Following the 2015 murder of nine Black churchgoers by Dylann Roof in Charleston, South Carolina, that summer, a small group of mostly Black students at the University of Mississippi (where I am a professor) began to discuss what, if anything, they could do. Earlier that spring they, along with most of the nation, witnessed the video-streamed murder of Walter Scott by a South Carolina police officer. Scott was shot in the back by the officer while fleeing for his life (Schmidt & Apuzzo, 2015). The students were also painfully aware of Freddie Gray, who had been murdered that same month in Baltimore while riding in the back of a police van. Gray’s spine snapped due to the van’s sudden deceleration. The Maryland state medical examiner’s office ruled Gray’s death a homicide because police officers “through acts of omission” failed to follow standard safety procedures (Fenton, 2015). Less than a month after Roof walked into Emanuel AME Church in downtown Charleston, these students would also watch the video of Sandra Bland’s arrest after a routine traffic stop and read with disbelief about her alleged suicide after having been found dead hanging in her jail cell. They, along with much of the rest of the nation, bore witness to and participated in the civil unrest that swept the nation that summer. And they, like many, continued to wonder what, if anything, they could do.

By August, these students had their own plan. They made a list of demands for campus administrators, including the removal of the Mississippi state flag from the flagpole in the center of the campus. The students drew connections between Roof’s proud display of the Confederate battle flag, its prominent display in the official state flag of Mississippi, and the glorification of the flag and other Confederate symbolism by White students on their own campus. As one of the students told my colleague in a feature for the late Anthony Bourdain’s Parts Unknown, “It infuriated me that Dylann Roof had been glorifying these symbols. And [students on this campus] wore them proudly, flashed them . . . revered them. And not that those symbols were responsible, but the same people that glorified those symbols were responsible for the deaths of people that look like me or that look like my grandma” (Foster, 2017).

As soon as the semester began in late August, the students went to work. They staged demonstrations in a historic green space on campus known as “the Grove” during home football games when thousands of students, alumni, and others gather in revelry to cheer on the football team. They wrote editorials in the student newspaper. They participated in a letter-drop campaign in the main administration building on campus, where more than
50 years prior, James Meredith was escorted onto campus by U.S. marshals following a deadly riot by a White mob protesting his enrollment and subsequent integration of the campus. By October, pressure was mounting on university and student leadership. A resolution authored by students proposing the removal of the state flag from campus was on its way to the student governing body for consideration (Lott, 2015). The students held a planned rally in front of the administration building in mid-afternoon. They spoke with conviction. Hundreds gathered to listen and to join in their demands. A smaller group of White counter-protestors, including members of a Klan chapter from Georgia, and members of a local League of the South chapter shouted racist taunts at the mostly Black students (Kirkland, 2015). Only one administrator, a Black woman who at the time worked within Student Affairs, stood between the mostly Black students and the group of White counter-protestors. The rest of the nearly all White, nearly all male administrators remained in their building. As an attendee of that protest, I recall looking toward the front of the building and seeing one peeking from behind the curtain of his office window.

The arrival of the Klan on campus proved to be the tipping point for student government representatives who until that time were ambivalent at best about the state flag. In the debate over the student resolution, one White male student declared that while he was not sure which way he would have voted before the Klan showed up, their appearance and their treatment of his fellow students made his moral obligation clear. The resolution passed with an overwhelming majority that evening (Levine, 2015). Shortly thereafter, the Faculty Senate voted unanimously in support, followed by the Staff Council and Graduate Student Council. With all four governing bodies now in favor, the administration had little room to maneuver. On a cold, rainy morning, and with little fanfare, the state flag was lowered, folded, and carried away by two university police officers (Ferguson, 2015).

While the students were ultimately successful in leading a movement to remove the state flag from campus, the Confederate monument at the entrance to campus remained in place. Later, its presence was contextualized with a plaque, but recently, it has been relocated to a Confederate cemetery in a more remote part of campus, just behind the old basketball arena and across the street from the football facilities. The statue's place on campus serves as a constant reminder to the majority-Black athletes on campus that while they may compete for the glory of a championship season, those students who fought and died to keep their ancestors enslaved made the real ultimate sacrifice, memorialized by the elegiac Greek couplet on the side of the statue's base that, translated, reads, “Go tell the Spartans, stranger passing by, that here, obedient to Spartan law, we lie.” This couplet is identical to that which is engraved on the monument to the Spartan soldiers who died at the Battle of Thermopylae, as dictated through Herodotus’s (2015) The Histories. Among Greek epitaphs it was commonplace to employ the term stranger as an appeal to sympathy from passersby. In this particular epitaph, the “stranger” is compelled to make a personal journey to Sparta to break the news of the soldiers' honorable sacrifice, “obedient to Spartan law.”

