

# Human Rights, Collective Memory,<sup>1</sup> and Counter Memory: Unpacking the Meaning of Monument Avenue in Richmond, Virginia

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## ABSTRACT

This article addresses human rights issues of the built environment via the presence of monuments in public places. Because of their prominence, monuments and public art can offer teachers and students many opportunities for interdisciplinary study that directly relates to the history of their location. Through an exploration of the ideas of collective memory and counter memory, this article explores the specific example of Monument Avenue in Richmond, Virginia. Further, the authors investigate differences in the ways monuments may be understood at the time they were erected versus how they are understood in the present. Finally, the article addresses the practices of contemporary artists who work with monuments and how teachers and students might study monuments in art classes.

## ERIN COMES TO RICHMOND

*For two years, Robert E. Lee's sixty-foot likeness confronted me on my way to and from my job. Approaching from several blocks away, I observed the monument in all conditions of weather and light. On the sixth floor of the Lee Medical Building where I worked, I could cross the hall to peer out a window at a height even with Lee's head. In the evening as I left the building, I often passed patients waiting for a ride home. I wondered if the patients were looking at the monument of Lee across the street or at the sky beyond. Having moved to Richmond from the Northeast, the prevalence of monuments commemorating leaders who fought against the abolition of slavery made me think I had stepped into a world where racism is openly glorified. Occasionally, I saw children playing in the grass around or climbing on the monuments and often I saw tourists posing in front of the monuments for photographs. Although the monuments seem like historical remnants of a different era in history, they are a prominent aspect of the landscape of this era and someone still mows the lawn surrounding each one.*

*On my second day of work, I sat on the stairs of the Lee Monument to eat lunch. As cars circled the lawn around me, I felt uneasy. Utilizing this piece of public space seemed to mean something different than utilizing any other piece of public space.*

1 In this article, we use the terms "collective memory" and "public memory" interchangeably.

*I worried I would be perceived as complicit in the message of the monument and decided never to sit there again.*

## MELANIE COMES TO RICHMOND

*One January day, I noticed people in Civil War uniforms, flying the Confederate flag, with tents pitched around the base of Robert E. Lee's statue. I wondered why people camped around the base of a statue in winter. Later that day I learned it was a state holiday—Lee/Jackson Day. On this day, people re-enact Civil War scenes at the monuments in Richmond in deference to their heroes.*

*I wondered why people today are proud of men who fought to keep humans as slaves, to treat people as possessions, and to deny others the rights that they enjoyed? Before I encountered the re-enactors, I thought the monuments on Monument Avenue were an odd relic of the past. However, seeing the re-enactors with the Confederate flag venerating the monuments, and thus the belief system of the men the monuments represent, I came to see the continued power of the monuments today as the most prominent public sculpture in Richmond.*

## INTRODUCTION

We, the authors, conceive of human rights broadly and believe human rights include the right to live in an environment that represents and respects the views of many. Thus, we are relating the theme of this special issue on human rights to the public sculpture that we see in our town by exploring the history of Monument Avenue in Richmond, Virginia. By studying the Lost Cause era in which the monuments on Monument Ave were created, how monuments function in general, the people they represent, and the narrative that they normalize, we learned a great deal about our city. The article concludes by building on the work of other art educators (Bae, 2009; Russell, 2004; Stephens, 2006; Whitehead, 2004) with ideas for how teachers can address public art and monuments, even ones related to difficult topics. Because we believe that all humans have the right to grow up and live in a physical environment that is free from hatred and physical representations of the domination of one group over another, commemorative monuments represent a human rights issue directly related to art education.

## THE LOST CAUSE

The term "Lost Cause" relates to the myths that Confederates developed after the Civil War and spread throughout the entire country.<sup>2</sup> This fictitious "history" was

2 We both attended high school and college in the northeastern portion of the United States and learned a version of Civil War history that is markedly different from the Lost Cause. We recognize that the version we learned is also incomplete and paints the position of the north in a positive light. For instance, we learned lovely stories about the transcendental poets and their



written into Virginia history textbooks (Dean, 2009) and continues to circulate today. These myths include the ideas that the Civil War was primarily about states' rights not slavery, that slaves were reasonably happy with their situation, and that the South's secession was a heroic act against northern aggression (Gallagher, 1995; McPherson, 2007; Nolan, 2000). The Lost Cause manifested itself through bestowing "heroic" status on the soldiers and generals who fought for the confederate cause and through nostalgia for the era before the Civil War.

