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HISTORY NEWS
AUTUMN 2016 VOLUME 71, #4 $10
THE MAGAZINE OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR STATE AND LOCAL HISTORY
RECONSIDERATION OF
Memorials and Monuments

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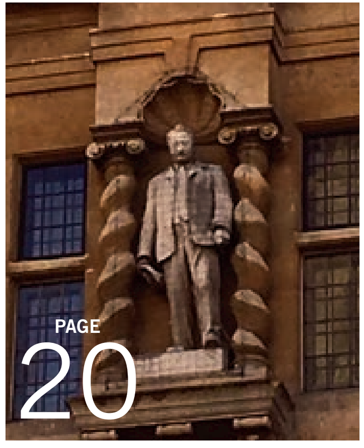

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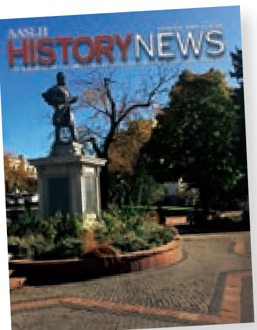

ON THE COVER

In 2002, the State of Colorado reinterpreted its original Civil War monument to include a plaque acknowledging the Sand Creek Massacre. From 1909-2002, Sand Creek was listed among "Battles and Engagements" in which Coloradans fought during the war. Photo Max van Balgooy

INSIDE: **TECHNICAL LEAFLET**

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History News is a publication of the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH). *History News* exists to foster publication, scholarly research, and an open forum for discussion of best practices, applicable theories, and professional experiences pertinent to the field of state and local history.

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As keepers of community history and memory, history organizations provide contemporary context. It's one of our most important roles, and one of the seven core values of history: "By bringing history into discussions about contemporary issues, we can better understand the origins of and multiple perspectives on the challenges facing our communities and nation." The remembered past through public monuments provides an opportunity to "clarify misperceptions, reveal complexities, temper volatile viewpoints, open people to new possibilities, and lead to more effective solutions for today's challenges."[1]

This *History News* highlights considerations about monuments of the Civil War era. I can think of no other event in American history whose memory is as hotly contested. As communities continue to grapple with the war's legacies, they are turning their attention to its public memorials. This, in turn, brings to the fore conversations about the motives of those who created them. Simply, they are not artifacts of 1861-1865 but are instead a reflection of the specific time period in which they were erected. This is an important distinction, one our organizations can help make.

Other questions follow. Does leaving them *in situ* officially sanction the activities of the honoree(s)? Does displacement allow future generations to gloss over the negative aspects of the past—with these very public reminders gone? How does removing these monuments affect preservation of the built environment? And what role should history institutions play in discussions of what to do?

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Charlie Bryan, President and CEO Emeritus of the Virginia Historical Society, provided an answer to the latter. The best historians are revisionists, he wrote, "looking at familiar subjects from unique perspectives to come up with new ways of describing the past."[2]

Monuments and memorials offer an opportunity for history organizations to do just this, while also educating the public about the processes of our discipline. There is no prescriptive answer, but moments like these are where we can provide one of our most valuable services: a convener of dialog about how history impacts the present.

This entire conversation ultimately comes down to the issue of relevance. And relevant history is inclusive history. This is something Dina Bailey discusses in the inaugural entry of a new quarterly History News column, "The Whole is Greater." We are grateful to Dina for being our first contributor to this feature.

Bob Beatty

[1] History Relevance Campaign, "The Value of History: Seven Ways it is Essential," www.historyrelevance.com/value-statement.

[2] Charles F. Bryan, Jr., *Imperfect Past: History in a New Light* (Manakin-Sabot, VA: Dementi Milestone Publishing, Inc., 2015), 126-127.

