of the state's failure to fully recognize the individual citizen, who was most often poor and black."

[205] Nomusa Makhubu, "On Apartheid Ruins: Art, Protest, and the South African Landscape," *Third Text* 34 (4-5): 569-590.

(Figure III. 2)

Rekgotsofetse Chikane contends that while in the past RMF has "outmaneuvered the management team of UCT at every corner" with regard to the removal of the Rhodes statue, as well as a host of other student demands, such as formal recognition of the group and improved work conditions that got rid of the majority of outsourced university labor, Shackville represented a blunder.[206] In addition to renewing threats of interdiction and legal consequences for protestors, UCT immediately framed Shackville as a "costly interference" that necessitated security responses to protect other "constitutionally guaranteed" uses of university space.[207]

While this demonstration did recreate scenes of the university destroying another shack to promote its own control over space (Figure III. 2), there were many even within the movement who found the protestors' vision drifting towards "unaccountable violence."[208] Encounters with the state and private security forces tended to draw on masculinist narratives of revolutionary practice, relying on images of "knobkerries, sticks and stone throwing" to allow the militarized masculine figures to appear as the guardians of the movement.[209] Black feminist leadership within the movement emphasized the importance of acknowledging the violence of decolonization alongside "the effects of violence and war" that often left students traumatized, silencing their bodily expressions as part of the decolonization process.[210] Thus, Shackville's bodily gestures may have instigated more hostile

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[206] Chikane 217-218.

[207] "What RMF is not saying is that it is their very actions (occupation, intimidation, interfering with staff, interfering with operations) that force UCT to have private security on campus in the first place. They create that cost for UCT." "UCT Protects Rights to Lawful Protests," *UCT Newsroom*, February 15, 2016: https://www.news.uct.ac.za/article/-2016-02-15-uct-protects-rights-to-lawful-protests.

[208] Francis Petersen and Wanelisa Xaba, "How Shackville started a war," *City Press*, February 21, 2016: https://www.news24.com/citypress/Voices/how-shackville-started-a-war-20160219; Raeesa Pather, "Students are #Shackville's collateral damage," *Mail & Guardian*, February 18, 2016: https://mg.co.za/article/2016-02-18-students-are-shackvilles-collateral-damage/.

[209] Wanelisa Xaba, "Challenging Fanon: A Black radical feminist perspective on violence and the Fees Must Fall movement," *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, *31*(3–4): 101.

[210] Kealeboga Ramaru, "Black Feminist Reflections on the Rhodes Must Fall Movement," in *Rhodes Must Fall: The Struggle to Decolonize the Racist Heart of Empire*, ed. Roseanne Chantiluke, Brian Kwoba, and Athinangamso Nkopo, (London: Zed Books, 2018); Xaba 101-102.

policing may serve as a public memory of those claims on belonging that might otherwise go undetected or lost in the fight over dispossession, or perhaps even further suppress the experiences of gender and political violence in a way that polices the meaning of reclaiming one's space. But it is only by seeing them both in this protest that we can begin to appreciate the depth of visceral experiences that go into imagining new kinds of democratic spaces.

In the Take 'Em Down New Orleans (TEDN) movement, Michael "A Scribe Called Quess?" Moore and a larger team of creative contributors published a series of zines that combined poetry, artwork, and oral histories of New Orleans freedom struggles; these included stories of protests and activist biographies that illuminate "the good people of New Orleans."[211] The content of the zines ranged from historical reconstruction of the US Civil War as "a rich man's war" that did not reflect anything like an admirable Southern heritage, to reflections on the intersections of migration and erasure that defined construction work in the rebuilding of Katrina, to personal testimonials of white activists across the US South working to confront codifications of white supremacy in housing practices and uses of Confederate symbols on the state flag. But the majority of the content focused on Black-led organizing efforts to confront "symbols and systems" of antiblackness in public memory or to proclaim their need for "room for new growth; our roots are rising."[212]

The phrase "symbols and systems" connects learning about symbols to acting together to address oppressive systems. By using monuments as sites for political education, TEDN brought out how representations of public memory were directly related to the construction of public space. Moore is particularly adept at expressing pressures and movements within such spaces in his poetic voice. For example, in recounting the failures of New Orleans government to go beyond merely

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[211] *Roots Rising: Take 'Em Down NOLA Zine,* Volume 1, 2019.
[212] *Roots Rising,* Vol. 1, 2.

removing the statues, Moore reasons that "your pro-gentrification policies, continued promotion of privatized school and hyper-surveillance of the city in the name of being 'tough on crime' that only lessens the livability for black folks in New Orleans? Are these policies not *symbols to white supremacy made flesh*?"[213] In a poem entitled "Grounded by Sky," Moore writes: "I cannot leave this ground/ where the scattered bones of my ancestry/ lay namelessly/ without tomb nor headstone/ sans burial ground much less monument/ and not feel the echoes of a chorus/ of gnashing teeth testimonies hissing at my heels/ can not stand this ground…" Here Moore grounds the bodily experiences of living with unrecalled public memories of enslavement and antiblack violence. He refigures the absence of monuments to demand continued struggle in spaces that he cannot stand, where he cannot stand, and perhaps where Moore is put in danger by those who choose to "stand their ground." Moore continues: "I live in the South/ where monuments to Robert E. Lee/ Andrew Jackson & Jefferson Davis/ stand taller than most homes/ and the street signs are noosed/ in the names of slavers." Thus, invoking the monumental goes beyond contesting specific figures. Moore re-centers the monuments as a site for unraveling sprawling networks of meaning that make the ground both "unleavable" and "unliveable." Such an unraveling requires collective processes of repetition, affirmation, and continued interrogation of the built environment of the city. These images make clear that removing monuments cannot be sufficient if removals are treated as isolated critiques of particular objects. Thus, the political wager of Moore and those who contribute to expanding the meaning and possibilities of monument removal as a democratic practice is that this incompleteness of any project of targeting the monumental opens up new creativity for "the journey toward complete liberation."[214]

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[213] *Roots Rising: The Take 'Em Down NOLA Zine*, Vol. 1, 23-24, emphasis added.
[214] *Roots Rising*, Volume 2: 9.

(Figure III. 3)   (Figure III. 4)

The power of monumentality is further imagined in TEDN's zines and their imaginative use of images (Figures III. 3-7). As Moore explains, the movement was a product of frustration over how left-leaning social movements operating in New Orleans at the time were not taking up stories of Black women and men being killed by the police as instigations for interrogating how resistance to antiblack violence would require confronting not only policing as a manifestation of the state, but also the social organization of race found throughout many symbols or rituals of public culture in New Orleans. Organizing with the Black Youth Project 100 and the Movement for Black Lives across the US, as well as the long-standing traditions in New Orleans of contesting public commemorations of white supremacy, the group focused on making public memory the basis for political resistance to racial injustice and police violence. In the first *Roots Rising* zine, the opening letter from the editors captures this well:

> For those who still question why we do what we do… Because the disregard for [our] Blackness on an insidious, every day level. Because the schools I went to, the streets I walk down, and the landmarks surrounding me are pregnant with hate, bloodshed, and a willful blindness. But now… Now I see. And when I see I act.[215]

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[215] *Roots Rising*, Vol. 1: 1.

 To enhance their claims about why focusing on the symbolic architecture of New Orleans is essential to the continued struggle for justice, the group includes images that open up the democratic claims implicit in the removal of such monuments.

(Figure III. 5)

As Angela Kinlaw writes, "by making a CLEAR decision to NOT compromise with white toxicity and honor it in any form or fashion, New Orleans would be a leader in the removal of images of psychological terror." [216] Kinlaw posits an imaginative dimension that cannot be separated from the will to act: "we must bring an end to what harms us and simultaneously build what will keep us healthy and whole."[217]

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[216] Angela Kinlaw, "Take 'Em Down & Build 'Em Up: Symbolically and Systematically," *Roots Rising,* Vol. 2: 10.
[217] It is no coincidence that Kinlaw publishes this sentence in the midst of the COVID-19 global pandemic, where the contestations over public commemoration emerges within marginalized communities struggling to control resources essential to safely working and living. Kinlaw, "Take 'Em Down & Build 'Em Up," 10.

(Figure III. 6)   (Figure III. 7)

Thus, the images of groups assembled on rising stairs or empty plinths suggest that new

kinds of gatherings may be possible when monuments no longer define public space. Sitting atop

empty pedestals, organizers of the first annual Take 'Em Down Everywhere conference convened

their group with fists raised; by denoting that the plinth was not vacant of political content, they

transformed it into a space capable of holding a new collective subjectivity. These images of what

TEDN refers to as "people power" offer their own take on the monumentality of a mass movement

in which figures such as Lee or Beauregard are displaced by assemblies with egalitarian motivations.

The climbing of the pillars is temporary, designed to become an image for later recollection, perhaps

even a re-performance that could be moved or redeployed. Mechtild Widrich describes such efforts

as "performative monuments" that are documented and relived through images in order to engage

"a temporally extended audience."[218] This act of commemoration, Widrich contends, "does not

relive the past by itself [but as] a present fact of public conduct…pointing to the past while carrying

its political and aesthetic effects into the future."[219] In this manner, the images capture real

commitments from activists to show up in the streets, or as Widrich puts it, "harnessing [the] social

concrete force" of demanding monument removal. Such harnessing captures not only self-

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[218] Widrich 8.
[219] Widrich 8.

motivation but the effect of practicing bodily gestures designed to contest the racialized production

of spaces and bodies, appearing a multiracial political bloc.[220]

If we think of such images as "performative monuments," we can see that the work of

organizing for monument removal does not entail rejecting all monumental works as antithetical to

democracy.[221] Beyond these performative gestures, there are other artistic depictions of intersecting

streets that do not exist, parks without a tangible location, even a redesigned collage of an empty

plinth of the removed General Lee with the face of Dorothy Mae Taylor, local civil rights advocate

and city council member who was instrumental in creating the legal framework for removing such

monuments in New Orleans. Together, these images offer their own "seedlings" of monumentality:

a rubric for space and bodies that cannot yet alter the physical environment. But the images are

useful to grow something new, to channel such unsettling of space into new ways of practicing

democratic self-rule. These images do not simply repurpose monumentality in order to insert

"diversity" into an already stable order. Rather, their inclusion in the collection of reflections,

statements, and platforms suggests that they are part of the larger claim about the meaning of

monument removal.

But one might be critical of these images, seeing people filling in the empty pedestal with

something ethereal or impossible, which only covers over the practical problem of "what goes up

after removal?" Knowing that the "empty pedestal" does demand some kind of alternative, TEDN

has always put its slogan of "Take 'Em Down" together with "Build 'Em Up." But the building up

does not dead-end at a set of stone monuments with more palatable historical figures. The images

and poetry of these zines, including streets signs that do not exist yet, paintings of skeletons of the

past coming alive to challenge those unrelenting monuments to white supremacy, and faces of

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[220] Widrich 10.
[221] Widrich 177-178.

struggle leaders adorned as if part of a perennial garden that blossoms in the middle of downtown New Orleans, signal what they are actually attempted to build up (Figure III. 8-10). These artistic renderings signal TEDN's vision of staging an alternative monumentality.[222] Rather than endorsing "the empty space of potentiality" as an opening for creativity, an undifferentiated embrace of "rootlessness," the images here suggest a desire to transform the spaces through what Kristin Ross refers to as "gestures of relationality and correspondence" that were implied by an orchard French revolutionaries imagined would regenerate the space left by the toppled Vendôme Column in 1871.[223] The sunflower adorning Taylor's head, for example, captures a fragile yet celebratory connection to the "seasonal rhythms and luxurious bounty" of flowers not intended to honor white supremacists, but rather to approximate a different matrix for monumentality: growing a public garden that could be shared.[224] Contesting the way monumentality imposed security on space with flowers that imagine growth and public nourishment, celebrating yet unmade streets, and seeing raised fists as bodies reconstructing space to accommodate their shared commitment to equality may plant the seeds of a more democratic world in these visual languages of resistance. What grows from such public memories, captured in these images, may be dreams, fights, and a kind of living that might not be achievable yet.[225]

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[222] This seems to take on a new meaning in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic where empty spaces may offer some safety, like "shelter-in-place" directives, but this kind of isolation cannot replace supportiveness of shared cause that is necessary to survive such conditions.

[223] Kristin Ross, *Communal Luxury: The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune*, (New York: Verso, 2015), 60-61.

[224] Ross 60-61.

[225] Ross 60.

by trying
to remove
it about liberation

PORT
AVERY C. ALEXANDER AV.
ONE WAY

Some
images further
perpetuate exploitation and
oppression, and we must discern
between these clearly

(5) NOT images of white
"supremacists," nor Black
misleaders, neoliberals, nor
those who placate to membe
the rich ruling class

11.

(Figure III. 8)

hen we choose to compromise
th white toxicity and the rich ruling
pitalist class, it makes us enemies of
r own liberation. As long as
pitalism and its imperialist
r exists, then all land
vulnerable,
cause
onizers
late and
press

ople first. They
ays use violence
colonize bodies,
rits, and minds, in an
rt to colonize the land.
. there are ALWAYS those
t resist. There are always
se that fight back. There
always those who'd
er die, than live a life
er the hand of the
pressor. However,
those who give in
ake on the mindset
he oppressor to preserve
r own life, or those they
m worthy, they become a
ility to everyone else.

ARTWORK BY JOE STERN

As we exercise the clarity of mind to
have no tolerance for what causes us
harm, we inevitabl
build a new wor
by operating
with the
kind of
love, integrity
and freedom
fighting spi
to bot
be an
create
what
we
wan
while
protecting it at all
costs. A new work
has NO choice but t
exist (not 100 years from
now), TODAY, and each day
going forward.

Dorothy Mae Taylor

(Figure III. 9)   (Figure III. 10)

III. Black Pain and Betrayal: Radicalizing Democracy from Rhodes to Shackville

On April 9, 2015, crowds gathered to witness the removal of Cecil Rhodes from the steps of the University of Cape Town (UCT). The University Senate authorized the cranes to hoist away the statue the day before at a meeting where students assembled in order to pressure university leadership to act.[226] Behind the scenes, UCT officials feverishly worked with heritage management bureaucrats to grant a removal exemption to override the heritage status of the Rhodes statue.[227] As recently as March 9, the infamous protest of Chumani Maxwele, which included throwing feces across the face of the Rhodes statue, led community leaders and university officials to condemn these actions against Rhodes as illegal and undignified.[228] But efforts to discredit protests to remove the statue were no longer evident on the day of its removal.

When the statue was set to be removed, members of the #RhodesMustFall (RMF) movement publicly spoke. Speakers declared the monument "falling" only *accentuated* the university's failures to address South Africa's nationwide Transformation Agenda at UCT. The students emphasized the acute failures of equity in Black student enrollment, hiring and retaining Black faculty, and teaching a curriculum that decentered western sources and paradigms.[229] Kealeboga Ramaru, prominent leader within RMF, gave voice to this interpretation of the removed statue in a prepared statement: "The removal of the statue by management is not something we should be grateful for… management is *our colonial administrators*, and their removal of the statue is merely an

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[226] "UCT Council Votes in Favor of Removing Rhodes Statue," *University of Cape Town News*, April 8, 2015: https://www.news.uct.ac.za/article/-2015-04-08-uct-council-votes-in-favour-of-removing-rhodes-statue.
[227] "UCT and Heritage Western Cape's Joint Statement on the Temporary Removal of the Rhodes Statues from Upper Campus," April 8, 2015: https://www.news.uct.ac.za/article/-2015-04-08-uct-and-heritage-western-capes-joint-statement-on-the-temporary-removal-of-the-rhodes-statue-from-upper-campus.
[228] Junior Bester, "Protestor Throws Poo on Rhodes Statue," *Independent Online*, March 10, 2015: https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/western-cape/protesters-throw-poo-on-rhodes-statue-1829526
[229] Department of Education, Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education, Pretoria, July 1997: https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/18207gen11960.pdf; Dan Hodgkinson and Luke Melchiorre, "Student Activism in an Era of Decolonization." *Africa*, 89 (S1), 1–14.

attempt to placate us and be perceived as sympathetic."[230] Despite UCT administrators' best efforts

to project an official message of reconciliation, the banners held by students and university workers

spoke much more loudly. "This is only the beginning," shouted protestors, echoing a sign that read:

"next, the invisible statues." "More than a statue," read another sign. "Fuck your dreams of empire"

was spray-painted on one side of the plinth on which Rhodes sat; and "African lives matter" spray

painted across the other.

      In the wake of the Rhodes removal, some posited removing an "unpopular" statue would

only provoke unending vandalism or bland party slogans.[231] But the phrase "must fall" actually

reemerged loudly in October 2015 over the question of free university education. A series of clashes

with university administration over fees burdening poorer students, previously drawn together under

the "1month1million" public pressures campaign, bubbled up into a string of university shut-downs

and occupations. Beginning on October 14, this series of university confrontations ultimately led to

the steps of Parliament. On the way there, it became clear that #FeesMustFall (FMF) was a renewed

force for protest, and a term emerged to describe this series of related protests: "fallism."[232] As

Bafana Nicolas Masilela recounts, "the symbolism in barricading entrances [to university]…as a

young Black man from a disadvantaged background" signified his and others' experience of

exclusion from public institutions in South Africa. University fees, for Masilela, represent a

normalized "*colonial vehicle* for oppression of the Black community." "The time is now," Masilela

[230] Raeesa Pather, "Rhodes Must Fall: The Movement After the Statue," *The Daily Vox*, April 21, 2015, https://www.thedailyvox.co.za/rhodes-must-fall-the-movement-after-the-statue/, emphasis added.
[231] Xolani Mbanjwa, "The Face of a Defacer," *City Press*, April 12, 2015;
Sipho Masombuka and Mkhululi Ndamase, "Statue wars heat up," *TimesLIVE*, April 7, 2015: https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2015-04-07-statue-wars-heat-up/; Mphutlane Wa Bofelo, "Fallism and the Dialectics of Spontaneity and Organization: Disrupting Tradition to Reconstruct Tradition," *Pambazuka News*, May 11, 2017: https://www.pambazuka.org/democracy-governance/fallism-and-dialectics-spontaneity-and-organization-disrupting-tradition.
[232] Susan Booysen and Kuda Bandama, "Annotated Timeline of the #FeesMustFall Revolt 2015-2016," in *Fees Must Fall: Student Revolt, Decolonization and Governance in South Africa*, ed. Susan Booyseen. (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2016), 318-320.

continued, "that these exclusionary practices that aim to train a Black child to be a working-class citizen should be challenged."[233]

While there has been rich reflection on fallism's challenges to contemporary South Africa and the legacies of apartheid and decolonization,[234] I argue monumental falling as a "political vernacular" is a critical means of condensing the uses of protest tactics by fallists into a radical vision for democratic power.[235] To speak this political vernacular, fallists attempt to bring together experiences of political frustration with immediate actions that effect the daily operations of public institutions, in contrast to deferring hopeful visions of shared prosperity that seem to only be possible in the future. In other words, the hope for fallists resides in bringing out the empowerment seen, felt, and inspired by "the fall," In this sense, the declaration of political claims through the cry of "must fall" relies on remembering the falling of the Rhodes statue at UCT.[236] This iterative invocation of this public event attempts to rally related causes with shared commitments to mass mobilization and anti-colonial disruption. And at the same time, it is more than a battle cry. It is also

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[233] Bafana Nicolas Masilela, "A Walk in the Shoes of '76: Perceptions of #FeesMustFall," in *Rioting and Writing: Diaries of the Wits Fallists*, 73:
https://www.sahistory.org.za/sites/default/files/archive_files/Rioting%20and%20Writing%20eBook.pdf

[234] See A. Kayum Ahmed, "#RhodesMustFall: Decolonization, Praxis, and Disruption," *Journal of Comparative & International Higher Education* 9 (2017); Francis B. Nyamnjoh, *#RhodesMustFall: Nibbling at Resilient Colonialism in South Africa* (Bamenda, Cameroon: Laanga Research and Publishing, 2016); Nomusa Makhubu, "On Apartheid Ruins," *Third Text 34* (4–5).

[235] In Fanon's writings on movements speaking from and to struggles over self-government and the politics of post-colonialism, he notices the political importance of an organizing vernacular that helps to replace the bourgeois sense of political party with a kind of political organizing that is not "contemptuous [of] the masses." Fanon writes, "if we choose to use a language comprehensible only to law and economics graduates it will be easy to prove that the masses need to have their life run for them. But if we speak in plain language… it will be clear that the masses comprehend all the finer points and every artifice… The more the people understand, the more watchful they become, and the more they come to realize that everything depends on them and their salvation lies in their own cohesion, in the true understanding of their interests, and in knowing who their enemies are." Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 188-191.

[236] It is worth pointing out that Che Guevara served as another source to constellate the invocation of falling to revolutionary cause at the global scale. The quote used most frequently came from a quote from an interview that appeared in 1965 edition of Liberation Magazine with Guevara about revolutionary programs throughout Cuba and Algeria: "The revolution is not an apple that falls when it is ripe. You have to make it fall." While it is difficult to say how salient such a quote was for the group's self-identification, its repeated use in Facebook posts suggests that on some level this gives perspective their vernacular for "falling."

a revision of official public memory. In this sense, fallism addresses unacknowledged forms of power that are often left out of liberal celebrations of the working through the past that brought about South African democracy. Fallism illuminates how empire can be recreated through writing, art, and the academic specialization that is central to South Africa's division of labor reserved for higher education.[237] The role of university as a public institution relies on colonial logics to consolidate elite interests through habits of learning, but it attempts to neutralize such logics through discourses of transformation and dialogue about the past.[238] The crux of fallism, then, is to clarify the insufficiency of these responses.

Fallism interrogates how universities, and public spaces more generally, are not immune to histories of racial segregation or colonial domination that persist even as the university prioritizes revising its own public memory landscape.[239] Instead, fallism prioritizes the dream of democratic power that disalienates and empowers Black communities in South Africa; their wager is that such power is best exemplified when remembering the falling of monuments. It seems that fallism's work is focused on asking what is created in the falling of a monument, and under what conditions such creations can become frameworks of social memory for democratic community.

This chapter first explores #RhodesMustFall's organizing context. I analyze how Maxwele's political performance becomes a catalyst for RMF's debates over what the movement would demand, how they would practice the political commitments to Black-led, intersectional organizing,

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[237] Gamedze and Gamedze, "Salon for What?" in The Johannesburg Salon, Vol. 9, *The Johannesburg Workshop in Theory and Criticism*, 2015: 1-2.

[238] Gamedze and Gamedze 1-2.

[239] According to Max Price, the university was in discussions starting on October 2014 to "review of statues, symbols and signage [that] the growing community of black students and staff were being confronted daily with symbols and signs of an apartheid or pre-apartheid colonial history which they regarded as oppressive and divisive… Our plan for 2015 was to review the controversial, yet apparently untouchable symbols and names and subject them to critical debate. These explicitly included the Rhodes Statue and Jameson Hall." Max Price, "Rhodes Must Fall: Max Price's Letter to UCT Alumni," *PoliticsWeb*, June 19, 2015: https://www.politicsweb.co.za/news-and-analysis/rhodes-must-fall-max-prices-letter-to-uct-alumni

and how the image of Rhodes falling would guide their responses to other sources of colonial domination.

The second section explores RMF's "starting point" at the Rhodes statue through the wider lens of the role of "the monument" in South Africa, as an instrument in the coloniality of race *and* reparative imaginations of non-racial democracy after apartheid. This duality echoes what Mihaela Mihai calls the "double erasure" of South Africa's public memory, where post-apartheid's "living heritage" obscures complicity in ongoing repression that echoes the colonial-apartheid eras.[240] In this context, "monuments falling" reveal the symbolic powers of domination attached to elite visions of non-racialism and reconciliation.[241] What fallists take issue with most is the *rush* towards unified national identity around these seemingly admirable goals of anti-racism, anti-sexism, and human rights; there is no time or space to discuss remaining forms of power differentials that persist even after official policies has been amended.[242] Instead, fallism demands spaces for embracing difference and conflict as productive for addressing oppression as it is lived out.