Both the plaque and the relocation of the statue have been responses to the pressure brought by the student movement. But, unlike the removal of the flag, they have met much more persistent and overt resistance.
Contradictory arguments are made by many, including claiming that the removal of the statues is “an erasure of history” while also maintaining that they are “just statues” and thus harmless (Hernandez, 2017; Hitson, 2019, 2020). It’s pretty clear on its face that both of these cannot be simultaneously true. It’s also clear that the resistance to their removal indicates that Confederate statues and memorabilia are serving some important purpose.

There are many criticisms and analyses of Confederate iconography to be made. In this essay, however, my aim is narrow. Here, I turn our attention toward the narratives these monuments convey. For example, as I explain later in the essay, the “Lost Cause” is a complex and enduring set of myths about the ante-bellum American South, its system of slavery, and its relationship to the rest of the nation. Monuments, memorials, and other Confederate iconography are symbolic representations of these myths, meant to condense and convey those myths through material forms and to reinforce the immaterial effects that accompany them. Understanding how the complex web of myths known as the Lost Cause endure more than 155 years removed from the Confederacy’s crushing defeat is a key task in understanding the movements to remove Confederate iconography from public spaces and the significant White racial backlash these movements engender.

Where Do These Myths Come From?

Beginning almost immediately after the end of the Civil War, men and women committed to the cause of the Confederacy—the enslavement of people of African descent—began to revise the history of the Civil War and its aftermath. Edward Pollard’s (1867, 1868) The Lost Cause: A New Southern History of the War of the Confederates and The Lost Cause Regained argued on the one hand that the Civil War was fought to resolve two different ways of organizing society—one through enslavement, and the other through free labor—while at the same time claiming the root cause of the conflict was the matter of state sovereignty. Pollard himself was a member of one of the South’s most powerful slaveholding families and before the war broke out, he published a book advocating for the reopening of the slave trade.

With the rhetoric and narrative provided by Pollard, various “Ladies Memorial Associations” and men’s veterans groups formed with the express purpose of reclaiming and reconstituting the Confederacy’s cause as just, honorable, and decent. Organizations like the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC), the Sons of Confederate Veterans (SCV), and the United Confederate Veterans (UCV) engaged in a decades-long propaganda effort that included museums and shrines, monument building, magazines, editorials, pamphlets, fundraising, and even the manipulation of K–12 curriculum. Chartered in 1894, the UDC became the most enduring and influential of the women’s organizations founded to memorialize the Lost Cause and among either men or women’s organizations, the UDC was perhaps the chief propagandist (Cox, 2003; Janney, 2012).

Like other Progressive-era women’s organizations, the UDC provided a space for women to participate in untraditional activities, including fundraising, historical research, and public speaking (Case, 2002, p. 601). Historian
Elizabeth Varon (2000) argues that women’s participation in organizations like the UDC was seeded during the secession movement, when it became understood that women’s patriotic duty was to compel their Southern men to fight for their way of life. During the war, it was women who were the first to memorialize the conflict and were responsible for finding the remains of their now-dead loved ones, as well as maintaining their burial sites (Case, 2002, p. 603).

From its founding, the UDC understood its mission as one that would influence the education of Southern children as to what it understood as the true causes and consequences of the Confederacy and its war against Union “invaders” (see Cox, 2003). The Constitution of the Mississippi Division of the UDC, for example, states,

The objects of this association are memorial, historical, benevolent, educational and social; to honor the memory of those who served and those who fell in the service of the Confederate States; to protect, preserve and mark places made historic by the Confederate States; to collect, and correct and preserve the material for a truthful history of the War Between the States.

(Mississippi United Daughters of the Confederacy, 1904)

Among the UDC’s primary purposes was the championing of the Lost Cause narrative. Unlike their male organizational counterparts, UDC members mostly came from wealthy families. Their social status provided them with access to resources necessary to produce their propaganda and conferred their work with a high degree of respectability and visibility (Case, 2002; Cox, 2003). Their chief assertion was that the Confederacy’s secession was justified and that the Civil War’s true cause was not slavery but rather “a different and directly opposite view as to the nature of the government of the United States” (Rutherford, 1915, p. 113). Reconstruction was deemed unconstitutional, and the extensive efforts to codify segregation and disenfranchisement across Southern states post-Reconstruction was viewed as wholly justified (Rutherford, 1916b).