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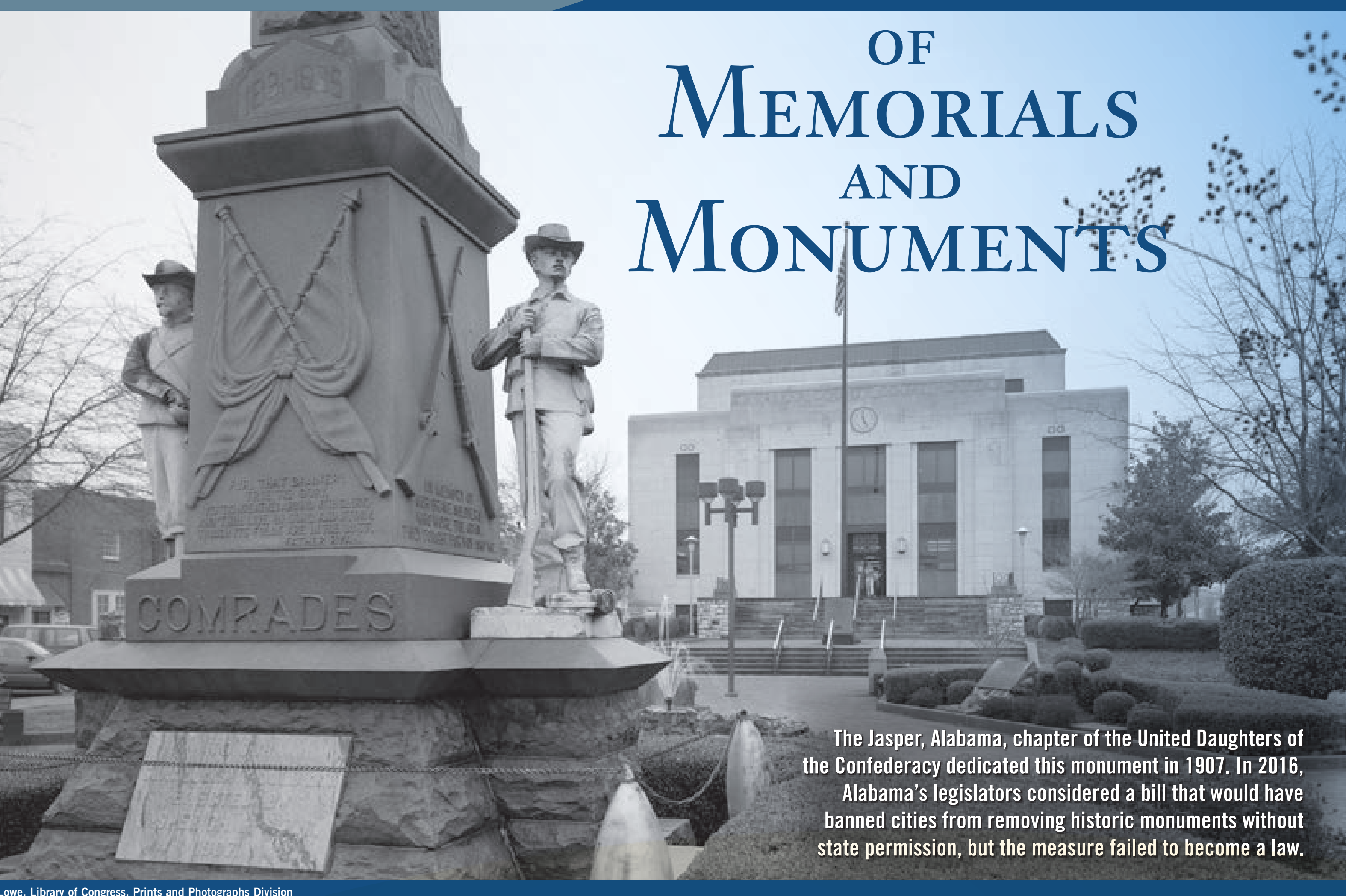
RECONSIDERATION OF MEMORIALS AND MONUMENTS



The Jasper, Alabama, chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy dedicated this monument in 1907. In 2016, Alabama's legislators considered a bill that would have banned cities from removing historic monuments without state permission, but the measure failed to become a law.