Savage (1997), a historian whose work since the 1970s has focused on public monuments and their often racialized nature, calls Richmond the center of the cult of Lost Cause, with Robert E. Lee as the key figure of that cult. Savage argues that Lee was chosen as a central figure for "sculptural configuration of Southern white heroism" (p. 130) in part because Lee represented the ideals of the Southern gentleman and gave Southerners a hero to celebrate. Leib (2006), a geographer whose work explores political geography as well as race and ethnicity in the American South, describes the era considered to be the height of the Lost Cause collective memory as a time concurrent with the erection of the monuments on Monument Avenue, and, simultaneously the era that Jim Crow laws went into effect.

## MONUMENT AVENUE

Monument Avenue is a prestigious thoroughfare with large estate-like homes in the heart of Richmond that features six large commemorative statues; they are the most prominent public sculptures in town. In a few miles along this renowned street, five Civil War era Confederate leaders are memorialized with large-scale bronze and stone sculptures. These sculptures embody what Russell (2004) describes as "hero-on-a-horse" public art in that they are idealized portrayals. Moving from East to West, the statues represent J.E.B. Stuart, Robert E. Lee, Jefferson Davis, Stonewall Jackson, and Matthew Maury. At the western end of this street is a contemporary bronze and stone monument to Arthur Ashe. Born in Richmond but forbidden to play tennis on local public tennis courts because of his skin color, Ashe was an internationally known tennis star and humanitarian. Aside from being a historical spectacle, Monument Avenue is a prestigious residential address for Richmonders. Events such as house tours, a 10k footrace, and holiday parades occur on Monument Avenue, demonstrating that civic pride centered around Monument Avenue remains strong.

The dedication of the Lee Monument in May 1890 marked the beginning of the construction of Monument Avenue. The Avenue's width and grassy median

abolitionist views, but did not learn about the number of northerners who promoted slavery and were pro-confederacy because it allowed them to purchase cheap cotton for their factories and maximize their profits. Thus, the version that we learned romanticized the northern position on the war and neglected to tell the less savory bits.

were planned to create a magnificent surrounding for the Lee Monument, emulating grand boulevards in the United States and Europe (Driggs, Wilson, & Winthrop, 2001).

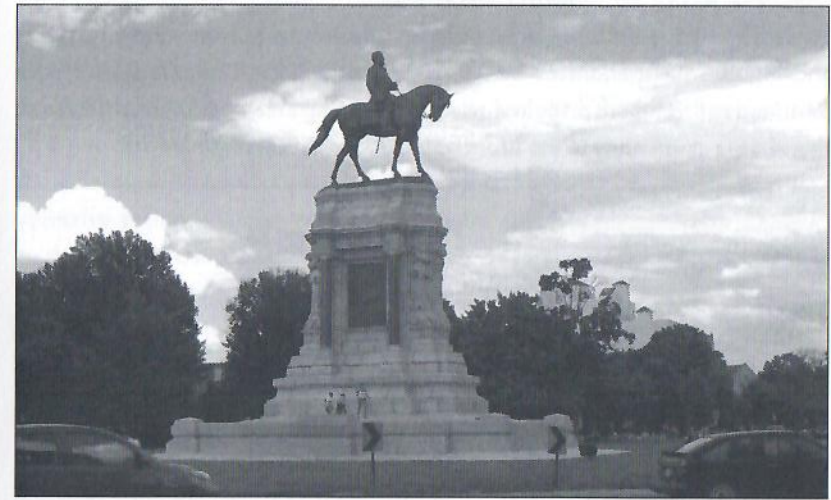


Fig. 1

Thus, development and traffic patterns of this section of Richmond were literally built around this monument to Lee. The erection of additional monuments followed with the monuments to J.E.B Stuart and Jefferson Davis coming in May 1907.