Along with the revisionist history of the root causes of the Civil War, the UDC and its chief historian, Mildred Lewis Rutherford, made popular the trope of the “happy slave,” who fared far better on the antebellum plantation than they ever could as free men and women (Hoelscher, 2003). Emancipation, according to UDC propaganda, had led to the physical and moral corruption of Black men and women who had now become “disorderly, idle, vicious and diseased” (Rutherford 1916a, p. 33).

To truly be effective in its mission to “educate” Southern White men and women on their “true” history, the UDC and other organizations understood they would need to shape how history was taught. For this, they focused their efforts on K–12 education. At the North Carolina chapter’s annual convention in 1909, for example, the UDC-NC’s division president declared:

We must see that the correct history is taught our children and train them, not in hatred towards the North who differed from us, but in knowledge of true history of the South in the war between the States and the causes that led up to the war, so that
they will be able to state facts and prove that they are right in the principles for which their fathers fought and died; and continue to preserve and defend their cause, until the whole civilized world will come to know that our cause was just and right. . . . There is an expression often used by our people as the “Lost Cause.” Let us forget such, for it is not the truth. . . . No, our cause was not lost because it was not wrong. (Huffman, 2019)

In 1919, the UDC joined with the SCV and UCV to form the Rutherford Committee, named after Mildred Lewis Rutherford, who was perhaps its most prominent member. Also on the committee was Julian S. Carr, a former Confederate general who in his 1913 dedication speech for the University of North Carolina’s “Silent Sam” monument referred to the horsewhipping of a “Negro wench” for insulting a “Southern lady” as a “pleasing duty.” Meanwhile, of the men who fought and died for the Confederacy, Carr claimed:

No nobler young men ever lived; no braver soldiers ever answered the bugle call nor marched under a battle flag. They fought not for conquest, not for coercion, but from a high and holy sense of duty. They were like the Knights of the Holy Grail, they served for the reward of serving, they suffered for the reward of suffering, they endured for the reward of enduring, they fought for the reward of duty done. (Carr, 1913)

The purpose of the Rutherford Committee was to develop and standardize Southern history and literature across Southern schools. Their 1923 pamphlet, “A Measuring Rod to Test Text Books, and Reference Books in Schools, Colleges and Libraries” (prepared by Rutherford herself), urged “all authorities charged with the selection of text-books for colleges, schools and all scholastic institutions to measure all books offered for adoption by this ‘Measuring Rod’ and adopt none which do not accord full justice to the South” (Rutherford, 1920, p. 3). Furthermore, “all library authorities in the Southern States are requested to mark all books in their collections which do not come up to the same measure, on the title page thereof, ‘Unjust to the South’” (Rutherford, 1920, p. 3). The 1923 pamphlet contained 11 “statements of fact” to be used to measure the extent to which Southern history was given its proper due by the standards of the committee. Some of these statements of fact were the following:

- Secession was not rebellion.
- The North was responsible for the war between the states.
- The war between the states was not fought to hold slaves.
- Slaves were not ill-treated in the South, and the North was largely responsible for their presence in the South.
- The South has never had its rightful place in literature.

The committee’s “measuring rod” was immediately embraced by the national UDC and its state divisions. The pamphlet’s “simple” set of rules,
summarized in just 23 short pages, made the Lost Cause easily digestible for the public, while also establishing clear guidelines for how to shape the narrative through educational curricula. Meanwhile, UDC divisions across the South were, due to the social status of their members and their prominent public voices, able to obtain appointments to state textbook commissions across the early 20th century. In Mississippi and Texas, state commissions actively partnered with UDC and UCV divisions in their textbook selections (Huffman, 2019).

The books selected mythologized, while at the same time obfuscated, the Confederacy’s causes and consequences. In 1923, in Greensboro, North Carolina, the UDC chapter endorsed for use as a school textbook, *Young People’s History of North Carolina* by Daniel Harvey Hill Jr. Hill, Jr. was the son of a Confederate general and had been North Carolina State University’s president. His textbook met the standards set forth by the Rutherford committee, casting the Civil War as the fault of Northern abolitionists, Lincoln as a villain with a penchant for war, and the Ku Klux Klan as “controlled by the best men in the South and used only as a means of keeping order” (Huffman, 2019). The enslaved, meanwhile, were depicted as “brought into the colonies fresh from a savage life in Africa and in two or three generations were changed into respectable men and women. This fact shows, better than any words can, how prudently and how wisely they were managed.”

