MONUMENTAL RECKONINGS IN THE CITY TOO BUSY TO HATE: ADVOCACY GROUPS AND CONFEDERATE MONUMENTS IN ATLANTA, GEORGIA

By

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(Under the Direction of Wayde Brown)

ABSTRACT

In the past decade, the issue of Confederate monument preservation has become highly contentious, leading many states to pass laws aimed at monument protection. This thesis examines the extent to which advocacy groups in Atlanta, Georgia have had an impact on the city's Confederate monuments since the enactment of the state's restrictive monument protection legislation in 2019. The effectiveness of the different approaches taken by these advocacy groups is evaluated through a comparative analysis of seven case studies. Each case study focuses on one of Atlanta's Confederate monuments, including the Confederate Obelisk, the Peace Monument, and the John B. Gordon Monument. This thesis reveals the extent to which monument protection laws restrict municipal autonomy over the public memorial landscape, and what role advocacy groups might play in that dynamic.

INDEX WORDS: Confederate monument, Advocacy group, Atlanta, Georgia, Interpretation, Monument removal, Lost Cause

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For my family—without you, none of this would be possible.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

LIST OF TABLES

Page

LIST OF FIGURES

Page

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"The Civil War sits like the giant sleeping dragon of American history ever ready to rise up when we do not expect it and strike us with unbearable fire. It has happened here—existential civil war, fought with unspeakable death and suffering for fundamentally different visions of the future." — David W. Blight[1]

All societies and cultures have certain tenets to which they adhere, individuals they idolize, religious figures they worship, and events they commemorate. In many cases these cultural values manifest in tangible heritage. Monuments are a common tool used by many diverse peoples to memorialize the figures, ideas, and events they feel are important. However, with the passing of time and the advancement of generations, both these monuments and the ideas they represent often fluctuate in significance, sometimes becoming obsolete or controversial. In circumstances where the ideas or individuals these monuments honor are considered contentious by the current generation, calls for their removal sometimes occur. This has become a significant dilemma in the United States in the past two decades, with calls for the removal of monuments associated with the former Confederate States of America coming from across the country. However, there are often robust barriers to the removal of these monuments by municipalities, especially in states that have passed monument protection legislation.

At present, seven states have laws in place barring the removal or alteration of public monuments: Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, and Tennessee. These monument protection laws are largely products of the twenty-first century.

[1] David Blight, "The Civil War Lies on Us like a Sleeping Dragon: America's Deadly Divide—and Why it Has Returned," *The Guardian*, August 20, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/aug/20/civil-war-american-history-trump

However, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), of the 409 Confederate memorial removals, relocations, or renamings that have ever been conducted, 377 occurred after 2015.[2] This statistic brings to light an intriguing trend—despite the enactment of state legislation aimed at protecting Confederate monuments, they are being removed at higher rates than ever before. The practical failure of these "statue statutes" is attributable to a number of factors, including the presence of legal loopholes, inadequate penalties for violation, and a simple lack of will to enforce them on the part of the states. The statistics indicate that the power of the state to control the domain of public commemoration can be countered by localities. The dominant actors in the debate over the nation's public commemorative landscapes are local advocacy groups, who, with increasing frequency in the past two decades, are engaged in a constant push and pull to either preserve, interpret, or topple the Confederate monuments that inhabit their neighborhoods.

a. Problem Statement

Controversies around Confederate monuments are not a solely modern phenomenon. On the contrary, the power of public monuments has long been recognized in the United States. The first ever manifestation of American monument resistance occurred in 1776, when a statue of King George III in Manhattan was toppled.[3] Confederate monuments were likewise subject to criticism upon their erection, evidenced by Republican Senator Weldon B. Heyburn's 1910 remarks denouncing the addition of a statue of Robert E. Lee to the Capitol's National Statuary

[2] Southern Poverty Law Center, *Whose Heritage? Public Symbols of the Confederacy,* 3rd Ed. (2022). https://www.splcenter.org/whose-heritage

[3] Zachary Bray, "We Are All Growing Old Together: Making Sense of America's Monument-Protection Laws," *William & Mary Law Review* 61, Issue 5 (2020): 1259–1328. https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/wmlr61&div=39

Hall. Heyburn's statement is reminiscent of arguments made against the maintenance of Confederate monuments today:

> I ask you in the interest of loyalty and harmony to say to the people who have sent this image to come and take it away. Take it away and worship it, if you please. But don't intrude it upon the people who do not want it. Take him home — place him in the most sacred spot; give him your dearest place in your local temples. But for God's sake, don't again start this spirit out of which the terrible troubles of the past arose.[4]

Thus, there is a tradition of Confederate monument controversy that precedes the modern debates.

There are three dominant schools of thought that appear in contemporary discourse around Confederate monuments. First, there are those who oppose removal in almost all circumstances. This camp argues three reasons why removal should not occur: because the monuments have historic or aesthetic significance; because it would constitute erasure of a historical narrative; and because this erasure would initiate a "slippery slope" of further erasures.[5] This is the position that has led to the development of monument protection laws. The second, more moderate school of thought typically manifests in one of two arguments: that Confederate monuments should be contextualized *in situ*, or that they should be relocated from public spaces. This position is most common among local museums and preservation organizations, which believe the monuments must be altered, but also feel they have important historical and educational value. The final major school of thought regards the removal, destruction, or defacement of Confederate monuments as necessary to counter the white supremacist narrative they project.