The chapter then explores how fallism mobilizes this tension between these two meanings of public monuments to challenge the status quo. This section sees fallism in relation to other forms of what Julian Brown calls "insurgent politics."[243] Fallism shares with these insurgent political movements a suspicion of liberal forms of public petition, deliberation, and universal ideals for articulating political claims. But it differs in fallism's emphasis on the democratic significance of the university as a site for liberation. Whereas other insurgent forms of politics in South Africa tend to

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[240] Mihaela Mihai, *Political Memory and the Aesthetics of Care: The Art of Complicity and Resistance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2022), 199-200.

[241] Sipokazi Madida, "Troubling Statues: A Symptom of a Complex Heritage Complex," in *Exchanging Symbols: Monuments and Memorials in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, ed. Anitra Nettleton and Mathias Alubafi Fubah, (Stellenbosch, South Africa: African Sun Media, 2019), 110; Ali Khangela Hlongwane, "Commemoration, Memory and Monuments in the Contested Language of Black Liberation: The South African Experience." *Journal of Pan African Studies*, *2*(4): 135–170.

[242] Rekgotsofetse Chikane, *Breaking a Rainbow, Building a Nation: The Politics behind #MustFall Movements*, (Johannesburg: Picador Africa, 2018), 26-27.

[243] Julian Brown, *South Africa's Insurgent Citizens: On Dissent and the Possibility of Politics* (New York: Zed Books, 2015).

focus on seizing the necessities of daily living in terms of land or utilities, fallism embraces this same call to make life livable as a call to recreate the university as a site for honoring Black labors, histories and cultures, all necessities for asserting the full humanity of Black lives. In a sense, it is about the narrative of education as pivotal to emancipation from racial domination, but it is also about challenging the university to halt reproducing colonial worldviews. They articulate this by reframing participants' feelings of betrayal of the dreams for after apartheid into new forms of democratic self-regard that can be honed by disrupting and regenerating what it means to practice "university" as a democratic institution.

Finally, the chapter concludes by examining how fallists have enacted their own attempts at public memory through the critically acclaimed play, *The Fall*. The play was written and performed by former RMF/FMF participants and it considers the continuities and changes in the group's self-understanding from its earliest moments to its collapse in the wake of internal tensions and state repression. The play re-collects monument falling in a form that offers sober reflections on RMF's founding mission as a model for collective memory that might embrace the falling of oppression and the rise of egalitarian democracy.

III. a. Fallism in Context

What accounts for the urgency around monument removal at UCT? One banner raises a poignant framing of the movement's comment on monument removal: "all Rhodes lead to decolonization of the mind." But what does this specifically mean? Who is colonized by Rhodes, and what "roads" bring them together? One way of unpacking this is to consider who constituted fallism, the movements of "must fall" that emerged in early 2015 and reached their twilight by mid-2016. It is correct to frame fallism as a coalition built around student activists loosely affiliated with various political party organizations, mainly African National Congress-affiliated ones (ANC), that

operated on universities throughout South Africa. Yet, early on the movements clarified that fallists would remain non-partisan, putting distance between the ANC and all other left-leaning political parties and the university-based movements.[244] The movement seemed to signal to the ANC that the "rising class of post-secondary education youth might realign, away from the former liberation movement, and create political homes for themselves in opposition parties or anti-systemic political organization."[245]

But while students made up the bulk of the movement, many workers on university campuses--in food preparation, housekeeping, other maintenance services or even administrative offices--affiliated with fallism as they both shared in "the function of the modern, economically-oriented university [that] provides precarious workers for the knowledge economy."[246] So, in addition to directly coordinating with campus workers unions, many activists expressed their commitment to invite and work alongside workers at universities in South Africa. Many fallists were first-generation students, coming from working-class or poor families; many felt familial connections to workers who did the same kind of work as their parents, leading students to take "considerable personal risks—from arrest to expulsion—to support workers' demands."[247] And this was reciprocated by workers' unions and individuals contributing food, bail money, and their presence at many fallist demonstrations.[248]

So again, if these constituencies were representative of fallism, how does this vision of decolonization connect to the ideas and practices of the movement? Fallism emerges out of

[244] Susan Booysen, "Two Weeks in October: Changing Governance in South Africa," in *Fees Must Fall: Student Revolt, Decolonization and Governance in South Africa*, ed. Susan Booysen (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2016), 24-26.
[245] Booysen, "Two Weeks in October," 26.
[246] Gillian Godsell and Rekgotsofetse Chikane, "The Roots of Revolution," in *Fees Must Fall: Student Revolt, Decolonization and Governance in South Africa*, ed. Susan Booysen. (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2016), 61-63.
[247] Godsell and Chikane 62.
[248] Godsell and Chikane 62.

concentric circles of protests against university conditions of racial inequity, discounting of conventional modes of politics, and tense negotiations over written declarations. In this sense, the decolonization of the mind aims at liberation achieved through asserting the experiences of Black communities in South Africa that converge in their experiences of university as a site of domination. This section explores how activists defended and used the performative defiance of the Rhodes statue at UCT as a "the natural starting point" for much wider vision of reconstructing institutions of democracy.[249]

Unpacking #RhodesMustFall begins with Chumani Maxwele. Maxwele, a recent UCT graduate, coordinated a confrontational protest where he threw feces onto the Rhodes statue during the "Infecting the City" public art festival to highlight the plight of Black students and workers at UCT. Maxwele said he did not imagine the electric reception of his "catalytic act."[250] Maxwele designed his protest to express Black communities' grievances through a psychic register, based on his studies of Steve Biko and Black Consciousness philosophy, as well as his own living experiences in a poor township in Western Cape.[251]

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[249] "The statue is therefore the perfect embodiment of Black alienation and disempowerment at the hands of UCT's institutional culture, and was the natural starting point of this movement." UCT Rhodes Must Fall Mission Statement, in The Johannesburg Salon, Vol. 9, *The Johannesburg Workshop in Theory and Criticism*, 2015: 6.

[250] Chumani Maxwele, "The not so potty idea that spawned a movement" *Sunday Times*, March 6, 2016.

[251] Another critical aspect of Maxwele's understanding of Black Consciousness comes from the influence he attributes to UCT Professor Shose Kessi. Her psychological research on discourses of race and the transformative powers of photography and self-expression peered into student experiences of cultural alienation and racial hierarchy. Her research emphasized that the Cecil Rhodes statue holds a "symbolic location of privilege" and reinforces "how the conditions of success for black students is the assimilation into whiteness." Kessi shows this contradiction through UCT's Black students' photographic expressions, how their use of images captures how they experience psychic domination and conscription as passive, absent recipients of the "transformative agenda" in South African higher education. The "rationality and reductionism of the transformation discourse, one that supports black students to 'fit into' the university but simultaneously portrays them as incompetent, conceals the exclusionary practices that take place." Following Kessi's work at the symposium hosted by the Institute for Humanities in Africa at UCT, Maxwele recalls several questions about when the Rhodes statue could be removed. Max Price, the UCT vice-chancellor at the time, was in attendance during the event but refused to respond to the question. For Maxwele, Price's unwillingness to engage with students' claims on the university was frustrating. In later conversations with friends, Maxwele decided to map out the "need to act radically in confronting the institutional and personal racism at the university." Eve Fairbanks, "The Birth of Rhodes Must Fall," *The Guardian*, November 18, 2015; Shose Kessi, "Coming to UCT: Black Students, Transformation, and Discourses of Race," *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa* 3(2): 1-16; Shose Kessi, "Re-politicizing Race in Community Development: Using

In a 2016 editorial, Maxwele remarks: "Black pain led me to throw Rhodes poo."[252] Black

pain, following from Biko's writings, refers to the experience of being "reduced to an obliging shell

[looking] with awe at the white power structure" as an immovable reality.[253] Maxwele's protest aimed

to take on the "spiritual poverty" of colonial destruction of Black pasts by unraveling the "solace

[produced from] close identification with the white society" and its "distorted, disfigured, and

destroyed" view of history.[254] The act, thus, served as an "inward-looking process" that is central to

Black Consciousness' use of historical reconstruction as a positive vehicle for building self-regard

among racially marginalized peoples.[255] Three days later, a mass meeting was organized by students

concerned about Maxwele's legal status with the university, or inspired by his protest, or curious

about what could happen from this particular moment; thousands showed up to voice their own

grievances that emerged from the issue Maxwele put on the table: institutionalized racism.[256]

This feces fracas captured popular imaginations, but it can too easily overshadow the longer

political context that fertilized its grounding. Relying only on Maxwele's protest as a political

beginning, or as Aziz Chaudry might call an "immaculate conception account" of a social

movement, goes too far to separate such a critical moment from prior organizing efforts, "[masking]

the significance of building communities of support for social change and collective struggle."[257]

Kealeboga Ramaru, a prominent fallist organizer, notes how the banner of #RhodesMustFall

became viable primarily through long-term, concerted efforts of student activists at UCT organizing

Postcolonial Psychology and Photovoice Methods for Social Change," *PINS* 45 (2013): 17-35; Shose Kessi, "Time to Decolonize our Universities," *The Sunday Independent*, April 12, 2015.
[252] Chumani Maxwele, "Black Pain Led Me to Throw Rhodes Poo," *Business Day*, March 16, 2016.
[253] Steve Biko, *I Write What I Like: Selected Writings* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 28.
[254] Biko 28-29.
[255] Biko 29; T. Spreelin MacDonald, "The Emergent Self in South African Black Consciousness Literature and Discourse," in *African Intellectuals and Decolonization*, ed. Nicholas M. Creary, (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2012).
[256] Chikane 100-101.
[257] Aziz Choudry, *Learning Activism: The Intellectual Life of Contemporary Social Movements* (Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 75.

around intersectionality, land dispossession, and Black Consciousness.[258] Yet Maxwele's protest

brought these three organizing ideas together as a new, tense approach to constructing a

"decolonial" vision of public memory.[259] The fallists saw their movement as a "new repertoire and

ways of claim-making" that aimed to unravel the political vernacular of transformation popularized

by the ANC in favor of a "more radical, post-colonial perspective of decolonization."[260] This means

calling into question the function of education or other public services apart from their capitalistic

exchange-value, the colonial epistemic framework that defines knowledge production at university,

and confronting the "inner Cecil John Rhodes" that is imprinted on the laboring subjects who work

and produce what comes out of the contemporary university.[261] Thus, fallism's public memory is

less focused on using the past to substantiate a formal political identity than asking how the past can

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[258] Beyond the focus on Black Consciousness, intersectionality, in a different way, served as a means of both identifying how the movement aspired to identify unacknowledged forms of oppression, and also as an internal ethic of democratic process: "the purpose of highlighting an intersectional approach to protest is vital… it is a moment in protest where those who lead are equally able to follow and those who follow are afforded an opportunity to lead." And the dispossessive challenge of settler colonialism is often expressed by fallists in various registers of Pan-Africanism, but there is little consensus within the movement about what this term means. These "pillars" showed up from a wide range of constituent student organizations. For example, South African Young Feminist Activists were holding reading groups regularly throughout 2014 and 2015 on the topic of intersectionality in the context of the African university; Imbizo, a Pan-Africanist group, was working to raise awareness about the politics land dispossession at UCT; and a host of leftist student organization and university worker unions had petitioned for a strike that never materialized in early 2015 on the topic of outsourcing dining, cleaning services, and a host of other university services. Abdul Kayum Ahmed, "The Rise of Fallism: #RhodesMustFall and the Movement to Decolonize the University," PhD diss., (University of Columbia, 2019): 110-138; Kealeboga Ramaru, "Black Feminist Reflections on the Rhodes Must Fall Movement at UCT," in *Rhodes Must Fall: The Struggle to Decolonize the Racist Heart of Empire*, eds. Roseanne Chantiluke, Brian Kwoba, and Athinangamso Nkopo (London: Zed Books, 2018), 150-152; C. Anzio Jacobs, "The Outcasts: No Retreat, No Surrender!," in *Rioting & Writing: Diaries of Wits Fallists*, 120: https://www.sahistory.org.za/sites/default/files/archive_files/Rioting%20and%20Writing%20eBook.pdf.
[259] Unlike official public memory that assumes existing shared social systems where diverse populations interact according to common experiences, decolonial practices of public memory begin by assuming *asymmetrical* encounters between subjugated populations and official accounts of the past. The demand of this approach to public memory is not inclusivity, but rather a question of the political conditions of survival: "whether there will be a future, and for whom." Jill Jarvis, *Decolonizing Memory: Algeria and the Politics of Testimony* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021), 6.
[260] Crispen Chinguno, Morwa Kgoroba, Sello Mashibini, Bafana Nicolas Masilela, Boikhutso Maubane, Nhlanhla Moyo, Andile Mthombeni, and Hlengiwe Ndlovu, "Reflexivity: Decolonizing the Process," in *Rioting & Writings: Diaries of Wits Fallists,* 24: https://www.sahistory.org.za/sites/default/files/archive_files/Rioting%20and%20Writing%20eBook.pdf.
[261] Ramaru, "Black Feminist Reflections," 151; Chinguno et al. 24-25.

be attacked in order to expose rituals of academic training. Such training is as overwhelmed by its

historical roots in supporting white supremacy; such training represents what Nombusa Makhubu

calls "apartheid's ruins" in contemporary South Africa.[262]

On March 23, 2015, roughly two weeks after Maxwele's protest, RMF publically read and

posted their founding declaration to Facebook. The statement was the result of three days of student

teach-ins and conversation in the occupied UCT's Bremner Building, where students pressured

recalcitrant university administrators to act.[263] The document gives an account of the emergence and

vision of the movement:

> "We are an independent collective of students, workers, and staff who have come together
> to end institutionalized racism and patriarchy at UCT. This movement was sparked by
> Chumani Maxwele's radical protest against the statue of Cecil John Rhodes on Monday 9
> March 2015. This has brought to the surface the existing and justified rage of Black students
> in the oppressive space cultivated and maintained by UCT, despite its rhetoric of
> 'transformation.' We want to be clear that this movement is not just concerned with the
> removal of a statue… Its removal will not mark the end but the beginning of the long
> overdue process of decolonizing the university. In our belief, the experiences seeking to be
> addressed by this movement are not unique to an elite institution such as UCT, but rather
> reflect broader dynamics of a racist and patriarchal society that has remained unchanged
> since the end of formal apartheid."

 Through the opening mission statement, we can begin to see a framework of decolonial public

memory in at least three ways: the political contestation of institutionalized space, the necessity of

fighting white normativity and militarized masculinity simultaneously, and the psychic life of colonial

power that undermines democratic participation.

First, RMF contests public memory in terms of how it is used to justify uses of space: its

discursive uses (e.g., public forums) and its symbolic uses (e.g., preserving monuments, art, or other

commemorative rituals). RMF insists that public space cannot be treated as a neutral opening that all

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[262] "The 'rot' and 'decay' [of colonialism] may not be manifest on actual edifices, but it consumes certain bodies, ferments race and gender social relations, and decays the sense of belonging." Nomusa Makhubu, "On Apartheid Ruins," *Third Text 34* (4–5): 570–572.

[263] "Bremner Occupation Statement," in The Johannesburg Salon, Vol. 9, *The Johannesburg Workshop in Theory and Criticism*, 2015: 9-10.

can equally access. Protestors' occupation of public space dramatizes how supposedly democratic processes are built on the assumption of Black subordination: "we have begun to question the entire neo-colonial situation…whether it is us the people that are occupying this building or whether we are realizing the fact that this building and its land always belonged to the people."[264] This invocation undercuts the university's narration of the removal as an intellectual exercise in deliberation and highlights the "sweat and blood of Black people" whose labor makes such deliberation feasible.

In fact, students saw the University's appeal that "all views be considered" before authorizing removal as symptomatic of institutionalized racism.[265] UCT management worked quickly to reschedule their pre-planned "Heritage, Signage and Symbolism" public seminar into a forum called "Have Your Say," where students and staff could express their view on the statue or broader issues to "advance transformation more generally."[266] This series of meetings was pitched as a way to appease demands for a timetable for removal as a precondition to any meeting with University management; these meetings would justify any actions taken by the University.[267] But RMF saw such an effort as "a complete disregard for the Black experience."[268] Treating claims about Black pain as an opportunity for debate suggested that UCT leadership would only "alleviate Black pain [if] the move [was] validated by white voices." From RMF's perspective, monument removal was salient *because* Black pain was at its center:

> this pain and anger must be responded to in a way that only we can define…the push for dialogue around the statue reflects the disturbing normalization of colonization and white supremacy at UCT. That the presence of Rhodes is seen as debatable shows that

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[264] "Bremner Occupation Statement," in The Johannesburg Salon, Vol. 9, *The Johannesburg Workshop in Theory and Criticism*, 2015: 9.

[265] "From the VC's Desk: Rhodes Statue Protests and Transformation," *UCT Newsroom*, March 18, 2015: https://www.news.uct.ac.za/article/-2015-03-18-from-the-vcs-desk-rhodes-statue-protests-and-transformation.

[266] "From the VC's Desk"

[267] "From the VC's Desk"

[268] "UCT Rhodes Must Fall Mission Statement," in The Johannesburg Salon, Vol. 9, *The Johannesburg Workshop in Theory and Criticism*, 2015: 7.

> management does not take seriously the terrible violence against black people historically and presently.[269]

Their longer statement suggests a connection forged in antiblackness between the petitioning of the wider student body and alumni for thoughts about the removal of Rhodes and the lack of action to address "racist backlash from white students."[270] The control of space was mediated through the language of community input, but the lack of insistence on racial equity as a baseline for public participation allowed old forms of white power to operate more "respectably" in defending the past.

This contestation over university space took on a more radical form the occupation of the Bremner Building (informally renamed Azania House by RMF) that began on March 20, 2015 and lasted three days. During the occupation, students began writing this first drafts of what would become RMF's Mission Statement. When an early draft of the mission statement was presented by Ru Slayen and others during the occupation, Slayen recalled being surprised by the audible support for the more radical claims of the document, particularly about Black pain and decolonization. Slayen remembered students speaking in more conciliatory tones at the Maxwele protest.[271] Thus, it seemed that practicing occupation and creating new spaces to meet on the university contributed new elements to the political vision of the movement. Whereas the space of academic training operated as a source of alienation for Black students, the spaces of protest and occupation took on a communal feeling, where students and staff could discuss, establishing ideas about writing, thinking, and acting collectively.[272] RMF focused on how their protests might turn university spaces into mediums that inspire contestation, community, and self-reflection.

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[269] "UCT Rhodes Must Fall Mission Statement," in The Johannesburg Salon, Vol. 9, *The Johannesburg Workshop in Theory and Criticism*, 2015: 7.

[270] "UCT Rhodes Must Fall Mission Statement," in The Johannesburg Salon, Vol. 9, *The Johannesburg Workshop in Theory and Criticism*, 2015: 7.

[271] Abdul Kayum Ahmed, "The Rise of Fallism: #RhodesMustFall and the Movement to Decolonize the University," PhD Diss. (Columbia University, 2019).

[272] The claim on Bremner Building includes students targeting the Archie Mafeje room of administration building as their site to "take up residence" and protest the lack of attention to their demands. Mafeje's activism and

Second, RMF aimed its critiques and self-critique at white normativity and militarized masculinity alongside resisting capitalist exploitation. The collective statement mapped out the "great symbolic power" of Rhodes' monument, both to the operations of the university and the group's political vision.[273] RMF described the statue as a "glorifying monument to a man who was undeniably a racist, imperialist, colonialist, and misogynist." In this sense, Rhodes's presence was representative of on-going legacies of dispossession and exploitation that were "not unique to an elite institution such as UCT, but rather reflect broader dynamics of a racist and patriarchal society that has remained unchanged since the end of formal apartheid." Their interpretation of Rhodes thus revealed the animating logics of the university. This is more evident when we consider some of the group's political demands: replacing artwork by white artists that "exoticize the black experience," increasing the representation of Black academics in places of power, improving facilities for stopping sexual assault and reporting sexual harassment at work, ending outsourcing of university labor. Such demands run parallel to the kinds of symbolic power that they witness in Rhodes' stone edifice.

And yet, while their statement powerfully interrogates how symbols like Rhodes map onto the power dynamics at play in the university, the group's earliest actions reflected the challenges in translating such symbolic vision into strategies of organizing protest. First, the declaration makes clear that RMF intended to be a Black-led social movement defined by the priorities of Black pain and Black alienation at UCT. This is not, however, to the exclusion of white student participation.

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teaching in the African Studies department drew criticism and removal from UCT by the South African government in 1968. Disrupting this space was meant to disclose the memories concealed in its commemorative naming. Brian Kamanzi, "Rhodes Must Fall—Decolonizing Symbolism—What is happening at UCT, South Africa?" *The Postcolonialist*, March 29, 2015, http://postcolonialist.com/civil-discourse/rhodes-must-fall-decolonisation-symbolism-happening-uct-south-africa/; Heike Becker and David Seddon, "Africa's 1968: Protests and Uprisings Across the Continent," *Review of African Political Economy*, May 31, 2018: http://roape.net/2018/05/31/africas-1968-protests-and-uprisings-across-the-continent/.

[273] "UCT Rhodes Must Fall Mission Statement," in The Johannesburg Salon, Vol. 9, *The Johannesburg Workshop in Theory and Criticism*, 2015: 7.

RMF specifically named the White Privilege Project as a model ally, a separate group that aimed to generate consciousness among white students and solidarity with the RMF movement. But clearly the participation of such groups was acceptable in so far as "participation in radical action" was "taking place on [RMF's] terms."[274] Here, the group marked out one connection between the symbolic and policy demands: it was insufficient to frame their work as being only about ending oppression of Black people, as this only returned white participants to "the days of the Noble Savage… Blacks do not need a go-between in this struggle for their own emancipation."[275] Rather, RMF accepted white participation that was consistent with acting "in unity to bring about our collective liberation," where the social order that subordinates Blackness restricts the humanity for everyone.[276] The "humanity" performed under whiteness relies on the violent negation of racial others' to live well. But even this celebration of possible solidarity written into the foundational document, however, did not prevent many white participants from abandoning the work during the earliest stages.[277]

In a related vein, the RMF declaration claimed "intersectionality" as their approach to political analysis. RMF acknowledged that their campaign could not only be attentive to how Rhodes stands in for antiblackness. Instead, they also paid attention to how Blackness operates through

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[274] RMF, again, turns to Steve Biko on the problem of the "white liberal" and the practicality of organizing in South Africa. In order to make clear there is no animosity intended by which racial structures of the movement, RMF cites Biko's thinking on Black consciousness as a necessary feature of democratic equality: "all true [white] liberals must realize that the place for their fight for justice is within their white society… therefore they must fight for their own freedom and not that of the nebulous 'they' with whom they can hardly claim identification."

[275] Quoting Steve Biko's "Black Souls in White Skins?" in UCT Rhodes Must Fall Mission Statement," in The Johannesburg Salon, Vol. 9, *The Johannesburg Workshop in Theory and Criticism*, 2015: 6.

[276] UCT Rhodes Must Fall Mission Statement," in The Johannesburg Salon, Vol. 9, *The Johannesburg Workshop in Theory and Criticism*, 2015: 6.

[277] In a series of interviews collected at UCT, some white allies felt the movement unfairly targeted white people as a group, rather than acknowledging white individual political actions; others saw the group's disruptive tactics as unnecessarily hostile and even dangerous for the university community. Laura Isdahl, "Student Protests at UCT: An Analysis of UCT Community's Perspectives of Tactics Used in the Fallist Movement," *Independent Study Project Collection*, 2365: 21-22.

gender, sexuality, and able-bodiedness, and class.[278] While RMF's early demands hinted at what this

meant practically, the founding document did not explicitly spell out the experiences of gender or

sexuality that would define intra-movement conflict later. Examples of these internal tensions

included proposing and implementing an "Intersectionality Auditing Committee" (IAC) by

participants who join RMF as members of South African Young Feminist Activists. As Kealeboga

Ramaru explains, the IAC was part of the discussions during the Bremner Occupation where Black

feminists "asserted [their] presence in the space" in order to form it as "a place of refuge for the

knowledge and discussions rejected by a University centered on colonial knowledge and thinking."