For several decades, the efforts of organizations like the UDC and SCV to commemorate and celebrate the Lost Cause were steadfast and total. In 1932 alone, the UDC’s North Carolina division had 183 portraits of Confederate officers and statements placed in North Carolina public schools. In 1933, the division helped place 865 Confederate flags across the state public school system—a number that was three times as many as the prior year (Huffman, 2019).

The interwar period, including the Great Depression, resulted in a significant decline in the political power of these Confederate memorial associations. Many of their founding members had aged out or were dead, and the national focus was no longer on internal battles of the 19th century but the external threats of the 20th century. Nevertheless, the work to entrench Lost Cause mythology within the K–12 educational system endured. The emergence of the modern civil rights movement produced a kind of “digging in” by proponents of Jim Crow segregation, including the production and promotion of new, state-commissioned textbooks that endeared nostalgia for the caste-system of the Old South (Cox, 2003; McPherson, 2005). In 1957, the state of Virginia commissioned a trio of textbooks that reframed the enslaved as happy servants, recast General Robert E. Lee as a “handsome man” who “sat straight and firm in his saddle,” and referred to the Civil War as the “Defense Against Invasion, 1861-1865” (Springston, 2018). The textbooks are estimated to have reached more than one million Virginian school-aged children between the years 1957 and 1970.

For much of the 20th century, Southern public schools adopted pro-Confederate textbooks, created school curricula that promoted the cause of the Confederacy, regulated the reading materials available in school libraries, honored Confederate holidays, and portrayed paintings of Robert E. Lee alongside those of the nation’s founders. The effect of this kind of cultural hegemony is expressed in John Dittmer’s (1995) study of Mississippi's civil
rights struggle, where Dittmer finds that as recently as the 1990s, most White Mississippians believed in the veracity of the Lost Cause due to “an interpretation drilled into the minds of generations of schoolchildren” (p. 12).

Complicating the Narrative

A sociological analysis of the Lost Cause mythology and the reverence toward Confederate monuments in particular might include the intersection of two complementary theoretical frameworks: (1) philosopher Antonio Gramsci’s concept of “war of position,” and (2) a cultural analysis of space, place, and power. Understanding the monuments in these contexts gets us closer to discovering why so many cling to them and the reasons why these artifacts should be removed.

The Lost Cause as an Enduring “War of Position”

Gramsci, an Italian political prisoner for the last decade of his life while under the Mussolini regime, was overtly concerned with how dominant groups rise to, and maintain, political power and influence. Gramsci’s analysis focused on the power of the State, and how it wields its power against the masses. For Gramsci (1971), there are two main ways the State maintains power: (1) overt domination and (2) the manufacturing of consent. Overt domination occurs through the State’s many apparatuses—from its criminal justice system, including its police, courts, and prisons, to its financial and economic regulations. Consent, however, is more complicated; it is developed outside of the State machinery and within civil society’s institutions: the family, media, and schools, among others. While the first form of power relies upon technological, tactical, and military dominance, the second kind of power relies upon cultural domination. The institutions of civil society, taking their cue from the State, develop a common moral and social language for society’s members, that positions the State’s interests as natural, pervasive, and commonsense. Gramsci termed this second kind of power, hegemony.

Hegemony for Gramsci is not an outcome; it is a process. As a process meant to maintain a dominant group’s authority and power, hegemony requires persistent actions by a dominant group in order to strengthen its hold across the institutions of civil society. Hegemonic power refers to when a dominant group is able to extend its authority through both the functions and apparatuses of the state and the institutions of civil society (Hall et al., 2013, p. 203). For hegemonic power to function, it depends upon subordinated groups accepting the dominant group’s ideas, values, and belief system “as normal reality or common sense . . . in active forms of experience and consciousness” (Williams, 1976, p. 145). Yet subordinate groups do not just acquiesce to hegemonic power. They resist in all kinds of routine as well as extraordinary ways. Thus, hegemonic power is often most clearly observable when the power of the dominant group is threatened, or during times of great political instability. According to Gramsci, this creates a “crisis of authority” as the masses begin to eschew hegemonic ideologies. Abolitionism combined with massive unrest among the South’s enslaved population,
including what W. E. B. Du Bois (2014) so aptly described as the “general strike” that swept across the Confederate states and ultimately led to their defeat, created a massive crisis of authority. The ruling planter class lost their primary source of labor, their land, their economic power, and of course their political and social status. The moment of Reconstruction was as hopeful a period of time for great social transformation as any in American history. But a series of events—the election of Rutherford B. Hayes, the regranting of political citizenship to the former ruling planter class, and the subsequent establishment of a new racial caste system in the South known as Jim Crow—paved the way for White, Southern elites to reassert their dominant position in Southern society.