Jet Lowe, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division

By Modupe Labode

Communities throughout the United States are in the midst of a widespread reconsideration of symbols of the Confederacy and white supremacy. The murder of nine African Americans in Charleston, South Carolina, in June 2015 is the most immediate cause of this scrutiny, but the national discussion of race and violence that emerged in response to the deaths of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown has also led communities to examine monuments. The debates over Confederate statues and symbols are concentrated in the South, but are also occurring in places like Harvard Law School, which recently removed a shield honoring the slaveholding Royall family. Although some people may regard the vehement arguments over these symbols and the calls for removal of monuments as a new part of twenty-first-century life, protests over the display of Confederate monuments and emblems go back decades.[1]

This issue of *History News* features three articles, each offering perspectives on the history and present-day legacy of the symbols and history of slavery and the Confederacy. Jill Ogline Titus discusses the history of Confederate memorials on the Gettysburg battlefield. F. Sheffield Hale, president and CEO of the Atlanta History Center, describes the sophisticated, user-friendly toolkit that his staff developed to help organizations and individuals interpret monuments to the Confederacy. Finally, Kelley Fanto Deetz, Bradley Lynn Coleman, Jody Allen, and Thomas E. Camden describe the work of a coalition of colleges and universities recognizing their fundamental connections to slavery and commemorating the lives of enslaved people who lived and worked at these institutions.

Carol M. Highsmith, Library of Congress

There are Confederate monuments even in states that fought for the North. This 1901 monument in Monroe County, West Virginia, was dedicated to "men who served the lost cause."

These articles provide examples of how museums and cultural institutions are engaging with the history of slavery and monuments to the Confederacy, but they do not provide a one-size-fits-all template for communities grappling with this issue. Such a tool cannot exist, in large part because each community discussing these monuments must engage with both the local historical context and larger historical trends. Because the discussions of Confederate monuments are local and engage with interpretations of the past, institutions concerned with local and state history could be involved in their communities as they contend with these issues. Yet many history organizations appear to be uncertain about what they should do or say about these monuments or have opted to maintain official silence, fearing that any statement could alienate local politicians, donors, friends, and neighbors. Silence, however, often speaks volumes.

This introduction provides a brief overview of how these Confederate monuments came to be placed in the landscape and then discusses strategies used in the recent past to respond to criticism of these monuments. Ideally, museums and museum workers can use these articles and resources to deepen the discussion of Confederate symbols in their communities.

Memorials honoring Confederate soldiers and generals began appearing in the South during the latter part of the nineteenth century as organizations such as the United Daughters of the Confederacy sponsored monuments in towns and cities throughout the region. Scholars Kirk Savage and John Winberry have documented that, over time, the preferred site for these monuments shifted from cemeteries to civic spaces such as parks and courthouse squares. These obelisks, plaques, and statues not only honored individuals or common soldiers, but also asserted that the values for which the Confederacy fought, including white supremacy, had not been defeated. This monument building was part of a social, political, and cultural movement that celebrated the Lost Cause in official and popular culture.[2]

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, anyone would have understood the connection between a Confederate statue and the ongoing economic, legal, social, and political subordination of African Americans. Racial violence, in the form of lynching, racial cleansing, and everyday harassment, enforced this social order through terror.

In addition to Confederate monuments, southerners created monuments overtly celebrating white supremacy, such as the commemoration of the 1874 Battle of Liberty Place, in which the White League led a coup against a New Orleans government made up of white and African American men. A subset of monuments placed before World War II focused on the "faithful slave" or free black individual who presumably allied with aristocratic whites. One of the most notorious of these monuments is the "Good Darky" statue of a deferential black man tipping his hat to passersby, which stood for decades in Natchitoches, Louisiana.[3]

After World War II, protesters challenging Jim Crow confronted segregationists who embraced symbols of the Confederacy, particularly the Confederate battle flag, to signal opposition to African American civil rights. From the 1970s, civil rights activists and supporters began promoting monuments, street names, and plaques to commemorate the struggle, African American history, and sites associated with slavery and lynching.[4]

Architectural historian Dell Upton argues that even as African Americans in the South gained political and economic strength, powerful whites have retained the ability

Origin of the Lost Cause Narrative

By Kevin M. Levin

In the spring of 1865, large swaths of the former Confederate states lay in ruins. Four years of war had left its economy at a standstill and roughly four million slaves freed. Within a short period of time, white southerners commenced with the difficult task of reconstructing their lives and rebuilding their society. That included justifying the hefty toll of the war and on the South and the rest of the world.