The Stonewall Jackson monument was completed in October 1919 and the Mathew Maury monument was unveiled on Armistice Day in 1929. These five monuments were presented to large crowds of white citizens of Richmond amidst festivities during Confederate reunions (Wilson, 2003).

The contemporary monument to Richmond native Arthur Ashe was built in 1996 and was the subject of a fierce debate among the citizens of Richmond (Leib, 2006). After a prototype was unveiled in 1994, Virginia governor Douglas Wilder, the first elected African American governor in the US, suggested that the monument to Ashe belonged on Monument Avenue. This led to significant public outcry and

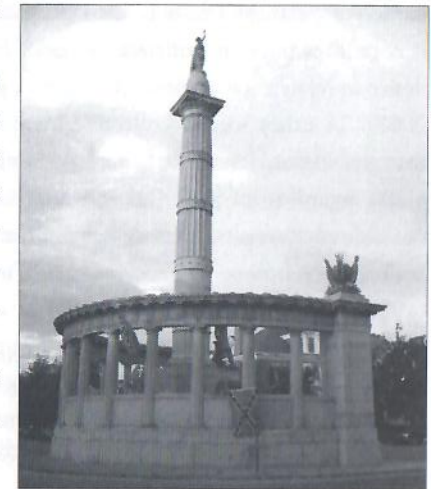


Fig. 2



numerous ideas circulated about the best place for the Ashe monument. Claiming it would be historically incongruent, some argued that a modern person did not belong in the company of Confederate icons on Monument Avenue; other arguments were patently racist (Baker, 1995).

Finally, Richmond's city council agreed to place Ashe on Monument Avenue and in 1996 the monument was unveiled. At the dedication, Douglas Wilder said, "today I feel more pride and relevance in being here on Monument Avenue than I have at any time in my life" (Leib, 2006, p. 206).



Fig. 3

### COLLECTIVE MEMORY

Collective memory relates to the Lost Cause and to Monument Avenue because it combines popular understandings of history, that may be incorrect, with a desire to relate these understandings to a group identity (Uhrmacher & Tinkler, 2008). In other words, collective memories can be formed through people's susceptibility to the rhetoric of a dominant group with power to circulate ideas, regardless of historical accuracy. Collective memory is so strong that it can sidetrack or alter personal memories and so insidious that it can become codified in monuments (Loewen, 1999) and in textbooks (Dean, 2009). Zelizer (1995) explained collective memory as the constructed memories of a group that promote the interests of that group, usually the wealthy and powerful. Further, Stanley (2003) described how public memory often circulates among a population in a largely unchallenged manner. The ideas of collective memory are accepted and believed to be true without an acknowledgement of their partial nature, their viewpoint, and their disputed aspects.

Collective memories spread in many ways, including speeches, photographs, movies, the Internet, television, books, newspapers, monuments, and word of mouth. They outweigh and eclipse individual stories, voices of dissent, and other ways of knowing. As an agent of hegemony, collective memory can be a stubborn obstacle against moving toward an equitable society where the voices of many are valued and represented. For example, bell hooks (2009) wrote about growing up in Kentucky where the collective memory included the idea that Kentucky "did not take an absolute position on the issue of white supremacy, slavery, and the continued domination of black folks by powerful whites" (p. 9). This rosy collective memory contrasted her experiences of school segregation, fieldtrips to the local Jefferson Davis monument, and veneration of the Confederacy and the Confederate flag. Thus, the collective memory stood in contrast to her lived experience.