In delineating a crisis of authority, Gramsci recognized that State power was not a given, and was always contested by groups and actors on the ground. Therefore, challenges to State-based power, like the power itself, unfold on two planes that are neither fully independent of the other. The first plane of contestation Gramsci termed a war of maneuver or a struggle of force and a direct confrontation against the State apparatus. Examples of a war of maneuver include violent confrontations between police and protestors or between protestors and counter-protestors. The second plane of contestation Gramsci termed a war of position. This war is fought through the institutions of civil society and a confrontation against dominant culture by “creating alternative institutions and alternative intellectual resources within existing society” (Cox, 1983, p. 165). A war of maneuver in which the Confederacy was defeated gave way to an enduring war of position in which the former planter class sought to reassert its dominance through political subterfuge, racial terrorism, and a widespread propaganda campaign known as the Lost Cause.

The relationship of Lost Cause defenders to the State is complex, and we must tread lightly in drawing broad conclusions about the State’s active role in enabling Lost Cause mythology. However, in the American South, Confederate monuments, memorials, holidays, and other events are codified into law, celebrated in state capitol buildings, and as the preceding analysis shows, well-entrenched within the public school system. Schools and mass media, along with the institution of the family, have served as the primary battlefields for this war of position in which Confederate memorial associations gained and maintained a hegemonic position relative to their dissenters.

Almost from the moment the war ended, former enslavers and their supporters worked to manufacture a particular memory of the South as a pastoral scene, benighted by invaders from the North who sought to destroy the Southerner’s way of life but that would one day “rise again” and return to its former glory. The first Confederate Memorial Day was celebrated in 1866, just one year after the end of the Civil War. That same year, former Confederate president Jefferson Davis helped lay the cornerstone of the Confederate Memorial Monument at the state capitol in Montgomery, Alabama. Today, there are more than 1,700 monuments, memorials, bridges, parks, lakes, military bases, and other iconography on public spaces across the United States (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2019). They range in prominence from the carving of Stonewall Jackson, Robert E. Lee, and Jefferson Davis into the side of Stone Mountain in Georgia to the more commonplace (and thus often unnoticed) streets and buildings named for Confederate officers and statesmen.
The memorials, however, would have far less meaning for many White Southerners had it not been for the effort of the UDC, often in tandem with other memorial associations, to influence and shape how Southern history was taught to school-aged children. From its founding in the late 19th century, the UDC maintained a presence in Southern public schools—from routine visits to ceremonial events honoring the birthdays of Confederate leaders (Cox, 2003). The UDC sponsored essay contests on Southern history and literature in which students and teachers could compete. Through their social ties to prominent state legislators, the UDC helped to place portraits of Confederate leaders in public schools and even rename schools in memory of those Confederate leaders. Southern schools were, for the UDC, sites where a war of position would be fought and won (Cox, 2003; Janney, 2012; McPherson, 2005).

Often in partnership with other Confederate memorial organizations, the UDC members helped shape, and then held appointments on, state textbook committees in nearly every former Confederate state in the nation. Most if not all of these textbook committees were empowered to mandate required books for use within local public school districts. Using the Rutherford Committee’s pamphlet as a guide, these statewide textbook commissions put enormous pressure on textbook publishers, many of which were based in the North, to eliminate anything in school-based textbooks that did not meet the standards set forth by Confederate sympathizers (Cox, 2003; McPherson, 2005).

Among the most widely adopted of these UDC-approved textbooks was Susan Pendelton Lee’s (1900) *New School History of the United States*. Lee’s textbook portrayed Lincoln as a warmonger and the South as the true defenders of the Constitution. Concerning the enslavement of people of African descent, Lee’s (1900) textbook informed schoolchildren that hundreds of thousands of African savages had been Christianized under its influence. The kindest relations existed between the slaves and their owners. A cruel and neglected master or mistress was rarely found. The bondage in which the negroes were held was not thought a wrong to them, because they were better off than any other menial class in the world. (p. 262)

These myths were not only circulated among White schoolchildren. While the racial caste system of Jim Crow segregated White and Black schoolchildren into separate learning environments, Black children’s textbooks were typically the discarded, older versions of those taught in all-White schools. Even in their own schoolhouses, then, Black children were forced to learn a version of Southern history that excused the system of slavery, demonized Reconstruction, and celebrated the efforts of the Klan and other racial terrorists to maintain a separate and unequal system all across the American South.