Edward A. Pollard, the editor of the *Richmond Examiner,* introduced the term "Lost Cause" in 1866 in his book *The Lost Cause: A New Southern History of the War of the Confederates.* Although it never followed anything close to an official playbook, this Lost Cause narrative quickly coalesced around a certain set of assumptions about the war, including its causes and consequences. Among other things, Lost Cause writers insisted the southern loss on the battlefield was due to the overwhelming resources of the North and not the failure of its generals or the wavering support of southern enlisted men and its broader populace. Lost Cause writers deified Generals Lee and Jackson and Confederate soldiers as embodying the virtues of bravery, sacrifice, and Christian morality.

Slavery, they argued, was not a negative, but benefited the black race; it functioned as the foundation of a peaceful society before the war, a culture that stood far superior to the violent, industrial North. Therefore, African Americans showed unwavering support for the Confederacy through the very end of the war. In contrast to Confederate Vice President Alexander Stephens, who spoke for many when he argued early in the war that slavery constituted the

to force many memorials focusing on African American history to conform to their tastes, often muting the message of these monuments. As monuments commemorating the Civil Rights Movement started changing the landscape, the historical markers, monuments, and other memorials to the Confederacy came under increasing scrutiny. Today's proposals to alter Confederate symbols in public spaces draw on strategies that have developed over decades: alteration, reinterpretation, creating new monuments, removal, and doing nothing. Many communities have used several strategies over the years. These alternatives, it is important to note, are not exhaustive strategies for engaging with Confederate memorials.[5]

Altering a Confederate monument has the potential to make profound changes in its meaning. In Tennessee, the Maury County African American Heritage Society and the Genealogical Society of Maury County led the effort to add the names of county residents who fought for the Union to the local war memorial. A ceremony in 2013 dedicated a stone slab engraved with the names of fifty-four African American men who served in the United States Colored Troops (USCT) and four white men who fought for the Union. Many of the men who served in the USCT had been enslaved and were fighting to end slavery and ensure the permanent freedom of their families. Newspaper reports do not reveal the process by which this remarkable project occurred. The simple listing of names may prompt viewers to reconsider their previous ideas about who fought in the Civil War and their motivations.[6]

Reinterpretation of monuments, through reading rails or plaques, allows the original monument to be preserved. Ideally, the viewer is able to develop a complex interpretation of the monument, but also of memorialization more generally. Qualitative evaluation would help historians understand whether or not the plaques are achieving this goal. If the reinterpretation is conducted in collaboration with people who have divergent positions on the monument, the project itself may provide an opportunity for discussion and, potentially, understanding.

A plaque dedicated in 2002 reinterpreted the Civil War Monument in Denver, Colorado, which originally described the Sand Creek Massacre as a battle.

Max van Balgooy

Ari Kelman and Kenneth Foote have analyzed what they consider to be the successful reinterpretation of a Union monument that describes the 1864 Sand Creek Massacre—in which Colorado Territory troops attacked a peaceful village of Cheyenne and Arapaho people and killed more than 150 individuals—as a Civil War battle. (Full disclosure: I had a small part in the process of reinterpreting this monument.) Several factors made this reinterpretation possible: the cultural and moral authority of Cheyenne and Arapaho representatives, many of whom had relatives killed in the massacre; the willingness of these nations to be officially involved in reinterpreting the monument; the widespread consensus among non-indigenous power brokers that the Sand Creek Massacre was indefensible; and the marginal standing of those who sought to minimize the massacre. Comparable factors may not exist in many communities seeking to reinterpret Confederate monuments.[7]

Installing a new monument to contextualize or counter Confederate monuments is another strategy. Many commemorations of the Civil Rights Movement have been placed near Confederate memorials. Dell Upton calls this practice "dual heritage." Although such placement means civil rights monuments are in prominent, familiar locations, Upton argues that this strategy conveys the message that the civil rights struggles are equivalent to the Confederacy. Several monuments successfully avoid this form of equivalency, honor people victimized by white supremacy, and convey the power and complexity of the civil rights struggle. A short list of

"cornerstone" of the South's new government, Lost Cause writers now insisted that the southern states seceded not in defense of slavery, but in solidarity with the states' rights cause.