However, the proposal left some Black men associated with Pan-Africanist organizing at UCT

feeling RMF was "claimed…by 'petty gender issues.'"[279] These tensions did not go away, but rather

led to a public counter-demonstrations against RMF from those within its own ranks. A group of

Black women and Black trans fallists expelled male participants from the Azania House in order to

"foreground accountability" on the on-going question of sexual oppression.[280] This group leading

this occupation issued a statement that traced the internal dynamics of the group, including the

negligence towards the IAC, back to the significance of the group's commitment to intersectionality:

> An intersectional approach entails viewing our blackness as part of an interconnected system
> of oppression… This lens holds us accountable to the notion that only identity markers are
> not simply add-ons to the battle against institutional racism, but are an integral part of the

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[278] It cannot be overlooked that the opening statement draws in the work of Yvette Abrahams, a prominent faculty member of UCT's Women and Gender Studies Department. Her definition of racism that emphasizes the asymmetries of power critical to labeling someone "racist" as opposed to someone who is disempowered yet holds "counter values which despise racists" is drawn from a chapter published on African womanism entitled "We're Here Because We're Here: Speaking African Womanism," emphasizing the theoretical and practical scandal and joys of Black women persisting and speaking from within the heart of African liberation. Recalling Abrahams, a professor in Women and Gender Studies who arrested by the apartheid regime for her participation in the Black Consciousness Movement, is also to invoke the political problem of practicing such intersectionality as a political movement.
[279] The IAC collapsed later than year with limited support and conflicting views about what its purpose would be within and beyond the internal workings of RMF. Ramaru 152-153.
[280] The RMF Facebook page posted a declaration from the "trans womxn, cis womxn and non-binary people of Rhodes Must Fall," who narrated continued embrace of their labor as organizers but silencing of their voicing of oppression as "matters to be dealt with later." Ramaru 153-155; UCT Rhodes Must Fall, Facebook post, January 21, 2016.

institutional issues that this movement seeks to challenge… No one should have to choose between their struggles.[281]

Thus, while many leaders were focused on fighting with police or campus security as the primary means of decolonizing the university,[282] significant parts of the movement were committed to the messier work of thinking practically about the organizing problems that emerge from bridging intersectional analysis with institutional transformation.

Third, RMF built from Rhodes' removal key interventions to target the psychic life of colonial power as an impediment to democratic self-regard. RMF states that "at the root of this struggle is the dehumanization of Black people at UCT." The critical flow of the movement must go through "the Black voices and Black pain that have been continuously ignored and silenced." But, student activists who were part of the earliest efforts to shape the RMF movement made clear that "Black pain" is not fully reducible to philosophies of Black Consciousness or Biko's ideas on "political Blackness." Biko's philosophy of Black Consciousness clarified the political stakes of Black people leading in the struggle to articulate their shared sense of oppression emanates from "the blackness of their skin," as a way to produce freedom that allows "the ability to define oneself with one's possibilities held back not by the power of the other people over one but only by one's relations to God and to natural surroundings…in other words, make [Black people's] freedom real by whatever he deems fit."[283] And as Maxwele's description of the poo protest attests, this Black Consciousness philosophy is critical to RMF's approach to Black pain.[284] But Black pain, particularly

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[281] UCT Rhodes Must Fall, Facebook, January 21, 2016.

[282] Wanelisa Xaba, "Challenging Fanon: A Black Radical Feminist Perspective on Violence and the Fees Must Fall Movement," *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity* 31(3-4): 100-101.

[283] Biko 92.

[284] To return to Maxwele, his description of Black pain echoes this decolonial project. He suggests that his political grievances demanded a kind of symbolic target fitting to both protest against white domination, but also to illuminated the "life of a black person in [South Africa]" as one "contaminated with a nervous condition" that often lead to premature death and "madness." The nervous condition is one that is shared widely, Maxwele insists, but is not specific to UCT, and necessitated a kind of "psychological fight with the white liberals that were keeping

as an expressive mode of political affiliation and identification, seems to have emerged during the

shared conversations and experiences of occupying Bremner.[285] As one fallist put it, Black pain is

> not pathology, it is our lived experience. The real pathology is the psychology of racist
> whites in South Africa, which, relies on certain racial frameworks created by the polarity of
> our skin color. What arises out of this polarity is a need to alleviate internal fears present in
> white racist psychology and justify the spatial oppression of Black people—it arises from a
> fabricated brew of darkness, otherness, and desire.[286]

In this sense, the claim on Black pain bridges the notion of self-determination or the ability to claim

one's own sense of how to live well with the psychic dynamics that continue to define racial

subordination in South Africa. Rather than a pathology of self-doubt or self-destruction, Black pain

names its origins in the social order of race as it entangles white subjects into this "brew of darkness,

otherness, and desire" to undercut Black political participation.[287] All of these dynamics contribute

to undermining possibilities of Black self-regard. So, Black Consciousness and Black pain together

sketch the political process of initiating political change to the racial order by focusing on this

constellation of psychic holds on Black citizens' sense of self-determination.

This commitment to centering Black pain shaped strategic decisions and conflict within the

early group discussions of RMF. While some organizers found white participation an impediment to

effective organizing, others saw its potential.[288] A commitment to Black-led organizing with limited

white involvement offers a "disobedient" praxis contrary to the "rainbow nation ideals for the

transition to democracy."[289] Rather than treating asymmetrical participation as the fundamental logic

that should be disrupted, the disobedience here is that racial oppression is about more than

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Rhodes as the face of the university." Thus, the ideological function of Rhodes' falling beings to speak to the
complexity of "structures" scheduled to fall. Maxwele "Black Pain."

[285] Ahmed, "The Rise of Fallism," 118.

[286] Khumo Sebambo, "Azania House as a Symbol of the Black Imagination," in The Johannesburg Salon, Vol. 9,
The Johannesburg Workshop in Theory and Criticism, 2015: 108-109.

[287] Sebambo 109.

[288] Ahmed, "Rise of Fallism" 122-124.

[289] Ahmed, "Rise of Fallism," 122.

inequality; coloniality attacks the humanity of Black people. While several scholars have criticized

this appeal to Black pain as essentialist or self-defeating,[290] white and Black organizers noted in

interviews that the "awkwardness" in the early stages made for stronger commitments to solidarity.

Adding layers of decolonial analysis to arguments about equality and freedom allowed RMF

organizers to clearly make decolonizing the university about more than institutional equality. RMF's

mission was to produce institutions that were committed to embracing all humans in their work of

living, breathing, and fighting for a better world. By October 2015, when Fees Must Fall started to

take the movement towards a new focus, criticizing university fees as colonialist, Black-led

organizing prioritized framing universal higher education as about more than representation.

Instead, fallists promoted public education as a critical tool for self-articulation, allowing Black

communities to speak their own needs.

RMF thus framed its project as a decolonial one: an interrogation of ways in which Black

proximity to whiteness relies on physical and psychic structures of inferiority, which puts Black

bodies at risk for surviving such encounters. It bridged imagination and hurt, pain and assimilation,

as critical to articulating new social relations. Thus, the focus of Black pain required attending to the

full range of what it means to be human and what must be reconfigured as a condition for

democratic notions of common good.

III. b. Contesting (Colonial) Monuments in South Africa

So if the Rhodes monument was "the natural starting point of this movement" according to

RMF, how does this political challenge of starting at a *monument* relate to reconfiguring the common

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[290] Two voices that have given reasonable criticisms of the emphasis on pain as category that is extremely limiting in the task of imagining collective liberation of decolonization are Achille Mbembe, "Exorcise Our White Ghost," *City Paper*, September 22, 2015: https://www.news24.com/citypress/voices/exorcise-our-white-ghosts-20150918; and Francis B. Nyamnjoh, *#RhodesMustFall: Nibbling at Resilient Colonialism in South Africa* (Bamenda, Cameroon: Laanga Research and Publishing, 2016), 131-137.

good? RMF opposition to Rhodes at UCT links the protest to broader histories of racialization and institutionalized immobility in South Africa, but it focused their work on the operations of the university itself.[291] UCT and other South African universities continued to be tightly controlled institutions that were intellectually focused on building up the professional class and "inserting Black people into the existing [academic] social architecture" designed for maximizing social value.[292] Thus, RMF linked the disproportionate absence of Black people and the presumption that the "social architecture" of the university system would meet Black social and economic needs to the lack of transformation of post-apartheid citizenship.[293] This section will consider the intersecting histories of racialized political rule, the symbolic context of the monument in South Africa, and how the shortcomings of the post-apartheid turn to "living heritage" as public memory discourse failed to address colonial subjugation in the constitution of citizenship and the common good.

Racialized citizenship was a central technique of power in apartheid South Africa. Racial categories were used to control the mobility of Black and Colored workers and their access to civic standing; political and spatial segregation were reinforced by rigid categories of "Bantustan" geographies and tribal identity.[294] Mahmood Mamdani argues that in order to repel organized labor union resistance, apartheid's architects designed categories of racialization and tribe to operate in tandem. By dividing the native population through dispossession, indirect rule, and ossification of customary law, they established white settler populations as unified elites in opposition to the

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[291] As Hodgkinson and Melchiorre argued, in many post-colonial states, the university has served as both a training ground for national bureaucrats to flesh out these new political institutions and counter-elite voices honed to dispute the validity of such unifying projects. Dan Hodgkinson and Luke Melchiorre, "Student activism in an era of decolonization," *Africa*, 89(1), 4-6.

[292] Kelly Gillespie and Leigh-Ann Naidoo, "#MustFall: The South African Student Movement and the Politics of Time," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 118 (1): 191-192.

[293] Hodgkinson and Melchiorre 6.

[294] Allison Drew, "Introduction," in *South Africa's Radical Tradition: A Documentary History*, Vol. 2, ed. Allison Drew, (Cape Town: University of Cape Town, 1997), 29-30.

diffuse, conflictual boundaries between tribal spaces.[295] While institutions like the state, military and university system served to habituate white populations into a "culture of obedience" paired with incentives for "enjoying a safe, elite status," the Bantustan system of limited political autonomy "ensured a degree of Black allegiance to the regime by security civil jobs and… profitable patronage networks."[296] Thus, racialized immobility and division, paired with repressive security apparatus nurtured by Cold War anti-communism made mass resistance precarious.[297]

And as the apartheid state took shape, its symbolic architecture took on a complementary appearance. This is exemplified in the monumental constructions of the Voortrekker monument in Pretoria.[298] Albert Grundlingh describes the Voortrekker Monument as an influential monumental site meant to commemorate the mythologized 1838 settler journey of "the Great Trek" across South Africa. Grundlingh calls our attention to how the "cross-class ethnic mobilization" of Afrikaner nationalism in the Voortrekker Monument's design. Specifically the "spatial mastery" of light and time as design elements baked into the monument depict the Battle of Bloodriver (Ncome) as an epic battle returned to frequently in settler memory: "each year on December 16 [the date of the 1838 battle], a shaft of light shines through an aperture in the dome onto a marble memorial block inscribed with the words 'We for thee South Africa' in Afrikaans."[299] Bordering on kitsch, the monument reveals a consistent effort to turn the story of white domination into something that

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[295] Mamdani, *Neither Settler Nor Native: The Making and Unmaking of Permanent Minorities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), Ch. 3.

[296] Mihai 185-189.

[297] Mihai 193.

[298] These monuments do reflect distinctions between Afrikaner and English subjects and structures. Even as it opens to a host of contestations, the development of Afrikaner nationalism alongside the maintenance of colonial standing both lend to related forms of racialization with whiteness enshrining Euro-centric forms of monumentality.

[299] Albert Grundlingh, "A Cultural Conundrum? Old Monuments and New Regimes: The Voortrekker Monument as Symbol of Afrikaner Power in a Postapartheid South Africa," *Radical History Review* (81):97-99.

aligns easily with an "imaginative appropriation of the landscape" through architectural planning and design.[300]

This imaginative appropriation of the landscape evident in the Voortrekker monument is also visible in UCT's statue of Cecil Rhodes. The placement of Rhodes on university steps connected settler control of land to the social productions of knowledge. The Rhodes statue is part of the larger architectural vision of Herbert Baker, a 19th century architect, who was influential in shaping the commemorative "cult of Rhodes" as well as the urban design of Cape Town.[301] Baker describes his approach to architectural design as a mediation between local traditions and imperial ambitions. The use of stone creates "a metonymic association between settler identity and natural landscape; it suggests that a new national presence is being built out of the local."[302] Baker attempts to capture this aspect of Rhodes' colonial ambition, the "aggressive pursuit of material wealth and national glory," by binding together technological knowledge, expansionary conquest, and refined tastes of "white civilization."[303] Thus, Rhodes' statue provides aspiring colonizers with an "unequivocal roadmap" to claim themselves as superior beings emerging anew from the land.[304]

Though powerful, colonial architectures of land and knowledge require institutional support from civil society and the state to establish a shared public memory.[305] Together with governmental agencies and legal rules about how past and future memorializations would function, these architectural installations became part of larger mechanisms of legitimizing particular arrangements

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[300] Jeremy Foster, "Landscape, Character, and Analogical Imagination." In *Washed with Sun: Landscape and the Making of White South Africa* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh, 2008), 1.
[301] Britta Timm Knudsen and Casper Andersen, "Affective politics and colonial heritage: Rhodes Must Fall at UCT and Oxford," *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, *25*(3): 240-242.
[302] David Bunn, "Whited Sepulchers: On the Reluctance of Monuments," in *blank_____architecture: Apartheid and After* (Rotterdam, Netherlands: nai010 publishers, 1998), 5-6.
[303] Nyamnjoh 34-37.
[304] For further reflections on the ways in which monuments generate this kind of mimicry or constituents through their bodily presence/absence, see Derek Hook, "Monumental Spaces and the Uncanny," *Geoforum* 36(6): 688-704; Nyamnjoh 33.
[305] Jenny Wüstenberg, *Civil Society and Memory in Postwar Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 27-29.

of power.[306] In Cape Town, the construction and celebration of monumental figures like Rhodes dovetails with one of the earliest preservation efforts of the National Monument Council (NMC) as a bureaucratic engine for "monumentalizing [South Africa's] built environment…consciously or unconsciously, to reinforce white political strategies and to create a myth of white legitimacy in the region at the time that this was being most challenged by indigenous groups."[307] Since 1936, the NMC (formerly known as the Historical Monuments Commission), which was charged with extending state protection from "indiscriminate destruction" to "a wide range of artifacts, buildings and natural environments," preserved primarily white public architectural forms. The vast majority of those preservations occurred after 1970 and were primarily located in the Western Cape provinces.[308]

This sort of preservation operated in at least two ways to serve the ends of settler rule under apartheid. First, in what Ambe Njoh calls the "seductive powers of urban planning," colonial preservation of the built environment became a self-serving campaign of seemingly apolitical expertise that actually disparages, qualifies, and otherwise disregards "traditional construction practices" without creating significant opposition to the NMC's definition of "monument."[309] Further, this definition did not immediately dissolve upon the formal end of apartheid or the drafting of a post-colonial constitution. For Achille Mbembe, the "remains of the potentate are the signs of the physical and symbolic struggle directed against the colonized."[310] As infrastructure that "cannot be returned," these colonial statues, as well as buildings, roads, military camps, and train

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[306] Wüstenberg 28.

[307] Franco Frescura, "National or Nationalist? A Critique of the Monuments Council, 1936-1989" in *Proceedings of the National Urban Conservation Symposium* (Cape Town: Oakville Press, 1991), 19.

[308] Frescura 16-18. According to Frescura's calculations, only 3 percent of the total monuments marker for preservation reflect Black or indigenous cultural traditions.

[309] Ambe J. Njoh, "Urban planning as a tool of power and social control in colonial Africa," *Planning Perspectives 24* (3), 303.

[310] Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, trans. Laurent Dubois (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 126-128.

stations, become objects that perpetually "entangle body and matter" in a routinized, even

unconscious "symbolic economy…of gifts that cannot be reciprocated." In other words, the built

environment, the monuments and beyond, projects its own colonial worldview; this projection is not

only caricatures of settler origins or disparaging African histories. Instead, the built colonial

environment, for Mbembe, sets a trap for "ex-colonized" subjects where they experience their world

as constructed to make them feel impotent or incompetent to change their space, and then the built

environment provides itself as a model for how to "reclaim" control over the space: build more

barracks, statues, and asylums staffed by your own people. Rather than trying to reimagine the

world, build up new strategies of socializing and governing together, Mbembe sees this built

environment as a primary technology that leads the colonized to "stutter and falter" in their attempts

at using such spaces to enact new political identities.[311]

Second, the preservation of monuments also speaks to the dream of "achieving immortality"

as an effect of settler colonial visions of elimination of Native presence.[312] The built environment

created a "facsimile of European towns" that crowded out indigenous populations, although local

peoples made up critical parts of the town's labor. As Njoh argues, this kind of construction

"impresses upon the 'natives' that colonial authorities controlled an inordinate amount of resources,

which could be tapped for use in neutralizing any challenge to colonial rule."[313] The monumental

heart of colonial order, then, is "a world of statues…a world sure of itself" that relies on stoniness of

bridges, missionaries, and conquest to insist on the participation of all in its "superior"

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[311] Mbembe, *Critique*, 127.
[312] Frescura 13; As Patrick Wolfe argues, the logic of elimination is not meant exclusively as "summary liquidation" of Black communities, but instead "marks [a structure] whereby the native repressed continues to structure settler-colonial society," by monopolizing claims on permanence through historical reconstruction, city streets, or a host of other institutional constructions. Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8(4): 390, 396.
[313] Njoh 305, 308.

designs.[314] This permanence manifests geographically and psychically in the building of things meant to last well beyond the present, demanding acquiescence to a specific colonial regime but more subtly to a longer lasting habituation into colonial design. Thinking with Fanon, statues of settler heroes and industrious imperialists impose on colonial subjects an order "to remain in his place [eternally] and not overstep its limits" across time.[315]

This architectural language of coloniality extends beyond built environments into political questions of belonging, freedom, and beauty, which frames the critique offered by the fallists. "Rising levels of gentrification" and persistent "spatial apartheid" are as evident in the city of Cape Town as they are in the university.[316] Kealeboga Ramaru, fallist from UCT, declares that formerly white universities, like the University of Cape Town, are "safeguarding colonial and Western education…constructing a space for white men to center themselves as primary knowledge makers."[317] For Ramaru, the "systematic exclusion" was evident in persistent rebuffs of challenges to Eurocentric curriculum, minimal staff transformation, and a continued sense of "physical and existential exclusion" from the housing, cultural, and education aspects of campus life.[318]

However, the role of the built environment in memorializing colonialism and apartheid has not gone unrecognized in South Africa. In the transition from apartheid to a fuller democratic electorate, the African National Congress (ANC) intentionally developed institutions for redefining heritage and civic culture in ways that preserved the legacies of state violence, segregation, and immobility of Black people under white rule in South Africa. This preservation was meant to create a "living heritage," a set of places, public holidays, curriculum and monumental designs to guide a

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[314] Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth,* 51-52.
[315] Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth,* 52.
[316] Ramaru 148.
[317] Ramaru 148.
[318] Ramaru 148.

"nation reborn" to promote non-racialism and human rights. [319] While many African states removed monuments during formal decolonization, South Africa's negotiated transition to democratic rule prioritized public accountability for violations of human rights (e.g., Truth and Reconciliation Commission) over fighting to remove public art and memories of apartheid.[320]

On one hand, allowing colonial statues to remain may have represented a politically strategic necessity. While a limited number of statues were removed initially, most notably busts of H.F. Verwoerd in Bloemfontein and a variety of assembly halls, libraries, and various public places, several white political parties "warned that such iconoclasm stymied much-needed reconciliation."[321] At certain points in the transition to democracy, the African National Congress (ANC) was worried about the threat of prolonged military conflict with right-wing militia groups and white nationalist hold-outs. Avoiding monument removals may thus have been about avoiding "heated debate and [turning removed statues] into a rallying point for a defensive community."[322] Some limited removals of Verwoerd busts, a key architect of apartheid whose image was widely regarded as unfit for public display, did not lead to more removals.[323]

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[319] For examples of critical reflections on "living heritage" and the (lack of) public engagement with these commemorations: Daniel Herwitz. "Heritage and legacy in the South African State and University," in *The Politics of Heritage in Africa: Economies, Histories, and Infrastructures*, p. 37–49, ed. Derek R. Peterson, Kodzo Gavua, Ciraj Rassool (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Nora Greani, "Public Monuments in the Twenty-First Century: African Renaissance and New Heritage," *Cahiers d'études Africaines*, *227*(3); Sabine Marschall, "Targeting statues: Monument vandalism as an expression of sociopolitical protest in South Africa," *African Studies Review*, *60*(3), 203–219.

[320] Sabine Marschall, *Landscape of Memory: Commemorative Monuments, Memorials, and Public Statuary in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, (Leiden, The Netherlands: BRILL), 2009.

[321] Karel Anthonie Bakker and Liana Muller, "Intangible heritage and community identity in post-apartheid South Africa," *Museum International*, 62(1–2), 48–54.

[322] Marschall, *Landscape of Memory*, 142.

[323] The indelicate handling of one particular Verwoerd statue in Bloemfontein, which included Black onlookers celebrating and dancing on the statue and empty plinth, was criticized by numerous ANC leaders, including Nelson Mandela. As a result, larger scale monuments like the Voortrekker Monument or a more systematic removal of apartheid's cultural markers were never seriously considered. Marschall, *Landscapes*, 140-141; Ann Coombes, *History After Apartheid: Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 22.

On the other hand, the decision to reject monument removal as an approach to public memory suggested a deeper political value at play in the imagination of South African democracy. As early as 1991, the ANC as well as the Pan-Africanist Congress of Azania and the South African Communist Party were crafting cultural policy statements about how artistic or historical sites would be governed as public goods.[324] In the 1992 policy report entitled, "Ready to Govern: ANC Policy Guidelines for a Democratic South Africa," the ANC expressed that "heritage resources and facilities, including those previously neglected, should be popularized, preserved, democratized, be open and belong to all South Africans."[325] But the ANC made clear that their overarching concern to preserve the memorial landscape of South Africa, including symbols of apartheid, also included an "opposition to a radical iconoclasm" that would be inconsistent with "non-sectarian, humanist principles."[326] Nelson Mandela himself warned that "we must be able to channel our anger without doing injustices to other communities. Some of their heroes may be villains to us. And some of our heroes may be villains to them."[327]

The focus, instead, was on building new kinds of monuments, reconceptualizing the purpose or effect of what became popularly called "living heritage" and how such heritage sites might operate differently in building a new nation. Central to creating new heritage sites was a strong narrative of what made this place an "authentic" site for thinking about the new South Africa's national values. Authenticity of voice was presented by recollecting traditions excluded from previous iterations of public memory, or by finding ways of remembering those who suffered under white policing of specific places. This authenticity built further on being directly on top of or near

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[324] Marschall, *Landscapes*, 24-26.
[325] "Ready to Govern: ANC Policy Guidelines for a Democratic South Africa," *African National Congress*, adopted May 31, 1992.
[326] Marschall, *Landscapes*, 26.
[327] Elizabeth Rankin, "Creating/Curating Cultural Capital: Monuments and Museums for Post-Apartheid South Africa," *Humanities* 2 (2013): 73.

sites of past grievances, persuading its audiences of the real historical forces that threatened this place and may still threaten the present constitution without the audiences' active participation in civic life. This approach included an extensive, state-centric investment in the management of public representations of the past, both in developing intricate processes for new public memorials and evaluating the significance of art and culture to national identity.[328]

Robben Island, which became one of the first public commemorative sites to be opened after the 1994 democratic election of an ANC government, offers an illuminating example. While the island has a long history of colonial encounters between western settlers and various native communities, its salient history for the post-apartheid era was that it served as a place to jail and torture political prisoners and people convicted of crime. In 1997, Nelson Mandela delivered a speech about Robben Island on Heritage Day, a public holiday that replaced Shaka Day (the celebration of Zulu unity in southern Africa) with a celebration of the variety of traditions that make up South Africa's cultural milieu.[329] Mandela, one of Robben Island's most well-known prisoners, connected democratic aspirations and monument transformation in South Africa. Mandela noted the centrality of Robben Island to South Africa's new "collective heritage," a heritage defined by the "memory of political prisoners confined on this island…" These public memories, Mandela insisted, must inform the ideals of South Africa's new democracy so that the "concrete content" of its political commitments will respond to these painful pasts. The kind of responses that Mandela imagined from holding onto memories of political prisoners would include unrelenting support for anti-poverty measures, sharing in national resources more equitably, and rejecting all forms of racism

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[328] Marschall, *Landscape of Memory*, 34-40.
[329] Karpona Maroga, "The Poetics of Remembrance as Resistance: The Work of Sethembile Msezane," *Artthrob*, February 27, 2017: https://artthrob.co.za/2017/02/27/the-poetics-of-remembrance-as-resistance-the-work-of-sethembile-msezane/

in order to clear the way so that all may be included in political life.[330] Mandela signaled the

importance of spatial reconstruction to articulating a more democratic public memory, one that is

not only shared by Black citizens but defines a broad commitment to non-racialism.[331] Mandela and

other leaders thus initiated a process of reforming public memory that aimed to link aspirational

symbols of non-racialism to state policies of democratic transition.