Confederate Iconography as Imaginative Geography

The late postcolonial theorist Edward Said (2000) coined the term *imaginative geography* as a way to describe how power, empire, and cultural
hegemony coalesce in the shaping of physical landscapes, helping to reflect and reproduce the ideas, values, and beliefs of dominant groups. The production and maintenance of these landscapes function as a form of authoritative knowledge—locating “us,” “them,” and the differences between. Imaginative geographies, then, are a specific kind of hegemonic activity.

Said’s analysis draws our attention to the idea of space and place as effects, or conditions, of hegemonic power. How the “story” of a given landscape is told is often a reflection of what the storyteller wants the listener to know about that landscape, including what interests, ideas, or beliefs the listener should take away from the story. Told from the perspective of the dominant group, the “story” of Southern space and place, including the story told through its material culture (i.e., monuments, memorials, and other iconography) becomes part of the ongoing “war of position” (see Gramsci, 1971) meant to reinforce existing power relations (see Kelley, 2017).

Complementing Said’s analysis is that of historians Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger (1992), in their book *The Invention of Tradition*. Hobsbawm and Ranger (1992) describe how dominant groups create a set of values and the traditions and objects that then become associated with those values. Objects and traditions become imbued with meaning and become part of how both dominant and subordinate groups ground their collective identities. The pastoral landscape of the American South—a familiar trope in its literature and within Lost Cause mythology—reflects more than just the common imagery of Greek revival–style architecture, manicured magnolias, and old live oaks. It also reflects the gendered and racialized economic relations that maintain them, and beliefs about the sanctity of those relations (MacKethan, 2004).

Imaginative geographies, and the invented traditions within them, serve important functions for dominant groups aiming to produce a common ideology that reinforces their dominant status. In this way, these imaginative geographies and invented traditions are part of what Omi and Winant (1994) term *racial projects*: simultaneously “an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines” (p. 56). Racial projects connect what race means to how social structures and everyday experiences are racially organized, based upon those meanings. Landscapes, including the cultural objects upon them, help to manipulate certain elements of the past, suppress others, and elevate still others in meaningful ways. Imaginative geographies reflect the suturing of representations and understandings of racial dominance to the physical landscape. Physical landscapes are not natural or authentic then; they are purposeful, even manipulative.

A recent report from the Southern Poverty Law Center (2019) identified nearly 1,800 Confederate monuments, memorials, place names, and other iconography across the United States. Among these are 300 Confederate monuments in Georgia, Virginia, and North Carolina alone and more than 100 public schools and colleges named for Confederate officers or statesmen. At the University of Mississippi, the landscape reflects a purposeful effort to imagine the South as a pastoral scene, and in doing so, suppresses the violence done to BIPOC folx from its founding to the present.

At more than 1,000 acres, and with numerous large, green spaces, the University of Mississippi is visually stunning. Mature oaks, magnolias,
and pine trees intermingle with antebellum and Greek revival architecture. Sprinkled across its large swaths of green space are luxurious and well-maintained beds of daffodils, tulips, and hydrangeas. In the spring and summer, the smell of magnolias in bloom wafts across the grounds. In the fall, the changing colors of the leaves on the trees blend into the flower beds below, creating a cascade of reds, oranges, yellows, and browns. Each spring, campus landscaping crews re-sod the green spaces and rotate the flower beds. By summer, the campus resembles a botanical garden.

Hidden in plain sight, however, and only recently acknowledged through the strategic placement of a few plaques, is that the land upon which the campus now sits was taken by force from Indigenous people. Enslaved Africans, leased to the university from local plantations, built and maintained its first academic structures. The Confederate monument that was prominently on display at the campus entrance for over 100 years now resides upon a massive gravesite for Union and Confederate dead, adjacent to and visible from the university’s football practice field. The building in which I work is named for L.Q.C Lamar, a Confederate statesman who helped draft Mississippi articles of secession, in which the opening lines read, “Our position is thoroughly identified with the institution of slavery—the greatest material interest of the world.” Lamar, like most former Confederate officers and statesmen, received a full pardon from the U.S. government for his treasonous efforts. Upon having his political status reinstated, Lamar would go on to serve in the U.S. Senate before his appointment to the U.S. Supreme Court. Along with my building are several others named for prominent segregationists and architects of Jim Crow racial rule. Indeed, one building remains named for former Governor James K. Vardaman who, in 1907, declared, “If it is necessary, every Negro in the state will be lynched.” According to lynching data from Tuskegee University, Mississippi’s lynchings of Black people were the nation’s highest over a period spanning more than 80 years.