### Monument Avenue as an Embodiment of Collective Memory

These statues on Monument Avenue play a significant function in the formation of a collective memory of the Confederacy. Based upon the Lost Cause myth, a fictionalized simulacrum of gentility, heroism, and a beautiful life, the monuments do not reflect a range of people and a range of viewpoints. Instead, the monuments perpetuate and promote a narrow view that reinforces the power of a few and glorifies the Confederacy and slavery. In writing about history and spectacle, Debord (1994) notes, "Myth was the unified mental construct whose job it was to make sure that the whole cosmic order confirmed the order that this society had in fact already set up within its own frontiers" (p. 93). In this way, the sculptures on Monument Avenue construct, perpetuate, and continue to reinforce the Lost Cause collective memory, perpetuating an unequal society. Because the monuments are permanent and a section of the city is literally built around them, they construct and reinforce the power of one group and keep others in a subordinate role.

### COUNTER MEMORY

Counter memory differs from collective memory because counter memory is more nuanced and may rely on the involvement of multiple voices telling multiple stories, promoting action, or challenging the very nature of a monument (Young, 1999). Building on the work of Foucault (1977), Giroux (1997) defined counter memory as a practice that:

Transforms history, from a judgment on the past in the name of the present truth, to a 'counter-memory' that combats our current modes of truth and justice, helping us to understand and change the present by placing it in a new relation to the past. (p. 160)

In describing the public memory and those who it neglects, Stanley (2003) wrote:



Yet those who do not fit into these narratives, whose presence and motivations are not accounted for by them, are in constant danger of being silenced or excluded, their right to be in democratic spaces called into question. Meanwhile, the actual histories that people live, their complex interconnections with others, are obscured and eventually forgotten. (p. 38)

Thus, according to Stanley, counter memories often represent those who were silenced by the collective memory and they may provide another lens through which to view the past and present, and a vehicle through which to change the present.

### The Persistence of the Lost Cause

Though the Lost Cause collective memory no longer circulates freely in an unchallenged manner, certain elements of it continue to thrive within the physical environment and through recent state government actions. The physical environment in and around Richmond features numerous homages to Confederates in the form of local schools, highways, office and residential buildings, and businesses bearing the names of Confederate icons. Examples of this include Lee-Davis High School, Jefferson Davis Highway, Lee School Lofts, and Lee Medical Building. Though official government policies promote equality, elements of Lost Cause linger in many ways. For instance, the commonwealth of Virginia continues to annually celebrate Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson by closing state government offices for a day in January. Originally started in 1889 to honor Robert E. Lee during the Lost Cause era, this holiday has now been celebrated for 122 years, thus showing how state-sanctioned reverence for the Confederacy continues to this day. Furthermore, in 2010 Virginia governor Robert McDonnell issued an executive proclamation to celebrate Confederate history month in April. His initial proclamation referenced the “sacrifices of the Confederate leaders, soldiers and citizens during the period of the Civil War” (Meola, 2010) without mentioning the institution of slavery. Another governmental function in which the legacy of the Lost Cause persists is education. In the fall of 2010, a newly approved Virginia 4th grade history textbook was found to contain factual inaccuracies including that thousands of African-Americans fought for the Confederacy (McCartney, 2010; Sieff, 2010). Though some African Americans served in the Confederate army, the notion that thousands willingly fought for the Confederacy is outside mainstream historical scholarship and is related to the Lost Cause (Leib, 2002; McCartney, 2010; Sieff, 2010). The above examples show how elements of the Lost Cause collective memory continue to linger in 21st century Virginia.

### ARTHUR ASHE MONUMENT

#### AS COUNTER TO ELEMENTS OF THE LOST CAUSE

The Arthur Ashe monument was built at a time when the African American community in Richmond had enough political power to tell a story that contrasts the hegemonic narrative created by the monuments to Confederates (Uhrmacher & Tinkler, 2008). Because Arthur Ashe was a contemporary figure his sculptural presence is not a counter memory to the Confederate monuments themselves. Instead, the Ashe sculpture is counter to the dominant narrative of the Lost Cause and some of its lingering elements, represented collectively by the other monuments on Monument Avenue. The Ashe monument challenges two specific lingering elements of the Lost Cause in Richmond’s collective memory: that Confederate leaders are the heroes who should be venerated and that Richmond’s pre-Civil Rights era past should be glorified.