But even with these aspirations, the "post-apartheid heritage complex" carried on troubling

conventions that were short-circuited by the unacknowledged replication of prior governing

patterns. Sipokazi Madida describes the "post-apartheid heritage complex" as a "conceptual

deconstruction of the existing marble, concrete, steel, and bronze blocks and structures" that

represent apartheid-era monumental technologies and an investment in these "sites" as a gesture

towards an "openness and versatile utility." But paradoxically, this reinterpretation empowered state

bureaucratic oversight to the extent that public memory resembled a process of procurement or

technocratic evaluation, which is meaningfully distant from other forms of public memory that

speak to those imaginative forms of remembrance that sustain popular struggles against

oppression.[332] This approach addresses the "taunting presence of the old in the monumental

landscape," as a way of speaking back to the past, or as Sabine Marschall puts it, "juxtaposing" the

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[330] Address by President Mandela on Heritage Day, September 24, 1997
https://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/address-president-mandela-heritage-day-robben-island-24-september-1997.
[331] Mandela mentioned these new monumental projects, such as Sharpeville Memorial, the Hector Pieterson Memorial and Museum in Soweto, or the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg. Mandela saw these efforts as inseparable from the Constitution and Bill of Rights in terms of their foundational significance. Echoing Mandela on the aspirations of the monumental, Ahmed Karthrada's speech at the opening of the Robben Island exhibits speaks also to what binds these two visions of racial transformation and social citizenship: an appeal to the transcendence of this kind of monument, which re-defines South African futures: "we will not want Robben Island to be a monument of our hardship and suffering. We would want it to be a monument reflecting the triumph of the human spirit over forces of evil… a triumph of non-racialism over bigotry and intolerance; a triumph of the new South Africa over the old."
[332] Sipokazi Madida, "Troubling Statues: A Symptom of a Complex Heritage Complex," in *Exchanging Symbols: Monuments and Memorials in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, ed. Anitra Nettleton and Mathias Alubafi Fubah, (Stellenbosch: African Sun Media, 2019), 101, 104.

present with "settler heritage."[333] One of the liabilities of this approach is that new memorials tend to reproduce "historical binaries…based on ideas of racial difference and timeless African cultures and traditions."[334] In an effort to find pasts that can subvert settler claims on land, post-apartheid monuments may actually rely on "forms of romance that fed into the settler notions of imperial conquest and *erfenis* (inheritance)."[335] This reliance clarifies fallism's critique of official public memory. Whereas the post-apartheid monument depended on expressing the historical injustice of the past as proof of that the present political regime has established itself as an effective body for achieving broad-based social progress, fallism embraced the creative self-affirmation that comes from radically rejecting the past as a way to emphasizes that the present regime's progress will reproduce apartheid's hierarchies in new forms because of its unwillingness to directly attack such legacies of colonialism.

Some scholars argue that this continuity between old and new monuments allows statues like Rhodes to *become* removable because they are seen as out of place with progressive narratives authored by present authorities.[336] State power, then, effectively "demythologizes" these architectural forms of apartheid, stripping them of their ideological force and allowing them to be easily disposed.[337] However, this suggests an inflated sense of the state's ability to declare certain historical narratives moot or irrelevant. This seems to serve not only state interests in promoting their own work as distant from the past, but also the international credibility to be seen as a defender of *human* heritage. As Marschall recounts, "respecting the symbolic markers of the old order" created an international signal, both to the wider network of "heritage experts" through UNESCO and other

[333] Madida 110; Marschall, *Landscape of Memory*, 34
[334] Madida 104.
[335] Madida 110.
[336] Mathias Alubafi Fubah and Catherine Ndinda, "Struggle Heroes and Heroines Statues and Monuments in Tshwane, South Africa," in *Exchanging Symbols: Monuments and Memorials in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, ed. Anitra Nettleton and Mathias Alubafi Fubah (Stellenbosch: African Sun Media, 2019), 233.
[337] Fubah and Ndinda 233.

museum consultation groups, but also hubs of global capital, that the spirit of reconciliation would prevail over reclamation and dismantling of art and property.[338] While the conservation of historical spaces that document the legacies of violence may guard against future oppression, such conservation ideals cannot be easily disentangled from arguments that foreclose "radical iconoclastic policy" because it may create hostility that is socially or economically unsustainable.[339] Fallism aimed to uncover the ways in which ending colonial domination in South Africa did not take on the prioritization of premature reconciliation and global integration over self-determination and, more specifically, re-asserting Black humanity. Thus, the call to use the past as a tool to "move on" or to think of the past "as a foreign country" may tolerate reactionary kitsch of Voortrekker or Rhodes as difficult but impotent monuments;[340] but such forms of historical reconstruction may underestimate how resilient the logic of colonialism remains.

III. c. Remembering Democracy's Insurgency through Fallism

As explored above, "the monument" in South Africa's political vernacular is a figure of the settler-colonial order, which crystalized under apartheid and continues to shape lives of Black communities in South Africa. And at the same time, the monument serves as a symbolic vehicle during the post-apartheid era for the larger project of rearticulating democratic power in the register of non-racialism and international development. In this sense, how does fallism's connection between the fall of the Rhodes monument and its other contentions about the present regime compare with other political struggles in South Africa?

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[338] Marschall, *Landscape*, 30-31; Sam Tenorio, "White Carceral Geographies," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 121(3).
[339] Such was the case in neighboring Namibia, which opted for street renamings and colonial reinterpretations of select monuments, which contrasts with Zimbabwe which pursued a much more aggressive removal of colonial monuments following formal decolonization. Marschall, *Landscape*, 31.
[340] Nyamnjoh 189-191.

One way of addressing this question is to examine how fallism contested the monument as an unrepresentative and harmful product of colonial entrenchment. But rather than exploring more representative or less harmful commemorations, fallism's political vision prioritized the significance of "the fall" itself. This section considers what RMF's embrace of "the fall" as a political vernacular signals for its politics more generally. While RMF resembles other insurgent groups' suspicion of formal institutional practices of liberal democracy, their attention to the university bridges more confrontational tactics with embracing betrayal as a productive affective-aesthetic guide for sustaining broader commitments to institutional transformation.

RMF's earliest actions were primarily focused on UCT's hesitance to remove the Rhodes monument in 2015. But this movement both spread and adapted over the next 12 to 18 months, moving to other university campuses and into the streets and administrative buildings.[341] Between April and August 2015, student groups at University of Stellenbosch and University of Witwatersrand (Wits) clashed with university officials and security forces over other instances of "empty promises and hollow commitments."[342] Specifically, groups of workers, including members of the National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU) and representatives from campus security workers, and students at those places demanded fulfillment of what RMF emphasized beyond the statue: ending outsourcing campus labor, respecting workers' rights, and ending exclusionary cultures around Black students and faculty.[343] Conflicts at Tshwane University

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[341] It is worth being clear that RMF and FMF are analytically distinct and account for different student leadership and objectives. But, my claim is that we can trace their commitment to a conception of public memory, which is not only about historical representations but also how one's temporal consciousness produces certain forms of contentious encounters. So, the overlap in language used to explain, predict, or inform their political fight seems to be thick enough to connect these two related movements.

[342] Susan Booysen and Kuda Bandama, "Annotated Timeline of the #FeesMustFall Revolt, 2015-2016," in *Fees Must Fall: Student Revolt, Decolonization and Governance in South Africa*, ed. Susan Booyseen. (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2016), 319-320.

[343] Kayum Ahmed, "On Black Pain/Black Liberation and the Rise of Fallism," *Blog of the American Philosophical Association*, March 19, 2019: https://blog.apaonline.org/2019/03/19/on-black-pain-black-liberation-and-the-rise-of-fallism/

of Technology and Wits led to fights about student punishment for protesting, contested student government elections, and a series of fires set in buildings and police vehicles.[344] While some of the contention between activist students and university management was not new, the atmosphere changed after Rhodes fell.[345]

The most visible changes occurred at UCT and Wits. At a meeting in early October 2015, the Wits student council deliberated over whether to endorse fee increases proposed by the university. Those gathering under the "must fall" banner at Wits saw the council's acceptance of such increases as a betrayal of the Students' Representative Council (SRC), the highest official decision-making student body in the university, that seemed to be too comfortable with endorsing university policies or limitations on the scope of students' protest.[346] Across Wits, UCT and several other universities, fallists launched an October 6 campaign, with nearly 2000 participants at Wits and over 300 at UCT, that became the first moment where thousands participated in walk-outs and delivered their draft of the "Worker's Charter" to university management.[347] While fallists were working out what to do next, they decided to call for an end to negotiations at Wits, which was followed by barricades, road blocks, and building occupations to halt the regular operation of the university starting on October 14.[348] By October 19, #FeesMustFall (FMF) became the banner for a new round of occupations and tactical use of fire against property. While security forces were

[344] Booysen and Bandama 319.

[345] Booysen and Bandama 320.

[346] https://uct.ac.za/dsa/student-development-student-governance/students-representative-council-src#:~:text=in%20the%20university.-
,The%20Students%27%20Representative%20Council%20(SRC)%20is%20the%20highest%20decision,the%20University%20of%20Cape%20Town.

[347] Chikane 149-150; The Charter demanded better compensation and protection for workers, as well as prioritizing their well-being as a foundational premise on which to imagine the University's role in reshaping society: "The university is part of the public sector. The public sector must be about what people need. The public sector today can be like seeds of a different future – a future where everything is collectively owned and organized under workers and community control according to what people need."
http://witsworkerssolidaritycommittee.blogspot.com/2015/10/university-workers-charter.html

[348] Booysen and Bandama 320.

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already mobilized at many universities, particularly historically Black universities, these FMF protests

led to new waves of arrests, rubber bullets, and police lines charging into protesting students. After

several days of skirmishes, students planned a march on parliament on October 21 that was met

with tear gas and riot police. On October 23, the Education Department signaled its willingness to

freeze increases in tuition for 2016, but neglected questions of free education, worker protection or

policing reform.[349]

The tide of student and worker protests that led from the mass demonstrations at

universities to the steps of government was awash with signs that fees must fall, signaling the power

of remembering the struggle over Rhodes. But its iteration here suggests there is another kind of

affective-aesthetic framework developing through this public memory of monument removal: a

means of accessing broadly held senses of betrayal to bond commitments to other projects of

institutional transformation.[350] One activist illuminated these connections: "You cannot separate

high fees from…mistreatment of black academics, from naming a university after a murderer. All of

these things are the colony, right? And that's what's happening right now… All these things are

linked because they are rejecting the colony."[351] Reworking the colony does not seem to be focused

on identifying an alien occupying force. Instead, rejecting the colony is about accessing how the

failures for the present government to continue striving to unravel the lingering logics of domination

that persist from colonialism. This sliding temporal notion clarifies how failure informs the fallists'

sense of betrayal, where the present does not live up to the dreams that were used to gain the

admiration and hope for the future, funds a wide range of disruptions that come under the banner

of fallism. This is not primarily about how fallism justifies disruption as legitimate or ethically

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[349] Simon Allison, "South African Students Score Tuition Fee Protest Victory," *The Guardian*, October 23, 2015: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/23/south-african-students-protest-pretoria-tuition-fees-rise
[350] Chikane 180-186.
[351] Interviewing Khanyisha Nomoyi, "Shutting Down the Rainbow Nation: #FeesMustFall," *Africa Is a Country TV* October 25, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ksgrJyOrd7A.

consistent. Rather, fallism's invocations of betrayal outline the need for new images that can

productively rework what constitutes democratic living. As one activist proclaimed, "The power

struggle, it's so imbalanced that the people find new ways to communicate their message."[352] Fallism

sees value in non-cooperative disruption as a critical approach to contemporary constitutional

democracy in South Africa: as a signal for rejecting the colonial order that functions within South

Africa's political culture and as an image of democratic power that can reimagine where power

resides in an affective-aesthetic register.

On one level, fallism connects its disruptive tactics to the coloniality of race. Kayum Ahmed

points out that disruption emerges out of the fallists' ideological skepticism with regard to human

rights.[353] Articulating the work of fallism as beginning from Black pain recognizes that appeals to

universal rights or other limits on state power are often only used to discredit protest or narrow the

scope of political contestation.[354] Thus, pain and disruption are both related to the alienation Black

students and workers experienced at UCT and to the forms of contention (e.g., protests, marches,

petitions versus occupations and property destruction) designed to gain concessions from university

managers.[355] As one fallist put it, student activism embraces disruption in order to focus their

protest both on their institutional demands as well as the broader logic that underlies such demands:

the need for time to address colonial domination and the persistence of such domination that

continues to manifest in democratic rule. Julie Nxadi states that "colonialism really set the clock" of

state responses to protest: "It's Black bodies, it's danger, it's destroy." [356] In response, the fallists

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[352] Interviewing Julie Nxadi, "Shutting Down the Rainbow Nation: #FeesMustFall," *Africa Is a Country TV* October 25, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ksgrJyOrd7A.

[353] A. Kayum Ahmed, "#RhodesMustFall: Decolonization, Praxis, and Disruption," *Journal of Comparative and International Higher Education* 9 (2017): 8.

[354] Ahmed, "#RhodesMustFall," 9-10.

[355] Ahmed, "#RhodesMustFall," 9-10.

[356] Interviewing Julie Nxadi, "Shutting Down the Rainbow Nation: #FeesMustFall," *Africa Is a Country TV*, October 25, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ksgrJyOrd7A.

embrace the contentiousness of time in democratic politics: if "the excuse [by administrators] is that there is no time, no space" to negotiate the structures of education and access, then "OK, let's paralyze everything else so that there's nothing but time and space. The [vice-chancellors] isn't doing anything except panicking." The dismissal of fallist protests as ineffectual or undisciplined thus reflects continuities between colonial legacies of unresponsiveness and contemporary bureaucratization of democratic politics. In the words of Sheldon Wolin, "institutionalization marks the attenuation of democracy: leaders begin to appear, hierarchies develop; experts of one kind or another cluster around the centers of decisions… Democracy thus seems destined to be a moment rather than a form."[357] Fallism enacts Sheldon Wolin's account of fugitive democracy by connecting their impatient time to the occupation of space.[358]

While disruption can be a useful tactic to put pressure on institutional leaders to act or make concessions on access to resources, fallism also draws out affective and other expressive means of articulating its sense of political identity. Fallism attaches affective-aesthetic meaning to disruption in relation to the future-oriented language of the "rainbow nation;" in this sense, fallism emphasizes its own political identity as one defined by embodiments of both immediacy and waiting: a way to physically practice their demands that creates space for sitting, talking, and planning how to proceed. Such a grinding tactic empowers its practitioners to feel as if their experiences of the failures of the past can guide their reflections, sturdy their courage to reject what appears before them as the "gift" of being born-free, and find new hopefulness in struggle across time.[359] In tracing the escalations in

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[357] Sheldon Wolin, "Fugitive Democracy," *Constellations* 1(1): 19.
[358] Wolin 23.
[359] "Born-frees are a generation of South Africans who are indentured to the rainbow nation motif. Their existence is meant not only to maintain this motif but unconditionally accept that the injustice of the past has primarily been erased due to the democratic dispensation achieved in 1994 and the process undertaken by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 1996. It is a wishful idea that is imposed on young people who live in a post-1994/post-apartheid society. It's not enforced enthrallment, but it is institutionalized into our society. We are, after all, Mandela's children and have been handed the torch to continue his legacy." Chikane 7.

police repression, from the murder of striking miners at Marikana in 2012 to the use of force against students protesting for free education in 2015, student-author Malaika Wa Azania reiterates how the "excessive violence…breaks my heart" as the promise of democratic South Africa "increasingly resembles, and is shaping itself like the apartheid government."[360] Wa Azania echoes Phulma Gqola in her assessment that the state recuperations of colonial power are concealed by the affective structures that are implied by the "rainbow nation" as a public metaphor.[361] Filtering the hard-fought successes of constitutional equalities alongside cronyism and crackdowns on dissent through the translucent lights of rainbowism underscores how the "new South Africa" succeeds as "an antidote to colonialist ways of definition, [but] also threatens rigorous examination of our entanglements in difference and power."[362] The uses of repression against democratic claims of students, for Wa Azania, raises constitutive concerns about what this legacy of transformation might actually mean: "the silencing technique [of police repression] is an apartheid technique… What kind of country is [the present regime] building by bringing back the same thing, using it against students fighting for a just cause?" Wa Azania gives voice to the distance between post-apartheid visions and the stark realities that produce broken hearts, or as another fallist put it, pervasive "exhaustion." Feelings of betrayal, then, guide participants to make connections, examine political institutions more carefully, as well as access what remains of their own hopes. The demands that even hopeful aspirations once lauded as examples of successful transformation must fall makes clear the depth of betrayal behind the desire to speak the needs of the present. One student's protest sign read, "Our parents were sold dreams in 1994. We are just here to get a refund"; while another sign directed at the chamber of parliament simply reads: "fuck your rainbow nation."

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[360] Africa Is a Country TV, "Shutting Down the Rainbow Nation: #FeesMustFall," October 25, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ksgrJyOrd7A.

[361] Phumla Gqola, "Defining People: Analyzing Power, Language, and Representation in Metaphors of the New South Africa," *Transformation* 47 (2001): 103.

[362] Gqola, "Defining People", 104.

To examine how these appeals to betrayal and disruption matter for fallism's political vision, we can turn to other strands of South African political opposition within post-apartheid imaginaries. Fallists share with these insurgent traditions critiques of reducing state spending on public resources, like education or electricity infrastructure, and of turning the ANC's heritage as a liberation movement into a justification for all sorts of neoliberal reforms of the South African economy, rather than pursuing nationalization or other strategies of economic development..[363] As fallists eschewed traditional party structures, they invoked what sociologists and political scientists might call "insurgent" politics, a genre of resistance defined by pushing back on the liberal procedures of citizenship and rejecting abstract universal values as a basis for political contestation.[364] While some forms of "insurgent" politics carry specific ideological labels, the term used here is meant to compare political movements that attempt to operate outside of formal political institutions. Thus, fallism would fit a kind of left "insurgent" politics, which represents a wide range of South African political movements after the end of apartheid, reflecting an "alternative lineage" of popular contestation to racial hierarchy and global capitalism, demystifying the "break" in social conditions before and after 1994.

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[363] Leigh-Ann Naidoo, "Contemporary Student Politics in South Africa," in *Students Must Rise: Youth struggle in South Africa Before and Beyond Soweto '76,* ed. Anne Heffernan and Noor Nieftagodien, (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2016).

[364] The concept of "insurgent" citizenship, liberation, or democracy, refers to a distinctive approach to the political. At a surface level, the "insurgent" represents a contestation of the formal processes designated for political action, whether the party structures or procedures for "registering" protest. Thus, insurgent politics seems to differ in that its objectives are not about representation or access to power, but also fighting against institutions, norms, or laws that foreclose, ignore, or delegitimize a more capacious, more volatile means of generating social power. James Holston offers an influential account of "insurgent citizenship" where insurgency "describes a process that is an acting counter, a counter-politics, that destabilizes the present and renders it fragile, defamiliarizing the coherence with which it usually presents itself." Holston emphasizes insurgency's temporal aspects claiming it is "not a top-down imposition of an already scripted future," but rather describes political action that "bubbles up from the past… In this view, the present is like a bog: leaky, full of holes, gaps, contradictions and misunderstandings." [say more to elaborate what this temporal vision means, try to address the problem of "breaking" with the past and new definitions of politics… the problem is that the channels of power are much more durable, much more consistent across time, even if the faces and policies differ]. I argue this "leakiness" helps to situate the psychic leverage fallism hopes to contribute, in their political-aesthetic attunements of their tactics to other fruitful versions of democratic insurgent politics. James Holston, *Insurgent Citizenship: Disjunctions of Democracy and Modernity in Brazil* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 34.

The "post" of post-apartheid signals "ambivalent sensibilities" for the cultural productions and habits of public memory, even if the juridical or institutional voices insist that the "past is a foreign land."[365] These left "insurgent" movements in South Africa tend to protests over "squatter" protections or service delivery issues that often lead to blockades, occupations, disruptions of public proceedings, or informal means by which people get their basic needs met (e.g., hacking electrical system, water or other public commodities, protection of shacks from land developers).[366] While many of these movements are successful at protecting the service or need sought, either by direct action or forcing responsiveness from local ANC branches, it is harder to sustain political movements that focus on structural reform where the limited chances of success are compounded by always being delayed.[367]

These insurgent movements, in so far as they reject institutional or political conventions about what counts as proper political action, do not necessarily reflect social fragmentation; they cultivate conditions under which the common good is contested and reconfigured. Julian Brown

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[365] Tiffany Willoughby-Herard, Derilene Marco, and Abebe Zegeye, "This Country is Not My Body: Caricatures, Shreds, Still Here, Black Feminist and Women of Color Feminist Approaches to the Study of Culture Twenty Six Years after 1994," in *Sasinda Futhi Seselapha: Black Feminist Approaches to Cultural Studies in South Africa's Twenty-Five Years Since 1994*, ed. Derilene Marco, Tiffany Willoughby-Herard, and Abebe Zegeye (Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 2021), 2.

[366] One example that ties together many of these themes is Anna-Marie Makhulu, *Making Freedom: Apartheid, Squatter Politics, and the Struggle for Home* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015).

[367] For example, Malose Langa and Karl von Holdt's study of a local eruption of protest action over misallocations of public funds revealed that while the ANC reproduces its "centralized control and technocratic domination" through localized networks of patronage and absorbing protestors into its bureaucratic structure. Langa and von Holdt argue that this antagonistic mass mobilization is still able to "protest and confront the police from within the ANC, appropriating the ANC to articulate their own grievance," even though… Fiona Anciano argues that while organization like the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee offer informative channels to "develop citizenship skills that can be used to deepen participatory democracy," there is often a disconnect between people "joining the movement to obtain assistance with service delivery issues" and desiring "broader economic reform… far removed from the everyday realities of Sowetans." Malose Langa and Karl von Holdt, "Insurgent Citizenship, Class Formation and the Dual Nature of a Community Protest," *Contesting Transformation: Popular Resistance in Twenty-First Century South Africa*, ed. Marcelle C. Dawson, and Luke Sinwell, (New York: Pluto Press, 2014), 80–100; Fiona Anciano, "Agents of Change? Reflecting on the Impact of Social Movements in Post-Apartheid South Africa," in *Contesting Transformation: Popular Resistance in Twenty-First Century South Africa*, ed. Marcelle C. Dawson, and Luke Sinwell, (New York: Pluto Press, 2014), 160, 151; Francis O'Connor, "The Marikana Massacre and Labor Protest in South Africa," in *Global Diffusion of Protest: Riding the Protest Wave in the Neoliberal Crisis*, ed. Donatella della Porta, (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Amsterdam University Press, 2017).

reads such protests as symptomatic of failures of the state to generate sufficient avenues for participatory inclusion or "developmental local government."[368] Yet Brown does not suggest that these protests are inviting technocratic problem-solving; rather, protest is a reliable form "of political activity that is most likely to open up new possibilities for action on the part of the state."[369] In this sense, protest aims to pose "a broad challenge to the distribution of authority and material goods within an unequal political society."[370] Brown's diagnosis proposes that these protests in South Africa form an "insurgent" citizenship, a loosely organized yet engaged public body that seeks to open up new channels for politics that are currently foreclosed by the state's annexation of the space to speak on behalf of its population. In a sense, fallism represents some of the same ambiguities as other forms of insurgent politics in that some of its disruptive projects were susceptible to losing support as efforts shifted to developing more concerted efforts at broad social transformation.