The campus landscape, like many other Southern spaces, has historically served and continues to serve as an important vehicle through which to wage a war of position on behalf of the Lost Cause. The University of Mississippi aims to present its campus as a pastoral Southern scene. A common trope in Southern literature, the pastoral South is meant to reflect permanence, virtuousness, authenticity, and kinship (MacKethan, 1999). This pastoral scene is accomplished through antebellum-style architecture, lavish green spaces, and pristine horticultural displays. It is also accomplished, however, through the active suppression of its contested history and harsh present-day realities.

At the May 10, 1906, unveiling of the university’s Confederate statue, a Rosedale attorney and then-candidate for governor by the name of Charles Scott gave an address at the request of the Albert Sydney Johnston chapter of the UDC (Twitty, 1906/2020). In it, Scott drew upon many of the common themes of Lost Cause mythology. He suggested that the South was misunderstood as treasonous when in fact “the people of the South were the loftiest and most unselfish patriots known in the annals of all time.” He also claimed that Congress left no choice but to rebel due to “discriminating import duties,” while at the same time abolitionists “industriously sowed the seeds of sectional hatred and strife.” The Confederate soldier, meanwhile, was cast as “the most heroic figure of all the ages,” more valiant than “Alexander with
his Macedonian cohorts,” “the bold adventurous Hannibal,” and “the great Cesar as he crossed the Rubicon” (Twitty, 1906/2020).

Yet Scott praised the efforts of Confederate defenders after the Civil War during what he called “the nightmare called the reconstruction, when these men boldly, aggressively, and intentionally overrode the letter of the law, that they might maintain the spirit of the law and preserve Anglo Saxon civilization as a priceless heritage for their children's children.” This resistance, for Scott, was “the crowning glory of the Confederate soldier . . . overshadow[ing] all [their] brilliant victories on the field of battle.” The statue, Scott told the crowd, would stand “as an enduring monument to the memory of the Confederate dead . . . It will serve, then, a double purpose by proclaiming to all future generations the gallantry of the Southern soldier and the nobility of the Southern woman.”

The statue, like the landscape that contains it, symbolizes and invokes the mythology of the Lost Cause, representing for passersby a “great and mighty” Southern history worth remembering. But at what expense? The presumed authenticity of this Southern landscape requires the active invention of a whole host of traditions and serves as the launching pad from which the most vigorous and violent defenses of the Lost Cause have been launched. Not only central for a war of position, the monument has also served as a key vehicle for launching a war of maneuver (Gramsci, 1971).

When White rioters attacked U.S. marshals in protest of James Meredith’s enrollment at the university in 1962, they regrouped near the monument as the marshals fired tear gas at them to disperse. There, former Army Major General Edwin Walker, who was forced to retire after violating orders to not distribute racist literature to his troops, climbed on the side of the monument and “congratulate[d] the students for their stand . . . and assured them of their right to protest and the justness of their cause” (Eagles, 2014, p. 361). An Episcopalian minister attempted to mount the base of the statue and discourage more violence, but Walker “announced that the group contained an Episcopalian minister whose position embarrassed him as an Episcopalian. Four men pulled [him] down, roughed him up, and sent him away” (Eagles, 2014, p. 362). According to a Newsweek article, Walker’s address to the crowd was, “Don't let up now. You may lose this battle, but you will have to be heard. . . . You must be prepared for possible death. If you are not, go home now” (Anon, 1962). It would be a mistake to consider the choice to rally at the base of the Confederate monument in defense of maintaining segregation as pure coincidence.