Because the Confederate icons are idealized in sculptural forms on Monument Avenue, their presence seems fixed and permanent, defining who and what a Virginia hero is.<sup>3</sup> In contrast to this presence, Arthur Ashe challenges the ideals of who a Richmond hero can be. In discussing how Ashe’s presence would change Monument Avenue, then Governor Douglas Wilder stated that the men sculpturally depicted “are heroes from an era which would deny the aspirations of an Arthur Ashe. He would stand with them, saying, ‘I, too, speak for Virginia’” (On streets where Confederates reign, 1995). We believe that there was a pre-existing canon of heroes and Ashe expanded this canon on Monument Avenue. Because he was a humanitarian, worked to improve the lives of others, and struggled against racist laws and policies, he exemplifies a different concept of what a Richmond hero can be.

Another aspect of the Lost Cause still circulating today is the unexamined glorification of the social, political, educational, and economic structures of the past (from the pre-Civil War time to the Civil Rights era) without acknowledging who these structures advantaged and disadvantaged and how these structures created and perpetuated inequality. According to Uhrmacher and Tinkler (2008) “The Arthur Ashe Monument challenges the need of some white southerners to glorify their past, a past which was based on slavery” (p. 233). The presence of the Ashe sculpture on Monument Avenue reminds us that he was denied access to public places including local tennis courts because of the color of his skin. It points to the fact that it was not so long ago that Richmond was a legally segregated city with many citizens denied access to public facilities.

3 Matthew Maury, Stonewall Jackson, Robert E. Lee, and J.E.B. Stuart were all from Virginia.

Though monuments in the “(re)member-and-(re)present” category can be permanent sculptural counter monuments, they can also be temporary interventions to existing monuments including events such as a flash mob that repurposes the monument, or they can exist solely through digital media.



By introducing an additional point of view to the narrative of Monument Avenue the Arthur Ashe monument complicates how we think about the racial structures of society that prevented Ashe and other African Americans from accessing publicly funded community resources. These structures of oppression, which bell hooks (2000) describes as the white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, continue to exist today in different ways and continue to afford privilege to some while keeping others in subordinate roles. In our present city, issues of educational inequality represent one way that this problem is perpetuated. As evidenced by the controversy that exploded in response to the proposal to place this monument on Monument Avenue (Leib, 2006), it is clear that Richmond still struggles with the legacy of slavery and that some citizens were disturbed by the possibility of a monument that would disrupt the collective memory of the Lost Cause.

### HOW MONUMENTS FUNCTION

Monuments are meaningful elements of the built environment that derive their power from multiple sources. Loewen (1999) explains how the conventions of hieratic scale, including size, lasting materials, landscaping, and allegorical allusions to authority, constitute a visual language of power in monuments. Through these conventions, many traditional hero-on-a-horse style monuments tend to buttress collective memories and the power of the leading group by asserting a sense of domination over the human audience and the landscape. Loewen (1999) encourages viewers to consider every element of a monument as an intentional decision chosen to create a particular meaning. There are certainly other types of monuments which take a post-modern approach by deliberately avoiding the conventions of hieratic scale as described by Loewen (1999). We discuss examples of this type of monument later in the article.

#### Hieratic Scale in the Material Language of Hero-on-a-Horse Monuments

The use of monumental size, lasting materials, and pristine landscaping are ways the sculptures on Monument Avenue express importance throughout time and demand attention. The conventions of hieratic scale express domination: posture, excessive muscles, and placement on a horse convey a sense of power (Loewen, 1999). Further, the well-kept landscapes around the monuments show that the monuments are still considered important by the community in the present day.

#### Stories of Wealth and Power

Monuments often represent the position of those who established that monument, serving as a representation and perpetuation of collective memory. Loewen (1999) noted that wealthy individuals often control the design and



Fig. 4

funding of monuments, resulting in monuments that reinforce and normalize their power in the minds of community members. In particular, Loewen pointed out that throughout the United States, and especially in the Southern states, there are monuments to people who fought to promote slavery.