And yet, fallism did generate a useful language for capturing a public memory of the dreams for broad social transformation. "Must Fall" established projects that depended on working collectively without trying to make everything fit into pre-formed commitments to unity. Recalling Rhodes "falling" and the shutting down of University of Witwatersrand as a means of making fees "fall" illuminates what Jason Frank refers to as visualizing "the people as a collective actor… [mediating] the people's relationship to their own political empowerment." [371] In this sense, the falling of Rhodes becomes a point of inspiration because it shows up in public as a vernacular of what kind of transformation many Black students and South Africans want to see. But the falling

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[368] Brown, *South Africa's Insurgent Citizens*, 17.

[369] Brown, *South Africa's Insurgent Citizens*, 19.

[370] Brown, *South Africa's Insurgent Citizens*, 20.

[371] More broadly the aesthetic problem refers to a variation of the paradox of democratic sovereignty, where determining the identity of the sovereign people required for democratic rule cannot be determined democratically. For Frank, the aesthetic problem of such a paradox is related to "popular manifestation," meaning how do people appear, act, and show themselves to be "part of and act as the people" Jason Frank, *The Democratic Sublime: On Aesthetics and Popular Assembly* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 24.

monument as inspiring rhetoric derives its force from the fact that "falling" cannot fully appear in any one place; instead it serves as a reminder of what it means for the people to dictate the terms by which they are governed. In other words, monumental falling demands not only that Rhodes come down, but rather to bear witness to how a public institution, like the university, can be a changed to reflect the wide-range of needs expressed by the people.

As Susan Booysen and Kuda Bandama make clear, RMF and FMF spread through confrontations across South Africa's universities, leading "a change in political and socioeconomic consciousness" that meant "student revolt potential" offered a new kind of democratic political confrontation.[372] Crucially, these protests prioritized the transformation of the institutional view of the university—whether through bodily fluid or the physical occupation of space with chanting, song, or study—as a means of taking the public space that exists and pushing to make it into a community defined by resistance to colonial domination, sexual hierarchy, and capitalist exploitation. The universities became spaces for experimenting with "an aesthetics aimed at [Black bodies] and through cultural productions produced for them (rather than global, capitalized markets)" that thought about what kinds of institutions should be possible in South African democracy.[373] Fallism speaks to disruption as ways of halting what seems normal, putting pressure on leadership to act, and giving time to those who inhabit the space to dream about what it takes to remake the space. These spaces, as opposed to the public ones defined by the ideology of the "rainbow nation," were not about straining out disappointment, complicity, or betrayal. Instead, those frameworks of disruption and betrayal become key for fallists to use in coming to democratic

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[372] Susan Booysen and Kuda Bandama, "Annotated Timeline of the #FeesMustFall Revolt, 2015-2016," in *Fees Must Fall: Student Revolt, Decolonization and Governance in South Africa*, ed. Susan Booyseen. (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2016), 319.

[373] S. Khan, "Thinking Through Black Feminist Creative Theorization Through the Postcolonial Masquerades of South African Visual Artists Mary Sibande and Senzeni Marasela," in *Sasinda Futhi Seselapha: Black Feminist Approaches to Cultural Studies in South Africa's Twenty-Five Years Since 1994*, ed. Derilene Marco, Tiffany Willoughby-Herard, and Abebe Zegeye, (Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 2021), 24-25.

imaginations that prioritized self-regard and refusal of compromises or debates that were not intended to uplift Black senses of self.

III. d. *The Fall*: **Acting out a New Public Memory**

But this feeling of betrayal can become overwhelming. One fallist remembers, "the institution that I have been raised to trust and its rainbow ideas was a failure…. *I don't think I will be the same*, I don't think I will ever walk by a policeman and not immediately tense up."[374] This sense of betrayal is not new to South Africa: ever since the negotiated democracy that culminated to the 1994 elections, there have been those who lamented the betrayal of national liberation by Mandela and the ANC.[375] But fallists make interventions into public memory by acknowledging how powerful this betrayal is. Incorporating betrayal into their actions signals how fallists are attempting to make public memories that appear to be already widely shared and feelings of dreams left unfulfilled.[376] In the play, *The Fall*, which was first performed in October 2016 at the University of Cape Town's Baxter Theater Center, a performing arts space with a history of contesting apartheid, fallists attempt to offer a kind of public memory that can touch on affective-aesthetic reservoirs that cut across generations of critically thinking about the radical possibilities and failures of democracy.

The Fall was written by UCT drama students, all of whom directly participated in the RMF movement. The group was inspired to write after seeing the 2015 production of *Black Dog*, a play first performed in 1984 to commemorate the Soweto Uprising of 1976, where police attacked and killed students protesting state-mandated education to be spoken in Afrikaans.[377] In the same way

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[374] "The Legacy of FMF Movement," Online Media TV, June 16, 2018: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vnrWt3chABw&t=4s, emphasis added.

[375] Willoughby-Herard, Marco, and Zegeye: 4-5

[376] Maroga, "The Poetics of Remembrance."

[377] Ameera Conrad, Cleo Raatus, Kgomotso Khunoane, Oarabile Ditsele, Sihle Mnqwazana, Sizwesandile Mnisi, Tankiso Mamabolo, and Thando Mangcu, *The Fall* (New York: Oberon Modern Plays, 2017), 7-8.

that *Black Dog* linked itself to Youth Day in 2015, a post-apartheid public holiday created to honor

those students who were killed in Soweto, the writers saw *The Fall* as a way to expand the public

memory of youth in South Africa's continuing democratic struggle.[378] *The Fall* is not only

celebratory; it also interrogates the movement and underscores where even positive media accounts

failed to capture the fullest picture of fallism. The producers of *The Fall* note: "the play doesn't offer

solutions but it hopes to raise dialogue—as it did during the workshop process—on intersectional,

institutionalized discrimination against the marginalized majority."[379] While the events of the play

center around a familiar timeline, the emphasis is on the dialogues of activists, the pathways

foreclosed or rejected, and the internal tensions that define the complexity of the movement's vision

for centering Black pain to contest interlocking systems of oppression.

The Baxter Theater as an institution of University of Cape Town seems to aspire to be a

theater that provides opportunity to reimagine what social worlds are possibilities in a given

moment.[380] Baxter Theater was built in 1977, at a time when theater and public entertainment in

Cape Town's city center was highly censored and segregated.[381] So Baxter used its physical location

outside of the city center at UCT to avoid the brunt of these regulations, and instead provide a

forum for "all the people of Cape Town" that exhibited art designed to push the boundaries of

South African society.[382] But in a broader sense, as Peter Euben suggests, theatrical arts as a genre is

well-equipped to present how intentions or actions fall apart in light of contingent, fractious, or

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[378] *The Fall* 8.

[379] *The Fall* 8.

[380] "Theater was thus a place where the Athenians became a community through common response and developed a shared sense of responsibility… Because plays were public events, their meanings, unlike those of our own plays, were interjected into the polis itself through the context of performance and festival. For the duration of that festival the city turned itself into a theater watching itself as an object of representation on stage." Peter Euben, *The Tragedy of Political Theory: The Road Not Taken* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 50-51.

[381] *The Fall* xiii.

[382] *The Fall* xiii-xiv.

coercive forces that are all part of what it means to attempt to act in concert with others.[383] In this

sense, *The Fall* fits into this genre of exploring and lamenting the political in a generative way.

   The Fall is set in March 2015, starting at the first occupation of the Bremner Building and

follows the internal deliberations and public protests led by fallists, up until the burning of painting

and other artwork around UCT and the collapse of Shackville, the installation that blockaded one of

UCT's major streets in February 2016. The characters are vivid compilations meant to portray the

diversity of race, gender, sexuality, family background, and political identifications that made up the

movement; while scenes were written by actual participants to convey the drama of protest, there are

no singular heroes. One reviewer described the stage design as "sparse scenic elements [of] basically,

four identical tables…to mount barricades, climb onto plinths and moving vehicles, and merge

briefly into a transporting, time-stopping blur of communal triumph, rendered in slow-motion

choreography."[384] In essence, the play explores how students made sense of their work together,

how they challenged each other to think clearly about how they had been shaped by their

environments, and to ask what it would mean to fight for more than a falling monument. *The Fall*

speaks to the unravelings of activists as they witnessed their struggle ascending to prominence and

descending into madness; or as Ben Brantley put it, "it is not so much a protest play…but a play

about protest [and all the] arresting complexity" that emerges from this distinction.[385]

   But at the same time, the play embraces the unraveling as a critical element of RMF's

remembrance of resistance. The characters often speak against one another and raise suspicions and

anger with their comrades; yet this does not preclude scenes of collaboration. Three themes emerge

from the play that exemplify how activists attempt to forge a public memory that embraces fallist

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[383] Euben 56-57.

[384] Ben Brantley, "The Fall Delivers Stirring Protest in South Africa," *New York Times*, March 12, 2018: https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/12/theater/the-fall-review.html.

[385] Brantley, "The Fall Delivers."

sensibilities for democratic imagination: the mobilization of space and action; processes of learning through conflict; and the psychic life of colonial power as central to democratic contestation. While these themes are tinged with the tragic, in knowing that the collapse happens, they also add perspective on dramatizing such public memory. Translating experiences of failure along with legacies of "collective hopes" that may invite new audiences for the play to remember this complicated moment of protest in a way that both honors and grieves how the past dreamed.[386]

First, the play conveys the central focus on using space as a resource for political action. The drama centers around how fallists used the university space to promote their own processes of mobilization apart from more formal institutions like university-endorsed student councils or the political parties on campus. The play begins with the Bremner occupation. Maxwele's protest is not recalled until the second scene. It operates in the play's narrative as a presumed event, only recalled in the reflections of the characters. Rather, the scene of the play is set by depicting "a wave of bodies" flooding into UCT administration building.[387] The demand of a specific date for the removal of Rhodes reflects the play's first political ethos: "talk" is discussed as the unproductive denial of political challenge. "Talk" is contrasted with breaching or subsuming (university) space. One character recalled "I saw some of you standing in the shade with your expensive water-bottles. You see, for some of us, the falling of Rhodes would symbolize the falling of every colonial icon in this country, one by one. *I remember*, we marched into the Bremner foyer singing."[388] While the character contrasts the spectators drinking water at a comfortable distance with an imagination of falling icons, the marching and singing experience instigates a remembrance, one where something new was formed by transgressing the space of official authority. Taking up space, "sweating and singing, not knowing what would happen next," is connected with a sense of "doing something" through the

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[386] David Scott, "On the Archaeologies of Black Memory," *Small Axe* 26 (June 2008): xiv.

[387] *The Fall*, 11.

[388] *The Fall*, 11.

agency of the assembled crowd.[389] Quickly Bremner becomes marked as "Azania" by the occupiers, recalling the name of liberated space of Pan-Africanists in South Africa, where "we began to share in each other's black pain."[390] This oscillation between memories of prior protest, song, collective action, occupation and practices of analyzing the specificity of the present in terms of pain and intersectional oppression constitute fallism's praxis. As one character notes, "we were not only determined to realize [previous] philosophies of black pride, but we were also committed to becoming our own heroes by taking matters into our own hands."[391] Thus, the language of action and solidarity stands in tension with the structures of public memory that hold together the shared sense of political belonging. The quest to do something new, to "act on one's own" rises to the surface in creating a political culture that rejects the simplicity of public memory of popular struggle against apartheid that never seemed to arrive in the present.

Recalling and re-narrating what those public memories mean can become a source of solidarity, of shared language that comes out of being inspired and shaped by those histories of resistance. To work between the necessities of acting in the present and of claiming something about the past together, activists recognize the frustrations that can emerge when views of solidarity and public memory do not align. The idea that the protestors need to "do it ourselves" may reflect a kind of individualism or heroic (and patriarchal) forms of resistance.[392] Because the play insists on working through the plenary sessions of self-reflection and internal discussions between RMF's participants about what it means to remove Rhodes, however, it dramatizes forms of learning

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[389] *The Fall* 12.
[390] *The Fall* 12.
[391] *The Fall* 13-14.
[392] Nigel C. Gibson, "The Specter of Fanon: The Student Movements and the Rationality of Revolt in South Africa," *Social Identities* 23(5): 590-591; Mihai 200.

through conflict that counter both the "white normativity" of reconciliation and the "militarized masculinities" that emerge in discussions of direct action politics.[393]

In depicting the initial plenary session following the occupation of Bremner/Azania, the second scene opens with a question: "Are we going to meet with management or not?" The first words from the gathered crowd insist that management does not "care about us. All they ever do is talk. What we need to do is to remove the statue ourselves." This comment echoes the language of self-determination and political initiative from the first scene, but a debate emerges over whether "an act of violence" perpetrated by the students would achieve their aims. As some students insist that "we must be violent with a system that is violent to us" and discuss the possibilities of getting ropes and trucks to "pull it down," others emphasize important work that exceeds the removal of the statue: curriculum, lack of Black lecturers, treatment of Black workers, coloniality of art on display, names of buildings, institutional culture of whiteness. One character quips, "We can't decolonize with a chisel and a hammer when we were colonized with a Bible and a gun."[394] But disagreement over direct action and the terms on which removal should proceed leads to an eruption of argument among the activists.

Even as the play dramatizes conventional arguments about tactics and process, the final sequence of the scene exemplifies the distinctive kind of learning through conflict that RMF embodies. Camilla, an advocate for putting pressure on the Council and the University, says to Boitshoko, an advocate for immediate toppling: "You would not get halfway through Cecil's blerrie head before they arrest you." To which Boitshoko replies: "Who said we are going to start from the top? We are going to start from the bottom."[395] As the scene closes, we are left with a sense of

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[393] Gibson 591; Wanelisa Xaba, "Challenging Fanon: A Black Radical Feminist Perspective on Violence and the Fees Must Fall Movement," *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity* 31(3-4): 101.
[394] *The Fall* 19.
[395] *The Fall* 23-24.

ambiguity. What is being built in imagining the destruction of Rhodes? Is there an institutional strategy for contesting the university governance? Is starting with Black pain meant as a way of "starting at the bottom" in order to pull apart Rhodes and more? Does the removal represent self-determination, empowerment, or new ways of seeing the space of the university and the country from the bottom? Or is "starting at the bottom" meant to point out that contesting the social order requires perpetually fighting, seizing, or taking down anything necessary to sustain Black living? As the scene suggests, fallism does not necessarily cohere into one way of addressing this colonial order. Instead, fallism vivifies the connection between the statue and social structures of oppression: "You cannot carry out fundamental change without a certain amount of madness."[396] Although recollecting the moral righteousness of prior struggles offers no certainty, remembrance may provide an openness to a "madness" that engenders "the courage to invent the future."[397]

This intersection of madness, discomfort, and conflict requires attention to the psychic life of power that is critical to imagining democratic ways of living. In the final scene of the play, the students are washed over by footage of Shackville protests and fighting with police, pulling the tables together into a barricade as they describe how this obstructive shack built on a main campus road led to escalations by University officials to treat the latest occupations with greater hostility.[398] In the play, the characters reflect on how police intervention was an inevitable result of the colonial logics at work in the university. But also, they reflect on their tragic realization that even with all their successful protests and modest support among university students, faculty, and staff, the university's power can be reconstituted at a moment where appeals to public safety are possible or reasonable compromise is denied by protestors.

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[396] *The Fall* 22.
[397] *The Fall* 22.
[398] *The Fall* 55.

As students used this shack at the foot of Jameson Hall to obstruct university traffic in order to protest for better access to affordable student housing, the university mobilized security forces to confront them. Threatened and cornered, the characters recount how students abandoned the shack and stormed the nearby dining halls to burn paintings and other artwork, making it clear they would not reverse their protest.[399] Yet, even as scenes of burnings and marching security forces are projected onto the actors, the characters each claim their own grave reflections on this moment where the "flames of protest" meet a disorganized, disillusioned movement. Boitshoko embraces the burned paintings, claiming to relish a collective sense of rage.[400] Camilla voices her alienation from the group, connecting the burning to reactionary forms of violence that she cannot square with the foundational visions of fallism and intersectionality. And yet, despite this alienated expression, Camila does narrate the connections between destroying benign paintings, continued rage at racial injustice, and the hopelessness that seemed to overwhelm the activists in that moment.[401] It does not create a moralizing barrier between "good fallists" and fallists that burn down what is good. Rather, the characters here trace out the liabilities and costs of membership in the present university system. Kgothatso voices being "undone" by the swirling of "white faces" where "anything you do as a black body is not enough."[402] The final words of the play voiced by Qhawekazi offer her reflections on such burdens. The unraveling and confrontations with violence is bound up with her sense of alienation as well as desire for something like normal existence: "we used to be people. We used to dream about a future where we didn't need to protest anymore… I'm tired. My soul is tired, but the reasons I came the first time won't let me leave. They won't let me live a normal life."[403] The longing for something that would approximate restful or "normal" is denied, the timeline of daily living that

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[399] *The Fall* 55.
[400] *The Fall* 55.
[401] *The Fall* 56.
[402] *The Fall* 56.
[403] *The Fall* 56-57.

unfolds outside of violence is foreclosed, and yet the instigations of wanting to reject the "normal" of colonial subjugation has not left.

The actors conclude the scene, looking off into the distance, uncertain of their prospects. Their pose is not one of heroic defiance, but a sorrowful remembrance that is costly and uneven. In this sense, to remember the fall of Rhodes is not only to embrace a moment of political empowerment but also to grapple with what is intractable or uncertain. Acknowledging the cost of pursuing democratic empowerment clarifies what is at stake in distinguishing the refusal at the core of seeing Rhodes as falling from efforts to replace Rhodes. The students' refusal constitutes a new kind of democratic creativity in so far as their commitment to a shared world means dislodging structures of privilege and subjugation. Without that, there is no democracy, only politics that grind up the subjugated people who live beneath those who benefit from freedoms that are designed to be consolidated, not shared.

While it has been well established that RMF challenged the disavowal of colonial memory in South Africa, this chapter hopes to elaborate on how fallism also offers a distinctive approach to the politics of memory. *The Fall* stands in as a clear representation of how fallists offered this ambitious contribution to reconstituting public memory. Halbwachs' classic account of social memory, nearly identical to what we have been calling public memory, is that that society's compulsion to construct shared memories does offer some relief from the frustration people experience when they try to recall an otherwise inaccessible past, the "vanished time" of the past.[404] But for fallism, the past is vivid in material objects of daily living, not inaccessible or forgotten. These activists work to reconfigure what is meaningful about seeing such structures fall. Fallism, then, imagines how betrayal and disruption might instigate new commitments within democratization, where monument

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[404] Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press 1992), 51.

removal becomes an image to explore challenges of building new desires and accountability for

those new desires into a decolonial polity.[405]

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[405] Halbwachs 51.

IV. Symbols, Systems, and Democratic Imagination in Take 'Em Down NOLA

Michael "Quess?" Moore, prominent activist within Take 'Em Down New Orleans (TEDN), confronted then-mayor of New Orleans Mitch Landrieu at the mayor's book signing in March 2018. The signing took place at the Presbytère off Jackson Square in New Orleans, less than a year after the first four Confederate statues came down. Landrieu's book, *In the Shadow of Statues: A White Southerner Confronts History*, speaks about race as "America's most traumatic issue" that "everyone alive today has inherited." In order to "heal our [racial] divisions we must be able to hear one another, see one another… We all want the same thing—peace, prosperity, and economic opportunity."[406] Moore challenged Landrieu that such a vision of healing offered limited acknowledgement of the long-time, painful work of Black activists to unsettle Confederate commemorations: "There is a history of our work being coopted. Our narrative, our blood, sweat, tears and years of effort in the mouths of white people, particularly white males, of a particular privilege to do what they think is justice to us, what they think is a favor to us."[407] Landrieu countered that he was not pursuing Confederate monument removal as paternalistic favor; rather this kind of repair was "the right thing to do." Rebuffing the mayor, Moore asserted that "*the right thing to do* is to acknowledge the forty plus years of work put into this…all this work came before you. Establish a platform for [their work], that's how you would be an ally."[408]

What sort of "ally" is Moore imagining from the mayor's office? In the wake of New Orleans City Council's decision to take down the statues, public commentators and critics of

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[406] Mitch Landrieu, *In the Shadow of Statues: A White Southerner Confronts History,* Kindle edition (New York: Penguin Books, 2018), Prologue.

[407] "Take Em Down NOLA's Quess confronts Mayor Mitch Landrieu!" *YouTube*, uploaded April 1, 2018, last accessed May 24, 2023: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zi-pOm5yMP4&t=2s

[408] Moore also wrote a detailed account of his own reflections about the context and significance of this exchange with Landrieu. A Scribe Called Quess, "What I Told Mayor Mitch Landrieu About Co-opting Black Activists' Work," *Medium*, April 24, 2018: https://ascribecalledquess.medium.com/what-i-told-mayor-mitch-landrieu-about-co-opting-black-activists-work-74c0749a2145.

Confederate monuments have generated detailed historical evidence of Lost Cause legacies in cities throughout the US, particularly the US South.[409] Claudia Rankine reflects that the persistence of such Confederate icons is "a reminder of a history marked by lynched black bodies. We can distance ourselves from this fact until the next horrific killing, but we cannot outrun it. History's authority over us is not broken by maintaining a silence about its continued effects."[410] Thus, many voices were attempting to imagine the character of a political response that would account for the legacies of white supremacy exemplified in these monuments and pursue democracy's promise of dismantling hierarchy to preserve the common good for all.[411]

Yet these national narratives only partly approximate what Moore and TEDN had in mind as they confronted the mayor. TEDN reflects a long history of New Orleans' community organizing, whether traced back to slave revolts, labor strikes, winning political office, resisting policing or white militia terror, or building up cultural and economic bases of community support that transcended national boundaries.[412] Thus, Moore's challenge to Landrieu was not primarily about rejecting the Lost Cause as historically true or political acceptable, on which they both agree. Moore's challenge was about acknowledging the layered history of Black-led organizing that has protected and promoted democratic resistance to white supremacy, even when there was no state support for such efforts. TEDN, emerging out the New Orleans' chapter of the Black Youth

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[409] For recent efforts at public scholarship that connects these statues to "Lost Cause" narrative, see Thomas Calder, "Historian Karen Cox Confronts Confederate Monuments," *Mountain Xpress*, May 17, 2018: https://mountainx.com/news/historian-karen-cox-confronts-confederate-monuments/; Jeremy Slevin, "Kirk Savage: A Confederate Monument Expert Explains How We Memorialized White Supremacy," *Talk Poverty*, August 17, 2017: "https://talkpoverty.org/2017/08/17/confederate-monuments-expert-explains-memorialized-white-supremacy/index.html." Of course, in a broader historical view, W.E.B. DuBois' *Black Reconstruction in America* is an essential text in outlining many of these themes about appealing to white Southern sympathies and humiliation in defeat in order to build new civic culture through the "wages of whiteness."
[410] Claudia Rankine, "The Condition of Black Life Is One of Mourning," in *Charleston Syllabus: Readings on Race, Racism, and Racial Violence*, ed. Chad Williams, Kidada E. Williams, and Keisha N. Blain, (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2016), 76.
[411] Joel Olson, *The Abolition of White Democracy* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 77-80.
[412] Clyde Woods, *Development Drowned and Reborn: The Blues and Bourbon Restoration in Post-Katrina New Orleans*, ed. Laura Pulido and Jordan T. Camp (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2017).