More recently, in 2019 several Black student organizations planned a peaceful march and demonstration at the base of the monument as part of Black History Month. Neo-Confederate groups shared information about the plans via their Facebook groups and organized a counter-demonstration that weekend that would include a march from a Confederate statue in the downtown Oxford square to the monument on campus. Members of these groups promised to arrive armed and ready to commit violence toward anyone standing in their way. The university advised students, faculty, and staff to stay away from campus to avoid confrontation with the neo-Confederate groups. One neo-Confederate group member posted a livestream of his driving through campus while wielding an axe.
Notably, there are no monuments, plaques, or other markers that identify the land as originally belonging to the Choctaw Indians. Only recently has the university commissioned a few markers that acknowledge the role of enslaved labor in the construction of the original campus buildings. Meanwhile, the university's previous leadership decided that they would contextualize the buildings named for enslavers and segregationists rather than remove their names entirely. And, while the Confederate statue that once stood guard over the entrance of campus for more than a century is no longer there, it remains on campus, tucked safely away in what was previously a massive, abandoned gravesite for Civil War soldiers. Plans to renovate the cemetery, including plans to place grave markers over plots of land with no regard for historical or archeological accuracy, resulted in massive public backlash, and public condemnation from a variety of faculty and student groups. The chancellor of the University of Mississippi quickly backpedaled and abandoned the original plans. Nevertheless, the statue's new location was recently renovated to include a new walking path and nighttime lighting for visitors.

**Resistance**

We would be remiss to declare the Lost Cause's efforts as totalizing. There is Frederick Douglass's searing indictment of the myth of American independence in his 1852 “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July,” and the demonstration of Black agency in Zora Neale Hurston's anthropology. There is also from the Black radical tradition that includes everything from the “sorrow songs” featured in Du Bois's (1903) *Souls of Black Folks* and Harry Haywood's (1948) declaration for Black self-determination in his “black belt thesis.” And of course, there is the iconic figure of Bree Newsome climbing the flagpole outside of the state capitol building in South Carolina to remove its Confederate flag, her fist raised in a Black Power salute (Helms, 2015). Resistance to the Lost Cause and its symbolism, especially among Black Americans in the South, has always been present. It is, in fact, what has shifted the national conversation toward its current “crisis of authority,” in which local communities, city and county governments, and entire states are reconsidering their relationship to Confederate iconography.

In 2001, a statewide referendum to change the Mississippi state flag failed by a nearly 2-to-1 margin (Firestone, 2001). Yet, five years after students at the University of Mississippi successfully fought to remove the state flag from their campus, the Mississippi state legislature overwhelmingly voted to immediately remove the state flag from all government buildings and form a commission to design a new one without any Confederate emblems. Just a few weeks later, Bolivar County, Mississippi—a small Delta community that resisted federally mandated public school integration up until 2017—voted to remove the Confederate monument that sits in front of its courthouse. Summarizing the significance of this cultural shift, the vice president for the county's board of supervisors, a Black man, stated that the town's monument, and others like it, wrongfully honors enslavers and that
“we’re doing right to end that celebration and celebrate something more positive” (Betz, 2020).

An analysis of this moment suggests that an opportunity exists for grassroots activists and other movement actors to make significant inroads in their ongoing “war of position” against Lost Cause proponents. A proper understanding of history, however, suggests that any inroads made will be met with significant backlash, what the historian Carol Anderson (2016) terms white rage. The front on which the battle of ideas takes place (i.e., within the cultural sphere) is always a contested one. Understanding how that contestation unfolds (i.e., the processes, actors, and events central to it) remains key for any mobilizing effort that hopes for success.

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SUGGESTED ADDITIONAL RESOURCES


QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

1. What, if any, elements of “Lost Cause” mythology are you most familiar with? How did you become familiar with these elements?
2. How does the author argue that this mythology is part of a “war of position”?
3. What other public or cultural elements can you identify that have been a source of conflict and contestation? What have been the results of those conflicts?

REACHING BEYOND THE COLOR LINE

1. Using the map provided in the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) report (https://www.splcenter.org/20190201/whose-heritage-public-symbols-confederacy), select one of the monuments identified and gather information on the history of the monument itself; when it was erected, by whom, and how people in the community responded.

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2. Read the following short article on the origins of the anti-lynching song, “Strange Fruit” from https://dailyjstor.org/the-unlikely-origins-of-strange-fruit/. Now consider the lyrics of the song, which includes the phrase “pastoral scene of the gallant South.” Given the author’s discussion of the “imagined geography of the pastoral South,” compare the map from the SPLC to that provided by the Equal Justice Initiative (https://eji.org/reports/reconstruction-in-america-overview/).

What similarities do you see between these two maps? What, if anything, is surprising to you? How does this connect to the argument made by the author in regard to the role of these monuments in shaping the values and culture of a place?

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