Women took the early lead in commemorating the Lost Cause by decorating Confederate graves. These activities led to the formation of ladies' memorial associations throughout the South and served as a foundation for the larger United Daughters of the Confederacy organized later in the century. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the Lost Cause was the dominant narrative of the Civil War in the South and served as the backdrop for the rise of Jim Crow segregation and the dedication of numerous monuments in states across the former Confederacy, including Kentucky and Maryland, which never seceded from the Union. Veterans' reunions and monument dedications helped to pass on the Lost Cause narrative to a new generation.

The Lost Cause also resonated outside the South, as evidenced by the success of the 1939 Hollywood screen adaptation of Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind*. The characters of "Mammy" and "Pork," along with scenes of loyal slaves before and during the war as well as loyal ex-slaves during Reconstruction, point to the Lost Cause's strong hold on American memory. The current debate about the public display of Confederate iconography attests to the Lost Cause's hold on the nation's collective memory of the Civil War.

Kevin M. Levin is a historian and educator based in Boston. He is the author of *Remembering the Battle of the Crater: War as Murder* and is currently working on *Searching for Black Confederate Soldiers: The Civil War's Most Persistent Myth,* under advance contract with the University of North Carolina Press. You can find him online at cwmemory.com.

Monument to Confederate Soldiers and Sailors of Alabama, Montgomery, Alabama Carol M. Highsmith, Library of Congress

such monuments includes: Maya Lin's *Civil Rights Memorial* in Montgomery, Alabama; the commemoration complex in Birmingham's Kelly Ingram Park; and the Clayton Jackson McGhie memorial in Duluth, Minnesota, that honors three African American men murdered by a lynch mob.[8]

Demands to remove monuments bring up fundamental questions about the purpose of commemoration. Should monuments in public spaces represent ideal community values? If these values are no longer acceptable, what should happen to the monuments? Many involved in public history or historic preservation recoil from proposals to remove these memorials, concerned about what will be lost if the monuments are moved. Protesters calling for the removal of these memorials emphasize that they take these symbols of white supremacy seriously and highlight the harm they experience when they encounter such monuments in their daily lives. Some protesters suggest memorials be placed in less prominent locations or in museums. Historian Aleia Brown, writing about the Confederate battle flag, raises concerns about the ability of many museums to provide adequate interpretation of this racially charged object. Her concerns also apply to interpretation of these monuments. In his blog, Kirk Savage has suggested that if monuments are removed, an empty column should remain, to remind viewers of what the public had renounced.[9]

Confronting Confederate symbols and memorials is a complex task in part because an honest discussion requires grappling with important issues that cannot be easily articulated, let alone resolved. How are race, identity, and history intertwined? What does the symbolic and historic Confederacy mean, both in the South and in the nation? What roles should museums and cultural organizations play in determining what communities should preserve and how the past should be interpreted? Some people worry that discussing these issues causes racial dissent. However, it is important to recognize that these conversations are already occurring in private or semiprivate spaces, from living rooms to Facebook, and are already affecting people's public actions and statements. Museums can choose whether or not to engage in the community discussion, but they should begin these discussions within their own walls. The ability of museums to preserve, care for, and interpret the contentious past is dependent upon these discussions. Many museum workers have complicated relationships to the history of slavery and the Confederacy, which they are reluctant to discuss with their coworkers, or anyone outside of their families. Yet, without honest engagement with the difficult past represented by Confederate symbols, the ability of history museums to engage in their core mission—interpreting the past—will be compromised.