Project 100, intended to unearth how the current wave of support for the rhetoric of the movement could not overshadow the city's long embrace of white supremacy in its politics and culture of government. In the same way that TEDN's praxis of Black-led organizing has functioned in the streets by embracing multiracial support and white allies for protection during direct actions, Moore seems to be demanding similar participation by the mayor's office: if you intend to claim this intervention as part of your agenda, put more policies or political stakes on the line than a few Confederate statues.

So, with the national focus on Confederate statues diverging from the challenges raised by local activists, this larger fight over the role of public memory in dislodging institutionalized racism in the present reveals a compelling tension over the meaning of racial repair. Landrieu's narrative represents a model of historical reparation that sees monument removal as a way to move past Confederate images and signal new public commitments for empathic listening, which can consolidate a growing consensus on the goals of promoting diversity and shared "prosperity." TEDN's counter-proposal seems to reflect another perspective: monument removal reflects a longer and much wider trajectory of "struggle toward racial and economic justice" that can only be achieved if democratic power is expanded to dismantle social and economic forms of oppression.

Moore's contention at the mayor's book signing requires more than attention to monuments or public memory. Instead, Moore's point is that the removal of monuments requires acknowledging the long-standing struggle against Confederate images as one example of Black organizers trying to upend systems that such monuments were designed to protect. TEDN's refrain of "symbols and systems" builds on legacies of generations of organizers who make sense of such monuments not only as problematic representations of the past but also as emblems of the racial bonds of American democracy. Despite these concerns, Moore concluded that there is room for an alliance with the city on statue removal. What does it mean that TEDN's project may call on the state not only to remove

monuments to white supremacy, but to demand the state validate the demands of generations of work that fought against what such statues stood for?

This chapter considers how Black memory activists in New Orleans have turned to public memory as a critical tool for distinguishing where the struggle for democracy has been derailed by historical absences or willful ignorance. TEDN emphasizes monument removal in order to make the case that democracy requires that the social and economic consequences of race must also be challenged in order to fulfill the political vision of self-rule. Crucially, TEDN has largely pursued its ends by demanding formal approval or accountability from city representatives. By channeling its efforts through formal political institutions, TEDN seems to follow what Houston A. Baker refers to as the "creative agency [of the black public sphere].[413] Here, Baker is carving out the critical work of "ceaselessly inventing its own modernity" by finding ways of engaging with predominately white institutions or public spaces that use the agency available to Black participants while signaling imaginative possibility beyond such agentic limits.[414] Rather than conflating their work with the work of others more entrenched in the political establishments of New Orleans, TEDN carefully crafted its approach to monument removal in order to "expand Black public expression, experience, and influence" without simply endorsing how state agencies frame Black public participation.[415] In this sense, TEDN is trying to imagine how monument removal could contribute to a rethinking of democracy defined by economic and racial justice. Monument removal provides a constructive language of political action that relies on, but moves beyond, official public memory.

The chapter argues that monument removal emerges as a strategy for activism in New Orleans that attempts to translate intergenerational struggles for freedom into a new fight against economic and racial injustice. To establish the promises and pitfalls of this approach, the chapter

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[413] Houston A. Baker Jr., "Critical Memory and the Black Public Sphere," *Public Culture* 7 (1994): 12.
[414] Baker, 12.
[415] Baker, 12.

begins by contextualizing recent attempts to consolidate public support for the removal of

Confederate monuments in New Orleans following the political upheaval of the Black Lives Matter

(BLM) movement across Ferguson, Baltimore, and Charleston. From here, the chapter focuses on

how the local knowledge of organizer Malcolm Suber and public historian Leon Waters develop a

protest language defined by the "value of sustaining intergenerational protest," a critical tenant of

BLM's philosophy of democratic protest. Next, the chapter consider how TEDN synthesizes this

intergenerational focus through their distinctive framework of "system and symbols" to analyze the

sources and effects of public memory. And finally, the chapter concludes by thinking about how the

tension between formal institutional politics and legacies of police brutality activism are heightened

when three monuments were toppled during the 2020 protests in response to the police murder of

George Floyd. TEDN's struggles to maintain its public voice on monument removal reveal how

organizing around public memory exists within the tension between forcing the state to defend anti-

racist policies without undermining public decision-making.[416]

IV. a. Unity and Nuisances: Contextualizing the City's Response

One could argue that monument removal has many different ends.[417] In the history of the

US, the examples cover a wide range of political projects. Statues were torn down by exhilarated

mobs during the Revolution; for example, an equestrian statue of King George III was pulled down

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[416] Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw's writing on the tensions between Black activists using civil rights legislation as one of many tactics to challenge the material and symbolic conditions of racial inequality in the US is central to my thinking about the political dynamics of monument removal, particularly the need to embrace the coercive power of the state to intervene against entrenched public monuments but also being weary of how this changes the fundamental character of larger struggles against the state's negligence or perpetration of white supremacy. Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, "Race, Reform, and Retrenchment: Transformation and Legitimation in Anti-Discrimination Law," *Harvard Law Review*, 101 (7): 1331-1387.

[417] One might explain the persistent draw to toppling monuments at the aesthetic level, similar to Michael Taussig's argument that monuments bear the mark of their own removal from their installation: as fragile, often cheaply constructed objects, monuments give an appearance of solidity that it cannot actually back up in the face of pick-axes and dynamite. Michael Taussig, *Defacement: Public Secrecy and the Labor of the Negative* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 20-21.

after a public reading of the Declaration of Independence in New York City.[418] In 2003, Robert

Bevan points out how toppling a statue of Saddam Hussein was used as a way to frame US military

occupation of Iraq as an act of liberation.[419] Confederate commemorations have been contested by

Black communities trying to hold onto their own public celebrations of Emancipation Day in the

1880s, or later activists like Richard Bradley who pulled down a Confederate flag on public property

in San Francisco in 1984 (Figure IV. 1).[420]

The recent salience of monument removal emerged after several high-profile acts of

antiblack violence. Since the murder and acquittal of those responsible for the deaths of Travyon

Martin, Michael Brown, and Freddie Gray, political upheavals throughout the US focused on the

targeting of Black people by police and vigilantes. Many protests were organized under the banner

of the Movement for Black Lives, including the Black Youth Project 100 in New Orleans. But it was

the murders of pastors and congregants at the Emmanuel AME Church in Charleston in June 2015

that sharpened national focus on Confederate iconography. The murderer was Dylann Roof, a

young white male from South Carolina, who was steeped in conspiratorial news of white genocide

and venerated white nationalist movements in the US and abroad. Once an image circulated of Roof

leering over his glasses and holding a handgun and a Confederate flag, conversations in cities

throughout the US South shifted to the persistence of Confederate and white supremacist symbols

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[418] Interestingly, the taking down of King George's statue was reenacted in 1932 for the aristocratic heirs who stayed at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York. Thompson does not elaborate on the political context or purposes of such a reenactment, but given its timing and location, it does raise questions about what it meant for audiences to take in the "frenzied patriotism" of those National Guard members who served as the cast of the production. Erin Thompson, S*mashing Statues: The Rise and Fall of America's Public Monuments*, New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2022: 8-12.
[419] Robert Bevan, *Monumental Lies: Culture Wars and the Truth About the Past* (New York: Verso Books, 2022), 252-253.
[420] Thompson: 178-180; "We Tore Down the Flag of Slavery," *Workers Vanguard*, July 10, 2015: https://www.spartacist.org/english/wv/1071/sf1984.html.

defining public life (Figure IV. 2).[421] The murders set off a storm of demands for the removal of

Confederate memorials in South Carolina and across the United States.[422] Many city and state

governments in the US South, including New Orleans, worked quickly to craft statements and take

actions that might address the preservation and veneration of Confederate memory. While defenders

of the Confederate flag argued that it was as an acknowledgement of "service, sacrifice and heritage"

that was merely "hijacked" by Roof, others argued that Roof as an "inheritor" of the flag's purpose

rather than its distortion.[423]

These debates about inheritance and the future seemed to affect Mitch Landrieu's public

comments as he prepared for the commemoration of 300th anniversary of New Orleans. Only days

after South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley's decision to remove the flag—but before Charleston

activist Bree Newsome's dramatic ascent of the flagpole at the state capitol to take it down—

Landrieu made his first major statement on the issue (Figure IV. 3).[424] In a public speech on June 25,

2015, Landrieu announced his decision to push the City Council to vote to remove four of the city's

most prominent monuments to Confederate heroics.[425] Landrieu made clear that his decision to

pursue monument removal was inspired by the murders at Emmanuel AME. But he also referenced

a conversation with Wynton Marsalis, renowned jazz musician, over the significance of Lee's statue

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[421] It's also worth noting that other images were soon published of Roof who took pictures of himself in regalia of South African white militia and apartheid regime signs (his personal website was titled "The Last Rhodesian," which at the time of the photos overlaps with the Rhodes Must Fall movement.

[422] Particularly in New Orleans for gathering members to what would become TEDN, where Michael "Quess" Moore recalls: "if the casual dismissal of the body of Mike Brown served as the gale wind that pushed a mountain towards avalanche, the murders of Clementa C. Pinckney, Cynthia Marie Graham Hurd, Susie Jackson, Ethel Lee Lance, Depayne Middleton-Doctor, Tywanza Sanders, Daniel Simmons, Sharonda Coleman Singleton, and Myra Thomas served as the windstorm that made all the rocks start to fall. And activist Bree Newsome supplied a further gust of revolutionary change…" *Roots Rising: The Take 'Em Down NOLA Zine*, Volume 1: 23.

[423] Aimee Ortiz, "Nikki Haley's Confederate Flag Comments Spark Backlash," *New York Times*, December 7, 2019: https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/07/us/Nikki-Haley-confederate-flag.html.

[424] Kenneth R. Rosen, "2 Charged in Confederate Flag Removal at South Carolina Capitol" *New York Times*, June 27, 2015: https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/28/us/2-charged-in-confederate-flag-removal-at-south-carolina-capitol.html.

[425] Robert McClendon, "Landrieu Coaxed to Evolve on Lee Statue," *Times-Picayune*, June 25, 2015.

to the city's upcoming tricentennial, a celebration of New Orleans past and future.[426] When the

mayor invited Marsalis to serve on the Tricentiennal Commission, Marsalis responded by

challenging the Lee Statue. For Landrieu, this conversation was "transformative," and it instigated

his own thinking about narrating New Orleans identity through its monumental landscape: "It's

about deciding what message we want to transmit through our public spaces."[427] This was something

Landrieu reiterated in July 2015, when he asked the city council to remove four of the monuments

"dedicated to people or events associated" with the Confederacy. Here, Landrieu also sought to affix

the label of "public nuisance" to these monuments, which suggested that they posed a threat to

public safety that overrode their historical significance.[428]

It is worth exploring the two justifications Landrieu offered for removing Confederate

statues. The first we might call, "reconciled unity" and the second we might call "defending public

safety." The major themes of Landrieu's "reconciled unity" are shared in the major speech delivered

on the eve of Lee's removal in the summer of 2017. His vision depends on state's authority to

declare history truthful and determine how social fissures can be repaired. According to Landrieu,

these statues were *originally* intended to obscure the moral depravity of the Confederacy as "Lost

Cause" artifacts that cover over *Confederate* "tearing the nation apart and subjugating Americans in

slavery."[429] In the face of rising racially motivated violence, human decency compels this new

engagement with these statues. The removal of statues is "not political, it is not retaliatory," but

instead "about how we as a people are able to acknowledge [the past]…and choose a better future

for ourselves, making straight what has been crooked and making right what was wrong."[430]

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[426] Robert McClendon, "Landrieu Coaxed to Evolve on Lee Statue," *Times-Picayune*, June 25, 2015.

[427] Robert McClendon, "Landrieu Coaxed to Evolve on Lee Statue," *Times-Picayune*, June 25, 2015.

[428] Robert McClendon, "Mayor Asking Council to Purge Statues," *Times-Picayune*, July 9, 2015.

[429] "Mitch Landrieu's Speech on the Removal of Confederate Monuments in New Orleans," *New York Times*, May 23, 2017: https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/23/opinion/mitch-landrieus-speech-transcript.html.

[430] "Mitch Landrieu's Speech."

Landrieu says, "in our blessed land, we come to the table of democracy as equals." The connection

between table and equality echoes the mayor's project of racial reconciliation, The Welcome Table

of New Orleans, where small groups across the city were assembled to facilitate conversation about

legacies and realities of racial disparity. The Welcome Table, formed in affiliation with the Winter

Institute, "helped [discussion groups] explore their own thoughts and feelings on race and call

attention to the need for racial reconciliation in our city and country…developing reconciliation

projects they hope will inform, educate and engage the people of New Orleans."[431] From this,

groups would go on to create murals and other public art projects to reflect the group's core mission

of racial reconciliation through community development.[432] These images, it seems, reflect the

mayor's vision of a table of democracy, where citizens might "[right] the wrong image these statues

represent" and undertake the cultural work of establishing commonality, through discussion, food,

music, or a variety of social encounters in a "city of many nations."

These claims about racial reconciliation are distinct from the legal justification of the city's

power to remove statues. That justification relied on the defense of public safety. In their arguments

before the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals, the city's legal team contended:

> these deeply divisive statues are a potential flashpoint for violent civil unrest… The City
> Council need not wait for the City to burn before reasonably concluding that statues
> honoring Confederate leaders are a potential lightning rod for simmering civil unrest… The
> anger exhibited by both sides undoubtedly cemented the Council's reasoned conclusion that
> the wounds commemorated by the monuments have festered, rather than healed.[433]

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[431] Biz New Orleans Site Staff, "Mayor Landrieu to Join Partners, Community to Celebrate First Year of Welcome Table New Orleans," *Biz New Orleans*, June 23, 2015: https://www.bizneworleans.com/mayor-landrieu-to-join-partners-community-to-celebrate-first-year-of-welcome-table-new-orleans/; "Our Process," *Welcome Table New Orleans*, https://web.archive.org/web/20150930050731/http://www.welcometableneworleans.org/process_our-story, originally published September 15, 2015, accessed on Web Archive August 1, 2023.

[432] Biz New Orleans Site Staff, "Welcome Table New Orleans Algiers Circle To Reveal Major Art Project In Partnership with Local Artist Odums," *Biz New Orleans*, December 1, 2016: https://www.bizneworleans.com/welcome-table-new-orleans-algiers-circle-to-reveal-major-art-project-in-partnership-with-local-artist-odums/.

[433] WWL Staff, "Appeals Court Rules New Orleans Can Remove Confederate-Era Monuments," *13News Now*, March 6, 2017: https://www.13newsnow.com/article/news/local/orleans/appeals-court-rules-new-orleans-can-remove-confederate-era-monuments/289-420224384.

While the legal justification for removal is framed by "civil unrest," it is worth elaborating on

the terminology of "public nuisance." The language of "public nuisance" refers to a 1993 ordinance

that authorizes removal of commemorative objects which violate three standards: if the monument

"honors, praises, or fosters ideologies which are in conflict with the requirements of equal

protection for citizens"; if it has been "the site of violent demonstrations"; and if the cost of

protecting the statues outweighs its "historical or architectural significance."[434] The provision also

insists that while the City Council should seek approval from historic district landmark commissions

and other relevant offices, and comply with federal or state laws regarding heritage objects, it

reserves the power to immediately remove any monument from public property.[435] Unlike his other

argument about embracing shared culture and listening to others' stories of race and injustice, the

argument about seeing statues as "nuisances" signals the importance of protecting public "health,

safety, morals, and convenience" against "unreasonable interferences."[436] This promotion of a

"collective ideal of civil life" relies on the powers of the state to regulate and maintain public

order.[437] More typically, these powers have been used to pathologize and remove Black communities

from civil life in the past and present.[438] As Taja-Nia Henderson and Jamila Jefferson-Jones argue,

most complaints of this nature reflect "deep-seated history" in the United States of "weaponized…

language of land use, particularly [through] nuisance and trespass," whether considering loud music,

joyous pool parties, or a host of other ordinary gatherings of Black community in proximity to white

neighbors.[439] Emily Behzaldi may be right that "the use of the public nuisance doctrine [to remove

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[434] City of New Orleans, Part II-Code, Chapter 146-Streets, Sidewalks and other Public Places, Article VII. Public Monuments, Sec. 146-611.b.1-3.
[435] City of New Orleans, Part II-Code, Chapter 146-Streets, Sidewalks and other Public Places, Article VII. Public Monuments, Sec. 146-611.c-f.
[436] Emily Behzaldi, "Statues of Fraud: Confederate Monuments as Public Nuisances," *Stanford Journal of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties*, 18 (1): 23.
[437] Behzaldi: 23.
[438] Taja-Nia Y. Henderson and Jamila Jefferson-Jones, "#LivingWhileBlack: Blackness as Nuisance," *American University Law Review* 69 (3): 871.
[439] Henderson and Jefferson-Jones, 871.

statues] can serve as a reclamation of the doctrine's oppressive past and counter anti-Blackness within our property law system."[440] But even with this potential of a kind of legal repair, Landrieu's comments avoid emphasizing more substantial political possibilities. Landrieu's strategy of framing white nationalist violence as something the state is best situated to eliminate raises questions about the kind of power the state exercises in turning to public memory. To what extend can the state manage a reparative gap between the failures of the past and the opportunity for future unity?

IV. b. Troubling Removal and State Response in Public Memory

If we assume that monument removal operates according to the state-centric logic elaborated by Landrieu, a question arises about whether there is space to negotiate or reframe monument removals to reflect the aims of social movements demanding that the statues come down. In a sense, both Landrieu's vision and TEDN's idea that monument removal is "necessary for racial and economic justice" may share some potentially problematic political assumptions.

First, both TEDN and Landrieu rely on stigmatizing Confederate monuments. While TEDN uses Confederate symbols to open up conversation about white supremacy as a systemic problem, they share Landrieu's strategic insistence on how far outside of the mainstream Confederate values are.[441] This approach may legitimize the state's role in delivering and protecting equality, even as the state has historically been central to reproducing white political power. When political institutions organize conversations around racial reconciliation and defend the civility of

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[440] Behzaldi 36.

[441] As Michael "Quess" Moore said in an interview with Clint Smith: "Those [first four monuments were] easier to stigmatize because they were all in the Confederacy," Moore notes. I ask him about the possibility of removing the statue of President Andrew Jackson—a slaveholder who also presided over the Trail of Tears—in the middle of the French Quarter. Moore laughs, "When it's Jackson, now you've gotta have a larger conversation." Clint Smith, "The Young Black Activists Targeting New Orleans Confederate Monuments," *The New Republic*, May 18, 2017: https://newrepublic.com/article/142757/young-black-activists-targeting-new-orleanss-confederate-monuments.

public spaces do they reproduce what Barnor Hesse refers to as "white sovereignty"?[442] As Hesse points out the separation performed by the written law of reconciliation alongside the "unwritten" or unsanctioned racial law as performed in policing or white nationalist violence, personified through CSA commemorations, reflects the function of white democracy: repress Black political disruptions so liberal institutions can appear to offer "fair play" without any real threat of full Black participation.[443] As Hesse and Juliet Hooker argue, the incorporation of Black political subjects into US democracy following abolition also necessitated "the eradication of white hegemony and [an] expansion through black self-representation and participation."[444] But the failure to sustain these reconstruction efforts reveals the "normalized white administration of a democratic regime" dependent on performing Black exclusion *as* liberal equality.[445] Thus, as Hesse and Hooker argue, it is a "bizarre turn" for the "state-and-rights-centric forms of black political activism…[to] become fixated on the state's responsibility to resolve its own failures to create and institutionalize racial justice," when embracing the state's authority has often relied on "discrediting" of "black populations deepening their social participation in democracy."[446]

Second, both Landrieu and TEDN see a possible relationship between removal and wider transformation, insofar as they allow political translation of Black grievances into national, even transnational, narratives. The problem is that this translation assumes that *national* accounts of racial wrongdoing speak to more localized, present contexts of political change on the level of daily encounters with the state, such as local policing, criminal sentences, property zoning, and economic

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[442] Barnor Hesse, "White Sovereignty (…), Black Life Politics: 'The N****r They Couldn't Kill,'" *South Atlantic Quarterly* 116 (3): 599.
[443] Hesse: 600.
[444] Barnor Hesse and Juliet Hooker, "Introduction: On Black Political Thought inside Global Black Protest," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 116 (3): 447.
[445] Hesse and Hooker 448.
[446] Hesse and Hooker 449.

development.[447] Such rhetoric may revolve around theorizing about the past while circling farther

away from what such speech amounts to in the present. As Saidiya Hartman makes clear, reparation

tends to create an originary tale of pastness that overshadows the "disaster of the present."[448] As

Elizabeth Alexander contends, "the American way with regard to the actual lived experience of

African-Americans has been to…[erase] bodily information as we knew it and [substitute] a counter-

text that has in many cases become a version of national memory."[449] Juliet Hooker argues that such

counter-texts of nostalgia or heroics become routinized over time, turning systemic violence into

"extraordinary sacrifices" and demanding exemplarity from subjugated people.[450] These narratives

downplay resistance in order to prioritize the political virtues of Black suffering and vulnerability.

Alexander makes it clear that the racial violence evident in typical public memory does not merely

"contradict the histories [Black] bodies know"; for African-Americans, they inform a "differentiated

'we'" within the US body politic. Such a differentiation emerges from the "sorry lesson" taught to

Black folks through routines of "continual, physical vulnerability in the United States," even as racial

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[447] This is a central point of contention between Moore and Landrieu. Moore reflects on his frustrations with seeing Landrieu taking credit for accepting the national perspective of racial injustice, while he continues to practice political power in a way that violates Black lives: "[Mitch Landrieu is] the same man who consistently deflected, surveilled and policed the efforts of Take Em Down NOLA, the coalition that picked up a long running baton of struggle for monument removal in New Orleans, is now claiming to be an ally of our work… This is the same "strong mayor" that spent $40 million on a surveillance camera project that he planned to expand despite public pushback. The same mayor that endorsed the further perpetuation of the charter school system that has now privatized 99% of public schools, after firing 7,500 public school teachers after Hurricane Katrina with no public hearing… The same mayor that approved a city budget that spends 63% of 647 million dollars on cops, jails, and reactive measures, while only spending 3% on children and families, and only 1% on job development. The same mayor that presided over an economy that doles out $3 to every white family for every $1 to black families and 53% of city contracts to white men and a measly 29% to black people in a city that is 60% black. The same mayor that has responded to the crime rates that result from impoverished, disenfranchised communities with more policing A Scribe Called Quess, "What I Told Mayor Mitch Landrieu About Co-opting Black Activists' Work," *Medium*, April 24, 2018: https://ascribecalledquess.medium.com/what-i-told-mayor-mitch-landrieu-about-co-opting-black-activists-work-74c0749a2145.
[448] Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007), 165-170.
[449] Elizabeth Alexander, "Can you be BLACK and look at this? Reading the Rodney King Video(s)," in *Black Male: Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary American Art* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1994), 94-95.
[450] Juliet Hooker, "Black Lives Matter and the Paradoxes of U.S. Black Politics: From Democratic Sacrifice to Democratic Repair," *Political Theory* 44(4): 458

reconciliation becomes central to the décor of democratic repair.[451] Thus, these relationships of state power, public memory, and democratic participation cannot be fully understood without acknowledging whose past counts and what the counting entails for engaging in political confrontation.

Third, more broadly, the constitutive act of public remembrance depends on mnemonic denial. As Sheldon Wolin insists, society's "hegemonic powers are constituted" by public memory's establishment of forgetfulness as a "rite of passage and as a condition of membership." In this sense, public memory reflects the processes by which power is established, and its repetition is a means of reproducing that hegemonic regime over time.[452] Cedric Robinson amplifies this observation by suggesting that racial regimes require a "covering conceit" in order to make the accrual of social and economic power appear as either immutable or "inevitable creations of collective anxieties" about difference.[453] "Forgeries of memory" through cultural or social productions constitute whiteness "as a basis for the reintegration of American society."[454] For Robinson, public memory's function is to keep the *historical* construction of race as unrecalled as possible. So even apart from the sincerity or quality of public memory, appealing to public remembrance seems to require popular assumptions that align with the habits and worldview of those already in power.