#### A Language of Power on Monument Avenue

Monument Avenue uses many conventions of hieratic scale to convey power, domination, and grandeur. Sheer size makes an impression with the monuments ranging in height from the J.E.B. Stuart monument at a height of 22 ½ feet to the Davis monument at 67 feet.

The Lee monument is surrounded by a large lawn in the middle of a traffic circle and is sometimes used as park space, the stairs of the base serving as a place to climb or sit. The Davis monument also invites passersby to climb its steps. Some of the other monuments feature small flowering gardens around their bases. All of the monuments are dramatically lit at night. A local rumor is that police patrol the monuments, shining searchlights on them to ensure they are not vandalized. The houses and the sculptures on Monument Avenue symbiotically elevate each other in status through the many conventions of hieratic scale.

#### Monuments as Agents of Hegemony

The tendency for permanent works of public art to fade into the background of our conscious thought is what can make them powerful agents of hegemony. When a monument's presence and message become so routine that passersby





Fig. 5

do not notice or question them, the monument gains more power to affect thoughts and culture by normalizing its message. The Confederate sculptures on Monument Avenue have tremendous power as symbols of the white supremacist capitalist patriarchy (hooks, 2000) and therefore deserve critical attention in the art classes of Richmond's public schools.

### PEDAGOGICALLY TOPPLING THE MONUMENTS

Though our first instinct was to suggest a literal toppling of these monuments, upon further reflection we came to see that a more powerful approach is working to pedagogically topple them. We agree with Merewether (1999) who wrote that trying to erase a period of history by physically removing monuments commemorating that period can be a dangerous form of revisionist history. Some might even argue that to destroy the monuments would infringe upon the rights of people who celebrate the monuments and the men they represent as part of their heritage and would not be in the spirit of human rights. As prominent public art in Richmond, studying these monuments in school classrooms relates to the ideas of many art educators (Alexenberg & Benjamin, 2004; Bae, 2009; Buffington, 2007; Green, 1998; Russell, 2004; Stephens, 2006; Whitehead, 2004). We believe that teachers who engage their classes in mining public objects for meaning can provide their students with the opportunity to think critically about issues of local and global relevance, such as racism, permutations of history, and the functions and possibilities of public art in the context of a specific place in their own community. In the following sections, we

make suggestions for how teachers could address Monument Avenue or other commemorative sculptures in their classrooms.

### Teaching Collective Memory

Because the monuments on Monument Avenue were erected during the time when the Lost Cause version of Civil War history circulated freely, these monuments represent and valorize not only the Confederate icons whose likenesses they portray, but also the Lost Cause era. Thus, a unit devoted to studying these monuments could be interdisciplinary and clearly connected to history. This unit might begin with an investigation into the Lost Cause era coupled with an investigation into the lives of the men depicted on Monument Avenue. Through this inquiry, teachers can help students understand the concept of collective memory. This can facilitate student learning about how the Lost Cause narrative emerged and continues to circulate. Through developing an understanding of the context, both temporal and social, of the construction of the monuments, students will consider what the monuments meant when they were constructed, and what they may mean now. Probing into the significant controversy surrounding the placement of the Ashe monument will add another layer to this inquiry. Working to understand the concept of counter memory (Foucault, 1977) may enable students to understand a wider range of ideas about the past and present history of Richmond and to see how they can work for justice now.

### Teaching Counter Memory

To further push the idea of a counter memory, we suggest that teachers have students think about other people from Virginia or Richmond who could be represented on Monument Avenue in order to tell a wider, more inclusive story about Richmond's past and present that might lead to change today. As described by Young (1993), counter monuments work against the, "traditionally didactic function of monuments, against their tendency to displace the past they would have us contemplate" (p. 28). Thus, we believe Russell's (2004) categories of monuments: "hero-on-a-horse," "form-and-freedom," and "collaborate-and-create" could be augmented with the addition of a fourth category related to counter monuments. We name this category "(re)member-and-(re)present" and intend this to include monuments such as the previously mentioned statue of Arthur Ashe, Krzysztof Wodiczko's interventions on monuments, and various monuments worldwide that tell stories neglected by the dominant narrative in that locale. Teaching students about the purpose and function of counter monuments allows students to research people of local importance from historical or contemporary times who are not included in the collective memory. There are