Modupe Labode is an associate professor of history and museum studies at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. Before working at IUPUI, she was the state historian at the Colorado Historical Society. Throughout

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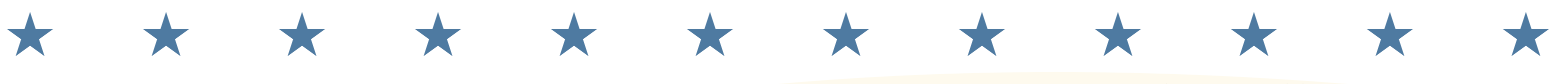

her career as a practitioner and academic-based public historian, she has worked with historical markers and other forms of interpretation. She is currently researching Fred Wilson's proposed work of public art, *E Pluribus Unum,* which was to be a reinterpretation of the figure of a freed African American on the Indiana Soldiers and Sailors Monument. She can be reached at mlabode@iupui.edu.

Resources:

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[1] Harvard Law Today, "Law School Committee Recommends Retiring Current Shield," *Harvard Law Today*, March 4, 2016; Harvard Law School Library, *Ask a Librarian!* "Q. What Are the Origins of the Harvard Law School Shield that Was Retired in 2016?"

[2] Jonathan Leib and Gerald Webster, "On Remembering John Winberry and the Study of Confederate Monuments on the Southern Landscape," *Southeastern Geographer* 55, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 8-18; Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

[3] Joan Marie Johnson, "'Ye Gave Them a Stone': African American Women's Clubs, the Frederick Douglass Home, and the Black Mammy Monument,'" *Journal of Women's History* 17, no. 1 (2005): 62-86. The city removed this statue, often called "Uncle Jack," from public view in the 1960s, and the Louisiana State University Rural Life Museum eventually acquired it. Over the years, the museum has struggled with where to place the object and how to interpret it. See: "Uncle Jack Statue," Louisiana Regional Folklife Program, go.aaslh.org/UncleJackStatue; Adam Duvernay, "Statue of Black Man Has History of Controversy," *LSU Now*, October 6, 2009; Fiona Handley, "Memorializing Race in the Deep South: The 'Good Darkie' Statue, Louisiana, USA," *Public Archaeology* 6, no. 2 (2007): 98-115.

[4] Richard Schein's article describes how a historical marker about the sale of enslaved people in Lexington, Kentucky, changes the meaning of a space previously dominated by statues focusing on the Confederacy. Richard H. Schein, "A Methodological Framework for Interpreting Ordinary Landscapes: Lexington, Kentucky's Courthouse Square," *Geographical Review* 99, no. 3 (July 2009): 377-402. For efforts to commemorate the 1918 lynching of Mary Turner, Julie Buckner Armstrong, *Mary Turner and the Memory of Lynching* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011); *The Mary Turner Project*, www.maryturner.org; and the Georgia Historical Society marker commemorating the site where Turner was murdered: go.aaslh.org/GHSMaryTurner.

[5] Owen J. Dwyer and Derek Alderman, *Civil Rights Memorials and the Geography of Memory* (Chicago: Center for American Places at Columbia College, 2008).

[6] "58 Maury Civil War Soldiers Added to Monument," *Columbia Daily Herald*, October 19, 2013.

[7] Kenneth E. Foote, "Editing Memory and Automobility and Race: Two Learning Activities on Contested Heritage and Place," *Southeastern Geographer* 53, no. 4 (Winter 2012): 384-97; Ari Kelman, "For Liberty and Empire: Remembering Sand Creek, Rethinking the Civil War," *Common-Place* 14, no. 2 (Winter 2014).

[8] Dell Upton, *What Can and Can't Be Said: Race, Uplift, and Monument Building in the Contemporary South* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015). For the Duluth memorial, see Erika Doss, *Monument Mania: Public Feeling in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012) and Clayton Jackson McGhie Memorial, Inc. www.claytonjacksonmcghie.org.

[9] Derek H. Alderman and Owen J. Dwyer, "A Primer on the Geography of Memory: The Site and Situation of Commemorative Landscapes," *Commemorative Landscapes of North Carolina*, 2012; Aleia Brown, "The Confederate Flag Doesn't Belong in a Museum," *Slate.com*, June 25, 2015; Kirk Savage, "What to Do with Confederate Monuments," November 15, 2015.

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