What we might draw from all of these critiques is that when states pursue historical repair, they narrow what counts as usable pasts. In other words, public memory is designed to bring up past events or ideas to solidify political claims to unity.[455] This approach forecloses deeper critiques of

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[451] Anderson, 95.

[452] Sheldon Wolin, "Injustice and Collective Memory," in T*he Presence of the Past: Essays on the State and the Constitution* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 36.

[453] Cedric Robinson, *Forgeries of Memory & Meaning: Blacks & The Regimes of Race in American Theater & Film Before World War II*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), xiii.

[454] Robinson, xiv.

[455] As Kevin Bruyneel articulates, "the diagnosis of amnesia and the cure of remembering are liberal rationalist ways of conceiving of the problem of, and solution to, forms of domination" tied to public memory." Kevin Bruyneel, *Settler Memory: The Disavowal of Indigeneity and the Politics of Race in the United States*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2021), 16.

the social transmission of hierarchy and exclusion or the framing of "returning to the past" as a

contentious problem in itself. These limitations cast doubt on the political usefulness of projects that

negotiate within the realm of public memory. This is not to dismiss the importance of "getting the

facts right" in order to dispel harmful myths or ideas, but it does make clear the importance of

seeking out alternative practices of public memory that might confront the present with

"interventions, lessons, and possibilities" that stretch the conventions of state-led reparation.[456]

IV. c. Traditions of a Radical Black Left in New Orleans

To think about the extent to which monument removal can serve as an alternative practice

of public memory, we turn to how it emerged in the context of US social movements and New

Orleans. Tracing monument removal's political intervention involves exploring New Orleans as a

nexus for Black Lives Matter organizing and the longer trajectory of Black left organizing against

policing and state violence.

Following the murders of Trayvon Martin in 2012 and Michael Brown two years later,

protestors gathered around the statue of Robert E. Lee in December 2014 to demonstrate their

frustration with waves of unpunished killings.[457] Organizing under the banner of the Black Youth

Project, they decried the "criminalization of Black and Brown bodies," articulating a "sense of

urgency" to respond to the continued violence of policing that threatened their communities.[458]

Moore and Kinlaw were present, listening and participating, along with a host of other organizers,

such as Christine "CFreedom" Brown, Amanda Rose, and Malcolm Suber. Amidst the voices raising

concerns about policing, failing economic development, and community empowerment, Leon

Waters spoke to the commemorative space in which the group was gathered. From the base of the

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[456] Bruyneel 16.
[457] Ken Daley, "Hundreds march for change, Protesters deliver," *Times-Picayune*, December 1, 2014.
[458] Daley.

Lee statue, Waters said: "Monuments like these poison the democratic minds of the people… Not

another penny of state money must be spent to maintain these racist symbols."[459] The group

emphasized this by circulating a petition for the statue's removal, making clear that this was "a

people's problem," pledging to hold nightly rallies to raise awareness of this statue's significance.[460]

The image circulated to publicize the demonstration depicted Michael Brown's face on top of the

plinth that crudely covered the Lee Statue, with the street sign renamed "Brown" Circle (Figure IV.

4).[461] Organizers led chants of "Turn up and take 'em down. We are doing this for Mike Brown."[462]

Waters' contention about the Lee statue echoes a long-standing fight over New Orleans' memorial

landscape, yet this public declaration marks one of the first moments monument removal was

connected to organizing efforts in the Black Lives Matter era.

Waters and Malcolm Suber are two long-time organizers in the New Orleans area and their

work together started with a looming problem of building intergenerational solidarity. In order to

challenge the prevailing order in New Orleans, where older generations were more invested in

maintaining connections forged with political elites and established civic organizations, Waters and

Suber found different ways of accessing New Orleans' historical reservoirs of resistance, violence,

and struggles for Black freedom.[463] Their role in influencing the challenge to public monuments is

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[459] Daley.
[460] Daley.
[461] Christine Brown, Facebook post, November 20, 2014.
[462] A Scribe Called Quess?, "Action Tracking," *Roots Rising*, Vol. 1: 21.
[463] Two other central figures within the movement, Moore and Kinlaw, illuminate the influence of Suber on their collaborative work. Moore recounts attending workshops hosted by Suber and Waters, two leaders of the "Hidden Histories" tours in New Orleans that emphasized popular ways of remembering slavery and resistance within the city's geography. Their public pedagogy "informed their organizing [along with] a Marxist/Leninist framework" the helped to connect these contested monuments to "how Black people live under systemic oppression." Suber's public talks "just clicked," said Moore, unlocking a way of seeing and explaining these connections that not only made sense, but lent itself to organizing. Suber also partnered with Kinlaw to form the People's Assembly New Orleans, and the pair worked closely together across the organizations to build interlocking forms of community development. As Kinlaw stated about her work of training new organizers with Suber: "this is what democracy looks like." Clint Black, "The Young Black Activists Targeting New Orleans' Confederate Monuments" *New Republic*, May 18, 2017; Jeff Thomas, "People's Assembly New Orleans Takes It to the Streets—and the Ballot Box," *The Lens*, July 10, 2017, https://thelensnola.org/2017/07/10/peoples-assembly-new-orleans-takes-it-to-the-streets-and-the-ballot-box/.

connected to their prior attempts at building broad coalitions to confront police brutality and

contest the failures of state and federal governments after Hurricane Katrina. Suber and Waters

connected renewed national fascination with memories of New Orleans after Katrina as a city "in

ruins" with their own historical perspective on the local strands of support and resistance that have

been critical to Black survival, whether through flooding disasters, police brutality, or state

abandonment.

      To speak more broadly about the connection between monument removal and this kind of

anti-brutality activism in New Orleans that Suber and Waters pursued requires thinking about these

distinct forms of white supremacy. Police coercion of Black people—through homicide, assault,

unlawful arrest, harassment, sexual exploitation, and complicity in trafficking activity—became a

critical issue in political organizing in the US postwar period.[464] In New Orleans in the 1970s, when

Black officers were recruited to the police force and incentivized to be as violent as their white

counterparts, it became more difficult to gather broad Black coalitions to confront police violence as

a structural problem.[465] Often unaffiliated with traditional civil rights organizations that were

prominent in New Orleans, "anti-brutality activists lacked credibility, an institutional base, and a

clear program," which led to reactive protests that were often confrontational and organized around

constituencies that arose out of the moment.[466]

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[464] Even though police served as the primary extension through which Black people encountered the state, after the war, increased demands for freedom and equality as well as global decolonization reshaped Black political thought in the US. Additionally, migration to urban settings, like New Orleans, by whites made the police an institutional home for white supremacist organizations to reconstitute the white mob violence that was much more common in rural settings. Leonard N. Moore, *Black Rage in New Orleans: Police Brutality and African American Activism from World War II to Hurricane Katrina* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State Press 2010), 1-2; Jordan Flaherty, *Floodlines: Community and Resistance from Katrina to the Jena Six*, (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2010), 160-164.

[465] Moore 3.

[466] Moore, 3-4; Robin D. G. Kelley, "Thug Nation: On State Violence and Disposability," in *Policing the Planet: Why the Policing Crisis Led to Black Lives Matter*, ed. Jordan T. Camp and Christina Heatherton, (New York: Verso Book, 2016), 22-23.

Suber's earliest work in New Orleans focused on police terrorizing and murdering Black

citizens with impunity starting in the late 1970s. Suber recalls leading concerned citizens to police

headquarters in response to 13-year-old Tony Deal's beating over a minor offense in 1979.[467] Suber

demonstrated the connection between monuments and police violence during the so-called "Algiers

Tragedy" in 1980, when three residents of the Algiers housing project were gunned down by police

in response to the murder of an NOPD officer.[468] As an organizer with the Liberation League, Suber

gathered protestors at a monument to police officers killed in the line of duty. While many

protestors carried signs that read "Stop Police Terror" and "Prosecute All Murders," Suber's words

invoked the power of the monumental to convey the structural challenge of their gathering: "We're

gathered here in front of the monument to their [police killed in action] dead, and we bring our dead

here today." Carrying a green coffin and an image of one of the victims to lay at the site, Suber

promised to "disrupt the economy of the city in order to focus attention on the killings.[469] This

dramatization reveals how the public remembrance of dead policeman was entangled with antiblack

violence; Black bodies were buried to pay for the emotional space needed to express white grief.

In the wake of the Algiers Tragedy, Suber and Waters tried to develop other ways to build

mass support for transformation of state power. It was at this juncture that Suber and Waters

learned about the McDonogh Day boycotts. Both Suber and Waters emphasized the importance of

a series of mass boycotts organized by the NAACP in 1954 in the wake of the *Brown v. Board*

decision. The boycotts challenged the annual celebration of John McDonogh, a man who was made

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[467] Suber recalls how this campaign involved marching on and daily petitioning of the police station to build community support against police terror. The event was connected with a changing dynamic in New Orleans Policy Department relying on more Black and minority officers to enforce more aggressive tactics surrounding the city's revitalization efforts. It was during this campaign of diversifying the police force that Suber stood out among political elites from New Orleans with his frustration with and willingness to challenge Black political figures, like Mayor Marc Morial, who were instrumental in enforcing these policies. "Liberation League Organizes Against Police Terror" *Unite!* October 1, 1979, p. 5; Malcolm Suber, "How I Got Over: My Involvement in the Black Liberation Struggle in New Orleans," *Roots Rising*, Vol. 1: 18-19.
[468] Moore 166-170.
[469] Moore 170.

wealthy through the slave trade and donated much of his wealth to the New Orleans public school system designed to only enrich white students.[470] The boycotts were led by Black school teachers who wanted to disrupt the tradition of wreath-laying at McDonogh's statue. The ritual, which was mandatory, required Black students to wait until all white students had laid their wreaths. The boycotts focused on the indignity of Black students being forced to wait during hot New Orleans summers for white students to complete their commemorative obligations.[471] The boycotts lasted for three years and involved over 30,000 Black students throughout the city of New Orleans.[472] Eventually these challenges led to the School Board revising the rules surrounding the commemoration, instituting a "first come, first served" basis for participation. Suber saw this local history as an opportunity to bridge his work on police violence with older, more reserved Black middle-class leaders. By turning to past efforts at racial solidarity, he dramatized present-day issues of state violence and capitalist exploitation.

In 1989, as part of the burgeoning campaign with the African American History Alliance of Louisiana (AAHAL) to reignite mass mobilization, Suber and Waters started writing about "the issue of police violence [and] the issue of white supremacist symbols."[473] In a pamphlet entitled "Down With Racist Monuments," Waters and Suber wrote that the city's plan to reinstate the Liberty Place Monument, a monument dedicated to the white storming of the Reconstruction era assembly of predominantly Black representatives of Louisiana, was meant to "incite hatred between white and Black working people."[474] They concluded that the persistence of Confederate commemorations

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[470] Aubri Juhasz, "Slave Owner John McDonogh's Money Left a Long Legacy of Inequitable Education in New Orleans," *New Orleans Public Radio*, June 19, 2020: https://www.wwno.org/education/2020-06-19/slave-owner-john-mcdonoghs-money-left-a-long-legacy-of-inequitable-education-in-new-orleans.

[471] Malcolm Suber, "The 1954 McDonogh Day Boycott," *Roots Rising*, Vol. 1: 25-26.

[472] Fari Nzinga, "Exit the Matrix, Enter the System: Capitalizing on Black Culture to Create and Sustain Community Institutions in Post-Katrina New Orleans," PhD Diss. (Duke University, 2013): 93.

[473] Suber, "How I Got Over," *Roots Rising*, Vol. 1: 19.

[474] Take 'Em Down NOLA, Facebook post, April 24, 2017.

throughout the city was "an indirect admission that the slave owners were still connected with state power."[475] The city's maintenance of the statues clarified their tacit support of Lost Cause narratives and their resistance to democratic transformation. Waters and Suber made clear that the statues not only distorted history but also continued to serve as yearly gathering places for "Klan and Nazis…to rally backward people to their causes." Thus, taking down the statues served as ground for common cause. Efforts to remove racist symbols and commemorate mass strikes, slave revolts, and figures that help "celebrate the victory over slavery…are the real bearers of the seeds of democracy and progress."[476]

Following Hurricane Katrina, Suber and Waters confronted the problem of recovery being driven by coercive forces that left Black communities both exploited and abandoned. As aid came to the city, commemorative interest grew. Working on rebuilding efforts through the People's Hurricane Relief Fund (PHRF), Suber and Waters both found an opening to "retell" the history of New Orleans through Black citizens' encounters with white supremacy.[477] As with their struggle against police brutality, Waters and Suber ran into the organizing problem of building movements capable of consolidating mass bases of support while also critiquing structures of the state. Like TEDN, PHRF attempted a double move by framing the "Right of Return" as physical return and "as reparations for victims of both the current crisis and past crimes of structural racism and exploitation.[478]

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[475] Take 'Em Down NOLA, Facebook post, April 24, 2017.

[476] The fruit bore not only the statute that would eventually legalize monument removal in 2017, but it also frames the iconic image of Avery Alexander, long-time civil rights activist in New Orleans, being harassed by police and Klan members at a rally around the Liberty Place Monument. In the image, Alexander is being dragged away by police from one of the Klan demonstrations following the passages of the memorial removal statue in 1993. The image would reappear in TEDN publications and street demonstrations to commemorate the struggle against these statues, but also as a political mapping of how state and white nationalist forces congeal through institutions of public memory.

[477] Flaherty 94-95; Lynnell Thomas, "Neutral Ground or Battleground? Hidden History, Tourism, and Spatial (In)Justice in the New Orleans French Quarter," *The Journal of African American History*, *103*(4): 609–636.

[478] Flaherty 95.

But the double move of connecting Katrina and reparations was plagued by criticism that this detracted from more effective forms of response to disaster. This criticism, however, helped them appreciate how the kind of affective-aesthetic attention given to natural disaster and cityscape ruins spurred new interest in public memories of New Orleans. From this, Suber and Waters created the Hidden Histories tour. Based around their public scholarship, their tour highlighted several significant labor strikes and the findings of their shared written project, "Onward to New Orleans: Louisiana's Heroic 1811 Slave Revolt."[479] Produced first as a pamphlet for mass distribution, "Onward to New Orleans" recovers the story of concerted efforts by hundreds of enslaved people all along the eastern banks of the Mississippi to destroy plantations and kill planters en route to New Orleans; it also addresses the political economy of slavery in the US, as well as the racial politics of reconstruction and labor struggles after formal emancipation. The text, compiled with Albert Thrasher, brings together newspaper archives and oral accounts of enslaved people who ran away, tried to sabotage or kill their masters, or were killed as insurrectionists in the face of white terror and complicity. On the 200th anniversary of the slave revolt, Suber said, "Our challenge to progressive whites in this city is that…we should launch a campaign this year t*o rid the city of all these white supremacy statues* which are all over this city."[480] Tying together his research on the 1811 Slave Revolt and his vision of taking down statues, Suber reflected on how he saw both as part of a larger project of democratic imagination: "When are we going to build institutions that make us more conscious, make us better citizens, more aware of our role in the world… We have to bring some anti-racism, we have to bring some anti-imperialism into the discussion. We have to ask people the basic question: is this the kind of world you want to live in? Is this the legacy you want to leave?"[481]

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[479] Albert Thrasher, *Onward to New Orleans: Louisiana's Heroic 1811 Slave Revolt* (New Orleans, LA: Cypress Press, 1996).

[480] Matt Olson, "Malcolm Suber on the 200th Anniversary of the 1811 LA Slave Revolt" *WTUL: New Orleans Independent Media Center*, Radio interview, January 12, 2011, emphasis added.

[481] Olson.

Together, the historical research and the idea of monument removal connects with previous organizing to generate content that substantiates New Orleans as a site of political resistance to white supremacy. Suber and Walters also aimed to develop a new historical consciousness and give audiences their own new footing for continuing this legacy of resistance in contemporary New Orleans.

Deeply rooted in New Orleans' Black radical tradition, Suber and Waters' "democratic experiments in local knowledge" resonate with the philosophy of political leadership practiced throughout the Black Lives Matter Movement. [482] Suber and Waters' experience and understanding of the longer project of Black-led resistance that was part of New Orleans political history informed the imagination of some of the earliest members of TEDN. By developing strategies for challenging white supremacist and capitalist exploitation in many forms, they empowered new leaders to follow their own insights. Suber and Waters clarify how activists might be able to link the national issues raised by BYP100 and BLM to the longer-standing challenges that monuments in New Orleans posed to struggles for racial and economic justice. By recovering histories of slave resistance, boycotts, strikes, and public campaigns to pressure city officials to act, Suber and Waters troubled the idea of "forgotten" pasts that can be taken up in the present to ennoble public remembering. Their work resonates with Moore's confrontation with Landrieu and with Suber's comment when Lee's statue was removed: "We owe it to [the elders] and to their memory of those who have passed on that we have completed the dreams that they had when they were young people… We are saying down with white supremacy!"[483]

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[482] Deva R. Woodly, *Reckoning: Black Lives Matter and the Democratic Necessity of Social Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 55-59.

[483] Maxson, unpublished field notes, "Second Line to Bury White Supremacy: Congo Square Speeches," May 7, 2017.

The demand for monument removal, like Suber and Waters' other historical projects, reveals how such problems are neither new nor interminable. Generating new forms of resistance to contest public memory cannot be done in isolation, or as a purely intellectual exercise, but must be learned through shared struggle and deep commitments to remaking space across time. And this involves imagining political power within *and* beyond the state that can promote and protect Black living.

IV. d. Systems and Symbols: Situating a Politics of Monument Removal

The organizing perspective of Suber and Waters contributed to TEDN's formation by emphasizing the importance of drawing connections across the social lives of Black communities fighting against systemic oppression. But how does this perspective manifest in the political approach of TEDN more specifically? The group's primary refrain for thinking about its targets or making sense of monument removal more generally was "systems and symbols." The group made clear that the phrase "systems and symbols" means that symbols can be used to understand the social organization of institutions of power, and systems produce symbols in order to shape the social dynamics most critical for maintaining their power.

Angela Kinlaw, prominent leader in TEDN, was the most consistent and visible member of the group articulating the political vision behind "systems and symbols." In her words, "symbols are used to bond people around cultural values, ideas, political ideologies, and those ideas show up in *systems that are protected by the state…* All of this stuff is messaging, all of this stuff is psychological, all of this stuff has an impact."[484] Here, Kinlaw identified Confederate monuments as symbols that justify policing. Rather than seeing the statues as open to many different interpretations, Kinlaw pinpointed how they perpetuate white social bonds. The statues survived because racially unjust structures remain unreformed.

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[484] Clint Smith, "The Young Black Activists."

Kinlaw spells out this dynamic in rich detail in her article, "Take 'Em Down and Build 'Em Up: Symbolically and Systematically." She writes that such symbols justify "resorting to force…to dominate those they wish to control and exploit."[485] Thus, the statues and other mnemonic devices perpetuate the "white toxicity" of actions and beliefs that are "protected and passed on in the form of racism, both social and institutional. These [systems] all work together to uphold capitalist exploitation, which further gets spread as imperialism, none of which are in the interests of the working class, particularly the Black working class."[486] This is the connection Kinlaw draws between her diagnosis of white supremacy and the framing of activism through "systems and symbols." Symbols help justify systems that produce disparities in living conditions or exposure to harm. Such symbols make existing arrangements appear inevitable, which undermines challenges that may otherwise attempt to disrupt or upend such arrangements. According to Kinlaw, the "root causes" of daily exploitation can only be confronted with "historical context and knowledge of self."[487] Such attention to "root causes," through the activity of removing symbols allows participants to "explore and collectively imagine and build towards a future where mental, emotional, and physical trauma can be prevented and responded to differently."[488] Thus, there is not reparation without commitment to acting on removal; nor is there meaningful removal without expanding the capacities for imagining a "world that honors life," as opposed to the social world of New Orleans that "honors racism, hate, exploitation, and oppression."[489] Kinlaw concludes, "as we exercise the clarity for mind to have no tolerance for what causes us harm, we inevitably build a new world by operating

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[485] Angela Kinlaw, "Take 'Em Down and Build 'Em Up: Symbolically and Systematically," *Roots Rising*, Vol. 2, 9-15.
[486] Kinlaw, "Take 'Em Down," *Roots Rising*, Vol. 2: 9.
[487] Kinlaw, "Take 'Em Down," *Roots Rising*, Vol. 2: 9.
[488] Kinlaw, "Take 'Em Down," *Roots Rising,* Vol. 2: 10.
[489] Kinlaw, "Take 'Em Down," *Roots Rising*, Vol. 2: 10.

with the kind of love, integrity, and freedom fighting spirit to both be and create what we want… A new world has no choice but to exist TODAY."[490]

How is this vision of democratic transformation different from the vision of removal and reconciliation offered by the city? Two dimensions of TEDN's earliest demonstrations clarify the challenge of "systems and symbols" through the uses of light projection during White Linen Night and their series of "Action Jackson" demonstrations.

One of TEDN's first direct action campaigns in 2015 disrupted the Contemporary Arts Center's annual "White Linen Night," which was held in the Commercial Business District near the statues of Lee and McDonough. The plan was to "disrupt the bourgeois affair" of wealthy art patrons' annual gathering by projecting images depicting the cruel realities of slavery onto the Lee statue to emphasize the "most forefront issue that summer: monument removal in New Orleans."[491] TEDN challenged the casual White Linen art crowd by juxtaposing images of slave ships and backs of enslaved people scarred by whippings with accounts of Lee's cruelty from one of the Black people he enslaved and his own claim that such "painful discipline" was "necessary for [Black people's] instruction as a [civilized] race" (Figures IV. 5 and 6). The projections re-narrated the monument's location in the city, recalling the founding purposes behind its renaming to Lee Circle in 1877.[492] Further, the projection concluded with images of prison cells, following by a quote from Michelle Alexander about race in modern carceral institutions. Connecting New Orleans's status as a city with one of the highest rates of incarceration in the US and a central hub for the trade in slaves,

[490] Kinlaw, "Take 'Em Down," *Roots Rising,* Vol. 2: 15.
[491] A Scribe Called Quess, "Action Tracking," *Roots Rising*, Vol. 2: 31-32.
[492] It is worth noting that the commemorative shift in 1877 aligns with a rise in white "terroristic violence" that targeted white and Black antislavery forces in Louisiana, and ultimately led to the withdrawal of federal troops from New Orleans on April 20 of that same year. Thrasher 109.

TEDN suggested "the present was still trapped by the past, and our work to undo the chains started with taking down these symbols of psychological oppression."[493]

While the focus of the protest was on disrupting who is praiseworthy, it also exemplified the work of monuments and public gatherings as layers of memory, written over one another. The projection of counter-images onto statues was used to great effect in other social movements, including monument removal elsewhere.[494] The intervention relies on the illumination of the monument's fuller meaning and, as Michael Taussig suggests, it cuts at the core of the monument's power to maintain secrecy about the inherent violence of slavery.[495] By creating a visible constellation of space, art, and public memory, TEDN demonstrates that the meaning of its critique of "symbols and systems," is to construct public memory that embraces critical interrogation, not only of historical narratives, but also of any sense that public memory is irrelevant to or neutral on the contemporary challenges of racial justice.

Second, TEDN undertook a series of "Action Jackson" protests in which they targeted symbols of white supremacy more broadly. These demonstrations gathered at the Andrew Jackson statue to put pressure on Mitch Landrieu to expand monument removal discussions to include more than Confederate representations of white supremacy. The first "Action Jackson" intervention insisted on immediate removal of all statues that reflect white supremacy rather than waiting for a 60-day deliberation period granted by the city. By TEDN's account, white supremacy did not need to be defended or debated and the statues were only worthy of "demolition."[496] Thus, the initial "Action Jackson" intervention was planned as a march and tour of statues, starting in Jackson

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[493] A Scribe Called Quess, "Action Tracking," *Roots Rising*, Vol. 2: 32.
[494] Light projection has been a successful political tactic in many other struggles, including protests by ACT-UP and other guerrilla art groups, and it was used to great effect in Richmond, Virginia to help create the removal of Lee and generate counter-discourse without violating laws regarding vandalism.
[495] Michael Taussig, *Defacement: Public Secrecy and the Labor of the Negative* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 39.
[496] A Scribe Called Quess, "Action Tracking," *Roots Rising*, Vol. 1: 24.