numerous notable people from the Civil War era whose presence on Monument Avenue would dramatically change the meaning of the street. For instance, though Henry 'Box' Brown, who escaped slavery in Richmond in 1849 by being packed into a crate and sent to abolitionists in Philadelphia, is memorialized in a sculpture elsewhere in Richmond, putting a sculpture of him in a prominent location like Monument Avenue could demonstrate human ingenuity and desire for freedom.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, Elizabeth van Lew, a Richmonder who developed many clever means to pass information to the Union army during the Civil War, could be the subject of a monument that might show one aspect of the often hidden role of women in the Civil War. Having students consider how sculptures of a range of people related to the Civil War could change the meaning of Monument Avenue would involve them in thinking about collective memory and counter memory.

After students investigate a particular individual, this unit could turn into a design problem for students. Students could consider ways to represent a person as a visually powerful monument, to show the accomplishments of the individual, and to allow for the representation of multiple (and possibly conflicting) points of view. Students will have to decide whether to use the traditional conventions of hieratic scale in their design, or to invent or appropriate other techniques to convey importance and invite attention. Having students work through the artistic process of designing a maquette and developing a rationale for placing their monument on Monument Avenue would involve them in the decision making process and allow them to participate in creating a plan that could involve civic action.

### **(Counter) Monumental Strategies of Contemporary Artists**

Another option to have students investigate monuments would be to look at the work of two contemporary artists whose work deals with monuments and issues of memory: Maya Lin and Krzysztof Wodiczko. Through the study of their approaches to commemorative works of art, students could develop plans for a contemporary monument to the Civil War era, or plan some type of artistic intervention that would involve changing the narrative told by the monuments on Monument Avenue. Studying the work of Lin could enable students to learn about conventions of monuments other than the traditional hieratic scale. In Lin's work including the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the Women's Table, and the Civil Rights Memorial, she creates pieces that are at human scale, allow interaction between the viewer and the memorial, and represent many people rather than one hero. In addition to the conventions she developed, students

4 There is a monument to Henry "Box" Brown along the James River in Richmond. However, this is on a walking path, not on a major thoroughfare in the city.

also consider how her works serve to humanize important events rather than distance them, literally or metaphorically, from the viewers.

Further, students could approach the idea of a counter memory working against the current narrative by considering how Wodiczko changes the meaning of monuments by projecting images and text onto them. By projecting video and sound on existing monuments as a form of artistic intervention, Wodiczko (1999) chooses to "reveal and expose to the public the contemporary deadly life of the memorial" (p. 51). These temporary interventions bring additional voices, often those of marginalized people, to the story that the monument tells, forcing the viewers to re-see the monument they may have ceased to examine critically. For instance, in the Bunker Hill Projection (1998), Wodiczko superimposed enormous images of women whose children had been murdered onto a large obelisk shaped monument to the Revolutionary War battle in Boston. Through this, Wodiczko connected the loss of life during a crucial Revolutionary War battle to the contemporary situation of the loss of life, due to a high murder rate, in the neighborhood around the monument. According to Hamlin and Desai (2010), Wodiczko, "believes that public monuments play an important role in civil, and specifically democratic societies, and can serve as significant sites for discussion and debate about current events and history" (p. 67). By studying his process, teachers and students could critically think about ways to alter the meaning of monuments in their area through artistic interventions. These could involve projections, craft bombing,<sup>5</sup> guerrilla art and sanctioned performances, flash mobs, digitally altered images, audio tours with multiple perspectives, public dialogue as performance, among other means. By exploring this range of possibilities, a class could develop a temporary intervention, suitable for their area that functions as a counter memory to disrupt the hegemony of the collective memory. Signage, interventions, and dialogue about the monuments are all possible ways to change the meaning of the monuments without erasing their existence from history. Even initiating new rituals, including play, in the public space surrounding the monuments could be a way of pedagogically toppling them and reclaiming a landscape that is otherwise oppressive.