Square underneath Andrew Jackson, and moving towards E.D. White and Christopher Columbus, and concluding at the Liberty Square Monument (Figure IV. 7). This action was meant to provide participants with a grounding in the history of such spaces prior to attending a hearing planned by the mayor's office.

In addition to getting people to "show up and show out" in support of monument removal generally, the intervention harkened back to the political strategies of Waters and Suber, calling on historical consciousness as a tool that allows people to connect their present conditions with prior regimes of slavery and white supremacy. TEDN's attempt at building historical consciousness went beyond giving participants the facts that would make them better, more credible speakers at the next public hearing. Instead, marches and tours around the monuments were meant to show participants how the language of the city's "revitalization" projects echoed older perspectives on Jackson or Columbus as "civilizing" figures.[497] Thus, the struggle goes beyond discrediting statues as out of line with contemporary standards of decency and illuminates persistent logics of power that justify exclusion or exploitation. This demonstration, then, made visible how structures of economy and political power depend on previous logics of violence. But as the intimacy of a walking tour suggests, there was also commitment to empowering people to think and act differently on the terms of what it means to be self-governed, to be receptive and responsive to claims made by historically excluded groups. This is the democratic power that TEDN aspires to practice.

The second iteration of "Action Jackson" had a similar flavor. Action Jackson II was connected to a City Council vote on whether to remove the four Confederate statues. Again, TEDN aimed their intervention at the narrow consideration of what was to be removed, this time dramatizing the commemorative language of wreath laying used to invest statues like John McDonogh's with reverential power. By laying objects on the statues, participants aimed to

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[497] Thomas 630-631.

dramatize the connections between past and present.[498] On the pathway leading up to the Jackson

statue, for example, the group laid out black and red flower petals, in an apparent commentary on

the wreath-laying ceremonies of McDonogh Day. The flowers symbolized the Indigenous and Black

deaths for which Jackson was responsible: red flowers symbolized the Indigenous lives lost during

the Trail of Tears and black flowers stood for the people Jackson enslaved. The mingled flowers

along the pathway visualized white supremacy as an interlocking feature of settler colonialism in the

US. The performance bore witness to grief for the lives represented by each petal; such a ritual of

mourning was meant to dishonor Jackson's monumental figure.[499] Further, TEDN offered a

decommemorative placard to replace the one on E.D. White's statue that read: "I am 'Justice' ED

White, in my WHITE robe, for WHITE supremacy, member of the WHITE League responsible for

the murder of over 3000 Black lives: THIS IS WHAT A TERRORIST LOOKS LIKE" (Figure IV.

9). The placard shifts between the first and third person, at times putting the words in White's voice,

and at other times imploring audiences to see the placard's narrative as coming from the present.

The group also put a white Klan hood on the White statue; and, during their march on the Liberty

Square Monument, they poured red paint on base of the obelisk, recovering the violence otherwise

sanitized away.[500]

The "system and symbol" framing also insisted on monument removals as iterative and

repeatable, rather than one-time acts of refounding. The TEDN refrain of "we are not satisfied"

suggests that their demands far exceed any individual acts of removal. But, there is an ambiguity in

their statement: does it suggest that the claims for monument removal must persist until justice has

been satisfied? Or is it that the time is "too late" for satisfaction, and the struggle against

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[498] Erika Doss, *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 2010), 194-196.

[499] Heather Pool, "The Politics of Mourning: The Triangle Fire and Political Belonging," *Polity* 44(2): 197-199.

[500] Tiffany Lethabo King, *The Black Shoals*: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies (Durham, NC: Duke University Press 2019), 39-42.

monuments is one way of working on an unsatisfiable project of refusal?[501] For example, TEDN

clarified that although the statue of E. D. White was removed from its outdoor plinth, its new

location inside the courtroom, away from public view, did not constitute its removal. In a statement

released in January 2021, TEDN contested the relocation of the statue: if removing him from

public view is "an admission of guilt as to how problematic his representation is," then "how could

it possibly be any better that he's on the inside?" Here the group challenged the idea such statues

ought to be placed in "museums" or other places where they could be contextualized or treated with

a more critical eye. Rather, TEDN made clear that the city's effort to rename streets and relocate

monuments associated with the Confederacy or post-reconstruction white backlash, is merely meant

to "coopt the movement with shallow cultural representation."[502] TEDN stated that the aim of

forming such commissions like the New Orleans City Council Street Renaming Commission and

creating spaces for these statues within halls of power is to "steer [removal] away from the larger

goals of systemic change." This dynamic is named as "the age-old trick of hiding the hand of

oppression behind closed doors so that the ruling class may continue its manipulation unseen."

For TEDN, monument removal is not completed when the statues come down. It requires both

fully divesting the symbolic object of its honorary status and acknowledging its structural

significance. In the case of the E.D. White statue, TEDN was not only frustrated that the statue was

moved inside rather than disposed of, but they also made clear that this flimsy symbolic gesture was

representative of a city "that generates $9 billion off of tourism while not offering its citizens a living

wage as they languish in 53 percent poverty." In this sense, TEDN acknowledges each particular act

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[501] Thanks to Lawrie Balfour for illuminating this ambiguity.
[502] In its final report of its yearlong efforts, the New Orleans City Council Street Renaming Commission laid out a list of 6 historical events that would deem a street or statue worthy of being revised, as well as laying out criteria for future decisions about how to choose which commemorations can be removed and how to choose replacements. "New Orleans City Council Street Renaming Report: Final Report," March 1, 2017: https://nolaccsrc.org/NOCCSRC-FinalReport.pdf.

of monument removal is always partial: "as long as the Louisiana Supreme Court is a part of such a system, there is no statue removal that is ever going to fully reflect the systemic change that we ultimately seek." And yet, this is not a refutation of their central mission, which is "to remove all symbols of white supremacy from the landscape of New Orleans as a very necessary part of the struggle toward racial and economic justice." Instead, these partial victories allow for restatements of the goal of such work on public memory, as something fragile and indirect, but always meaningfully part of a longer trajectory of struggle. TEDN made clear that moving E. D. White inside, into an environment where he can be officially contextualized should be seen as a "piecemeal offering of watered-down justice."

Reiterating this critique in 2021, TEDN posted a commemorative image of the removal of the Jefferson Davis monument on their Facebook page. Four years after the statue came down, the group contends, they "understand the contradictions" of coordinating their efforts with a state where "Black lives only matter to the state when our uprising threatens their private property or their profits."[503] Yet the power of this collective organizing had "forced the city's hands" and could not be overlooked, even in the midst of set-backs and looming crises. The commemoration was posted four days after the conviction of Derek Chauvin for the murder of George Floyd, which set off a summer of protest and spontaneous toppling of other monuments in 2020. TEDN's comments about the state, police, and property reveal connections between the 2020 protests and the painful slowness of monument removal. Instead, TEDN offers a sober reflection on the tragic, contingent, and sometimes contradictory means of gathering political power and diffusing it across an array of struggles.

The monument removal TEDN imagined is an incompleteness that opens up democratic citizens to a much longer struggle. It was not about confronting singular structures that so tightly

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[503] Take 'Em Down NOLA, Facebook post, May 15, 2021.

hold individuals that there is no space to maneuver. Even in these somber reflections, TEDN still offered up its vision of "a landscape free of ALL symbols of racist violence oppression…. [a landscape] that uplifts the most liberated and healthy models of humanity that our history has to offer and honors the revolutionary freedom fighters that helped us get here." TEDN interpreted monument removal as a reiterative process that also encompassed the remaking of people and public spaces so that such statues cannot reappear in the future (Figure IV. 10). As TEDN imagined through their acts of political solidarity, the landscape becomes a means of remembrance that generates support for prison strikes, resisting immigration policing, and expanding the view of structural oppression. The wager is that new social and political bonds can be forged by continuing to capture the slow, contingent, but persistent relationship between symbols and structures.

IV. e. After George Floyd: Gordon Plaza, Topplings, and Institutionalizing Removal

Even though many of TEDN's demands were left unmet, many of the court rulings and city council decisions surrounding the questions of monument removal gave them fodder for continued activism. In the wake of George Floyd's murder, TEDN was well positioned to elaborate the connection between symbolic, social, economic and political consequences of race for democratic polities.

In the summer of 2020, TEDN spoke about the urgency of both direct action on police violence and monument removal by re-presenting the city's legal arguments as presented to the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals in March 2017. The justification for removing monuments echoed what TEDN saw as a clear justification for abolishing police: "time has not tempered the unrest and violence that began in Ferguson" and "the wounds commemorated by the monuments have festered, rather than healed," therefore the city must act. But the response to the murder of George Floyd took TEDN in two directions, which actually ended up dissolving TEDN rather than building

a stronger resistance: 1) TEDN's increasing role in advocating for Gordon Plaza residents to have a fully-funded relocation by the city, and 2) TEDN's endorsement of spontaneous toppling of more monuments in New Orleans. While the former became a new campaign that built up networks of support from various organizations in New Orleans (including the New Orleans People's Assembly, a group co-founded by Angela Kinlaw and Malcolm Suber), the latter became media sensations that only seemed to align with the end of TEDN's organizing work. These two directions are clearly related to TEDN's original vision for democratic reconstruction. But the tenuous connection between housing and monuments could not garner the same kind of support for housing resettlement; and as the city formalized its own processes of transforming public memory, TEDN's space to make demands for state action was slowly eroding.

Gordon Plaza was developed in the late 1970s on land used as a toxic waste dump in the early 20th century, as well as a site for unregulated dumping of debris following Hurricane Betsy in 1965.[504] The residents of Gordon Plaza are not alone among public housing residents in New Orleans who have been in long-standing fights with the federal, state, and local governments to receive compensation for the undisclosed exposure to harmful environments and demand new, affordable housing. The connection between gentrification and housing justice, on the one hand, and TEDN's analysis of symbols and systems, on the other, was amplified during the pandemic of 2020 (Figure IV. 11). Organizers pivoted their attention to issues of workplace safety and compensation that spoke to "essential" workers as symbolic instruments of capitalistic systems that did not care for their livelihood. Tying this present health crisis together with this longer history of being exposed to the "toxicity" to the living conditions of Gordon Plaza gave the group more ways to sharpen their argument: "stay-at-home orders are toxic when you live on a landfill."[505]

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[504] Jesse G. Perkins, "Symbols and Systems: The Agriculture Street Landfill," *Roots Rising,* Vol. 2. 49-50.
[505] Take 'Em Down NOLA, Facebook post, June 29, 2020.

Throughout much of the second volume of the *Roots Rising* zine, whiteness as a racial logic is referred to as "white toxicity" rather than "white supremacy" in order to emphasize the pathological nature of justifying the inferiority of racialized others, as well as the physical hazards Black people are exposed to as a result of white power.[506] Posting videos of Gordon Plaza residents articulating their demands for fully funded relocation, TEDN placed their commentary under the banner of "systems and symbols" and pointed out a host of contradictions: "How could there ever be a serious conversation in New Orleans about Healthy Housing, when the Residents of Gordon Plaza have been left to live on toxic soil, where the water and air is impacted?... How could there be a serious conversation in New Orleans about recovering from the impacts of COVID, when the Residents have quarantined in while being immune compromised ALL OF THIS TIME"[507]

Yet at the same time, the struggle for monument removal became harder to hold together with many of the projects imagined by "systems and symbols." In several demonstrations, the people of New Orleans gathered to protest the murder of George Floyd in conjunction with a critique of monuments to White and McDonogh for producing racial identification that emboldened police violence. Thus, statues became targets in the wake of state inaction in response to the murder of Floyd, along with the local murders of Eric Harris and Modesto Reyes and others by the police.[508] Following the toppling of the John McDonogh bust, TEDN announced: "people have talked, voiced their opinions, followed every process the city has offered, and time is up. There is no excuse for compromising with white supremacy… Racist monuments should come down IMMEDIATELY. Empty pedestals for however temporary, are better signs of progress against

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[506] "Removing Weeds of White Inferiority so the Seeds of Liberation Can Grow," *Roots Rising*, Vol. 2: 3-4.
[507] Take 'Em Down NOLA, Facebook post, October 26, 2021
[508] For reference on these specific cases of police violence: Ken Daley, "Eric Harris Protestors Stage Blockade of Central City Street," *Times-Picayune*, February 14, 2016; Ashley Dean, "Protests Planned for Every Night of the Week in New Orleans," *New Orleans Public Radio*, June 1, 2020: https://www.wwno.org/latest-news/2020-06-01/protests-are-planned-for-every-night-this-week-in-new-orleans.

white supremacy, than inaction toward racist monuments." Yet, a few months later, the group's

frustrations mounted as there was little tangible progress made as a result of such topplings. And the

City Council was planning its Street Renaming Commission, yet inattentive to TEDN's demands for

city action on a wider scale. Nor were the concerns of Gordon Plaza residents gaining traction with

the new mayor, LaToya Cantrell, who TEDN accused of "compromising with white supremacists"

who sought to minimize statue removal and bring an end to this "contentious issue."[509]

     While TEDN continued to organize around a variety of social issues connected to Gordon

Plaza, the disproportionate effects of COVID-19 on marginalized communities, and continued

efforts to advocate for the removal of symbols of white supremacy, there was a clear dwindling of

TEDN's mobilizing efforts. The topplings, while publically endorsed by TEDN, may have pushed

them away from the kinds of organizing that succeeded in advancing their "systems and symbols"

framework over previous years. By early 2021, the group acknowledged the frustrations mounting

and tensions surrounding their mission. In laying out why they would not participate or endorse the

city's efforts to rename streets with problematic histories, the group issued a statement that read,

"Take Em Down NOLA will continue to push the City of New Orleans to Finish the Job, and in

some cases, the people have had to take action on their own [to topple such monuments] without

the involvement of a city appointed commission."[510] The combination of spontaneous actions to

topple monuments, plus the city's slow but recognizable steps to revise public memory, pushed

TEDN towards rejecting further engagement with state institutions that continued to dismiss their

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[509] The compromise the group seems to be referring to in multiple places is the Monument Relocation Committee established by Mayor Cantrell in 2018 that advised her on how to deal with the issue of removed monuments. The committee was chaired by Frank Stewart and Sally Reeves, who both were vocal opponents of removal. The committee advised moving many statues to private property and to halt any further removals. The membership was meant to be kept secret, according to the Times-Picayune reporting, and sought to encourage Mayor Cantrell to "bring closure to what has been a citywide divisive issue for the past 2 ½ years." Kevin Litten, "2 Confederate monuments should stay in New Orleans, committee recommends to Mayor Cantrell," *Times-Picayune*, May 12, 2018.
[510] Take Em Down NOLA, Facebook post, January 28, 2021.

larger structural demands without a meaningful direct action route available. The public visibility of

the Street Renaming Commission moved the evaluation process to individual communities, which

put TEDN in a position where it could neither participate on behalf of the city nor credibly contest

proceedings that were focused on countering symbols of white supremacy. Prior to the

Commission's final report in March 2021, TEDN issued a sharp statement that this "street renaming

commission 'appears' as a sign of progress to some, but…we are for non-cooperation with

defenders (who consistently compromise with) of the false ideology of white 'supremacist'

capitalism." TEDN "labeled the Mayor and City Council's misleadership as cowardly for passing off

their responsibility to an unelected commission…[who made] every effort to temper and silence the

democratic rights of the Black majority to rename any public property."[511] The Commission's

proposed process was to include over 37 approved names for removal from street signs and some

public buildings, which undercut the tensions central to TEDN's organizing strategy. The minimal

connection between democratic responsiveness, commemorative namings and historical events

deemed "unacceptable" discounted the contemporary issues that were central to prior campaigns.

The commission's development of standardized processes of evaluating and replacing street names

became its primary goal. In other words, the confluence of state responsiveness, global pandemic,

and revolutionary iconoclasm contributed to undermining the organizing strategy of TEDN.

In some ways, it may be possible to look at the decline of TEDN's influence as all related

back to focusing on monument removal as a political strategy. If partial successes like the E.D.

White relocation or the institutionalization of renaming procedures are deflationary, then work on

public memory may require a kind of sustained attention that is difficult for any movement. But the

continued campaign of Gordon Plaza or New Orleans People's Assembly suggests such efforts at

developing historical consciousness and drawing connections to past struggles for freedom may

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[511] Take 'Em Down NOLA, Facebook post, January 28, 2021.

generate potentially energizing ways of conceiving of the problem of democracy. Regardless, looking closely at TEDN's trajectory as a social movement makes clear that public memory as a medium of political translation between specific objects and structural change is precarious. There are deep tensions between gaining support and avoiding the pitfalls of working with state actors, particularly those who are able to articulate progressive messages on race; their preference to wrap up contentious issues with appeals to unity runs contrary to an agenda defined by long-term, sustained cultural, economic, and social transformation. And yet, despite all these limitations, TEDN's efforts were able to make clear why symbols of public memory are intimately connected to everyday practices of racial hierarchy that expose some to harm through environmental hazards, policing brutality, exposure to unsafe working condition, while others are protected.
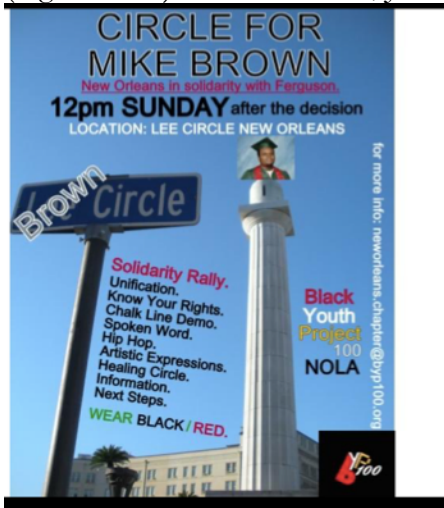

(Figure IV.1) Richard Bradley, April 20, 1984, San Francisco

(Figure IV. 2) Dylann Roof, June 20, 2015, New York Times
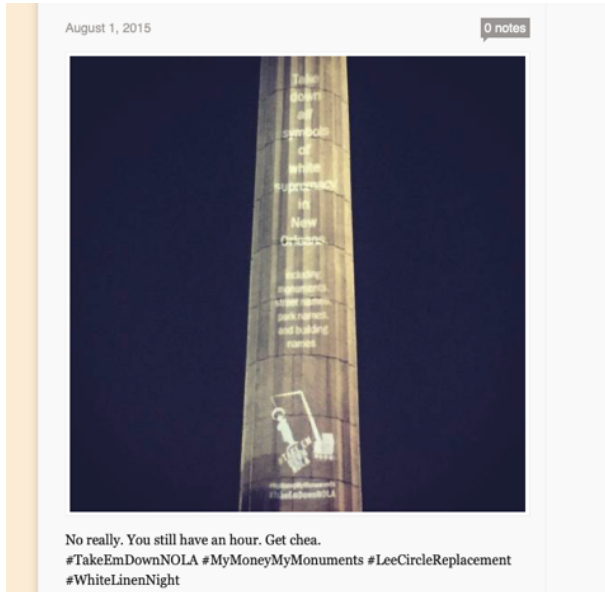
(Figure IV. 3) Bree Newsome, June 27, 2015

(Figure IV. 4)

The Take 'Em Down NOLA group projected images of the scarred backs of slaves onto a monument to Confederate General Robert E Lee [Roopa Gogineni] [Daylife]

(Figure IV. 5)

(Figure IV. 6)

(Figure IV. 7)

(Figure IV. 8)

(Figure IV. 9)

(Figure IV. 10)

(Figure IV. 11)

V. Concluding Remarks

The title of the dissertation comes from the concluding chapter of Robin D. G. Kelley's book on freedom dreams where he is addressing the imaginative work of the Black radical tradition. The actual chapter that this phrase, "turning rubble and memory into seeds," comes from is the epilogue, where Kelley reflects on the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. He sketches out a lovely vision of converting the rubble of the Twin Towers into an international territory, governed by collective rule between United Nations and First Nations, where artists would design the space for unstructured, democratic place with the world "freedom" written in every language on every surface in sight. It is this kind of imagination Kelley describes as only the beginning of a collective process where constructing such a space allows people to feel out "a vision for what it means [to fully] realize our humanity." Kelley concludes, that without such spaces, "all the protests and demonstrations in the world won't bring about our liberation."[512]

What I find interesting about Kelley's notion of imagination, space, and political transformation is that his vision is built in the ashes of terrorist attacks and the subsequent military invasions that created more dead bodies in Afghanistan, and surely more spaces, more rubble, and perhaps more memories. And of course, Kelley knows that imagining such a space does not negate the need for struggle. The rubble and memory, then, are painfully made tools. They are forged across longer arcs of violence that makes them poignant places for unraveling the knotted chords that make up daily experiences of community. Thus, to begin imagining the world through chipping away at monuments is not meant to replace other forms of political struggle. Instead, it means to focus on how such containers become productive spaces for instigating confrontations and dreaming again about the possibilities of making this other world possible. This, I think, is where Kelley's reflections are so beautiful and poignant for looking back at the stakes, dynamics, and

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[512] Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2002), 195-198.

shortcomings of the social movements committed to removing racist and colonialist monuments. The struggle, in some ways, is about taking down such vicious objects meant to project historical domination and shut down the kinds of spaces needed to imagine. Generating the political will to remove some of these monuments is an accomplishment that should not be overlooked. But in some ways, taking down the monuments is about struggling to hold open rubble-filled spaces against the rush to fill them in with newer versions of the same problem.

But to conclude in a more proper fashion: there are at least two insights to continue exploring based on where this research led me. The first is the puzzle of concretizing the struggle for racial equality. As activists in New Orleans and Cape Town expressed, there is plenty of talk about racial reconciliation or reparative measures to be made that would alleviate some of the most glaring effects of the racial-colonial order. But often monument removal activists sided against efforts they perceived as "talk" alone. This puts "talk" and "action" at odds, or it led to eschewing some of the slower, more relationally oriented projects in favor of actions that dramatized dissatisfactions at larger scales. And what seems so compelling about the work of monument removal work is that such efforts to "do" something, even if what they do is partial or falls short of stated aims. It does seem to generate a lot of creativity. But it also seems to come with a kind of frustration that led to the rapid collapse of activist groups. A lot the materials I used for RMF and TEDN would have been lost if I didn't create copies early on. because their digital infrastructure-- whether YouTube, Facebook, or some other web-based platforms--stopped hosting their work. It seems like this is connected: the desire to make tangible, noticeable effects on social dynamics and the frustrations that come when the moment has passed. I want to think about this puzzle in the way Kelley frames the task of rubble, memory, and imagination: what are the tensions or costs in trying to enact collective change for organizers and social movements, and how are these costs absorbed or redistributed in broader democratic politics? If so, how would we talk about those effects? As

features of democratic social movements? As effects of systems of oppression that consume those who fight hardest against its logics? But in its most broad form, I am left with a question about the tension between the desire to concretize struggles against racial inequality and ways in which relationship building and community development may shift around the costs of different strategies.

And second, I only started to think through some of the implications of Jenny Wüstenberg's ideas about state-led and grassroots public memory. But I kept coming back to the question Wüstenberg raises about when activists become part of state-led efforts to consolidate public memory into usable forms of political identities. Of course, there are structural constraints that prevent states from becoming synonymous with the grassroots activists' visions of a more contested form of public memory, but my question is about how to disaggregate notions of "state-led public memory." For my dissertation, I did not directly consider the different kinds of governance involved, even though clearly the intersection between courts, executive powers, legislative processes, and various accounts of political power in civil society are all active in my account. But, I wonder if thinking about different kinds of "state-led" memory might bear fruit for understanding not only "what is grassroots" but also the kinds of political power, democratic or otherwise, that shape public memory in different ways. This inquiry might yield a clearer picture of the kinds of strategies that are most useful for negotiating with state interests.

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