We think that the goal of building an understanding of collective memory and counter memory is not to have all students agree on a new monument or come to hold the teacher's viewpoint. Instead, our goal is to have students recognize that history looks different to different people at different points in time. We also want students to think about their built environment, consider the monuments they see and ask themselves: "What stories do these monuments tell?" "Whose stories are told?" "Whose stories are neglected?" "How can I work with others to help expand the stories that monuments in my area tell?"

5 Though it can take many forms, craft bombing usually involves temporary and unauthorized additions of crafted objects to a public place.



## CONCLUSION

A work of commemorative sculpture in conjunction with the surrounding landscape tells a story that is part of the community's collective memory. Sometimes the story being told has the hegemonic power to eclipse other stories and voices, contributing to human rights issues. Through pedagogically critical strategies, including artistic interventions that change or add to the meaning of the monument, students can consider a variety of viewpoints and voices, thus chipping away at the monumental power of a harmful collective memory. Further, teachers can use monuments and memorials to center discussions of perennially relevant human rights topics such as racism, colonialism, and atrocities like slavery and war. Richmond's Monument Avenue contributes to the enduring strength of the myth of the Lost Cause, but it also offers citizens of Richmond something on which to focus a dialogue on the deeper issues of enduring aspects of racism and inequality in our community today in service of change. These issues are not limited to the Confederacy and slavery; the histories of many other groups including women, American Indians, and Latin Americans, have been neglected or misrepresented on the sculptural landscape of the United States. In particular, Loewen (1999) describes how sculptural depictions of American Indians frequently show them in subservient roles to Europeans by appearing passive and by being positioned physically below the Europeans in monument. Across the country, monuments and memorials that are the sources and reflections of deep seated collective memories provide opportunities for communities to re-evaluate collective memories, introduce counter memories, and add additional narratives to what is commonly known about a monument. Art classrooms are excellent places for these discussions.

## AUTHORS' NOTE

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## El Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos: Pedagogic Reflections

KATHLEEN KEYS

### ABSTRACT

This article addresses human rights issues of the built environment via the presence of monuments in public places. Because of their prominence, monuments and public art can offer teachers and students many opportunities for interdisciplinary study that directly relates to the history of their location. Through an exploration of the ideas of collective memory and counter memory, this article explores the specific example of Monument Avenue in Richmond, Virginia. Further, the authors investigate differences in the ways monuments may be understood at the time they were erected versus how they are understood in the present. Finally, the article addresses the practices of contemporary artists who work with monuments and how teachers and students might study monuments in art classes.

### INTRODUCTION

With a background in social justice art education research (Keys, 2003, 2005, 2007) and fifteen years of teaching experience in museums, community arts settings, and higher education, I journeyed to Santiago for fall 2010 as a Universities Study Abroad Consortium (USAC) visiting professor at the Universidad de Andres Bello. Once there I began exploring El Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos (MMDH), the existence of which in a post-dictatorship society is significant. Inaugurated January 11, 2010 by President Michelle Bachelet<sup>1</sup> it was a major Bicentenario project funded<sup>2</sup> by the Chilean government. The building of MMDH (Figure 1) acknowledges that Chile is healing, but also stresses that what happened under Pinochet's dictatorship must not be forgotten.

MMDH affords myriad learning opportunities, however the following investigation will focus on areas relevant to the field of art education, as presented through the lens of a Visual Art & Human Rights (VAHR) course taught by myself (a U.S. visiting professor) and taken by U.S. study abroad students. Within the course, MMDH's architecture and design, resonant artworks and artifacts, and its role in Chile's "reencuentro" were explored. In this article

1 Bachelet was elected the first woman president of Chile and is a torture survivor of Villa Grimaldi where she and her mother were detained, and later exiled. Her father, who served under Allende's government and was also imprisoned and tortured, and died of a heart attack in prison (Eshet, 2008).

2 \$25 million was originally dedicated.