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[4] Cynthia Greenlee, "A Senator Speaks Out Against Confederate Monuments… in 1910," *Smithsonian Magazine*, October 18, 2017, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/senator-speaks-out-against-confederate-monuments-1910-180965299/

[5] Abigail K. Coker, "Close the Sores of War: Why Georgia Needs New Legislation to Address Its Confederate Monuments," *Georgia State University Law Review* 38, Issue 2 (2022): 629–vi. https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/gslr38&div=31

While criticisms of Confederate monuments are not new, their frequency has increased exponentially in the past decade in response to several significant events. The instance that is often credited for kickstarting the monument removal movement was the 2015 shooting by a white supremacist at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina. SPLC tracked 114 Confederate monument removals that occurred in the period following the massacre. In addition, the event prompted many states to proactively tighten their existing monument protection laws.[6] Then, in 2017, the "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia again opened the door to increased discussions about Confederate monuments in the modern landscape. Finally, the most recent contributing event was the killing of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis, Minnesota in the summer of 2020. Protests following Floyd's death led to the removal of many Confederate monuments across the country, including the Robert E. Lee statue in Richmond, Virginia. SPLC released a statement on Confederate monuments in the wake of Floyd's death, arguing "This has shifted the focus from understanding to action."[7] It was in the context of these events that the city of Atlanta, Georgia, began to re-evaluate its own Confederate monuments.

Senate Bill 77: Georgia's Monument Protection Legislation

Georgia's Monument Protection Act was first implemented in 2001 and originally applied only to military monuments located on public property. The push to amend the Act was started by then state senator Jeff Mullis (R-53rd), who wanted to extend its protections to all monuments, both public and private. The thinly veiled motivation behind the bill—Senate Bill 77 (SB-77)—was specific protection for Confederate monuments, evidenced by the date on

[6] Emily Behzadi, "Statues of Fraud: Confederate Monuments as Public Nuisances," *Stanford Journal of Civil Rights & Civil Liberties* 18, Issue 1 (2022): 1–50. https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/stjcrcl18&div=4
[7] SPLC, *Whose Heritage?*, 8.

which it was signed into law: Confederate Memorial Day, 2018. There are three main elements of SB-77 that differ from the original act: Its extension to private monuments in addition to public, its prohibition of removal in all circumstances except when necessary for the monument's preservation (in which case it must be relocated to a location of equal prominence), and its increased punishment for violators, who may be subject to treble damages or charged with a misdemeanor.[8]

Several different local advocacy groups issued statements following the signing of SB-77 into law. For some, it represented a positive step toward a stronger defense of the state's historic monuments. The Georgia division of the Sons of Confederate Veterans (SCV) praised the bill, stating:

> This is a great day and victory for all Georgians who cherish the sacrifices of all our Nation's Veterans. The State of Georgia now has some of the toughest monument protection laws in the Country. These strengthen [sic.] laws sends [sic.] a strong message that vandalism, removal or defacement of any Veterans monuments will not be tolerated by the State of Georgia.[9]

Conversely, resistance to SB-77 existed amongst many other advocacy groups from its inception. In Decatur, for example, a local organization, Beacon Hill Black Alliance for Human Rights, held a meeting in March of 2019 to discuss potential methods for preventing SB-77 from passing through the Georgia legislature.[10]

Other critics voiced the opinion that the law would only serve to reduce the autonomy of localities over their memorial landscapes. This lack of option is a product of the doctrine of preemption, which mandates that municipalities defer to state laws and regulations. As a result,

[8] Evelyn Graham and Timothy J. Graves, *SB 77—Protection for Monuments*, 36 GA. ST. U. L. REV. 219 (2019). https://readingroom.law.gsu.edu/gsulr/vol36/iss1/13
[9] GA SCV, "Georgia's Governor Brian Kemp Signs Senate Bill 77," (2021). https://www.georgiascv.org/georgias-governor-brian-kemp-signs-senate-bill-77/
[10] Graham and Graves, *SB-77*, 221-222.

localities often struggle to respond to the needs and desires of their residents on issues in which the state has an interest. Thus, in the case of Atlanta's Confederate monuments, with the city restricted by state law, advocacy groups have become the primary force attempting to affect their maintenance, interpretation, and removal.

b. Significance

This thesis aims to answer the question: To what extent have advocacy groups in the City of Atlanta been able to influence the removal, interpretation, or maintenance of the city's Confederate monuments since the establishment of Georgia's restrictive Monument Protection Law, SB-77? As of now, there are no comprehensive studies that analyze the actions of multiple Confederate monument advocacy groups within a single city. There are, however, several case studies that look at the lifespan of a singular monument or of a handful of monuments that exist in the same city. For example, in 2016, Dr. Irvin D.S. Winsboro, a professor at Florida Gulf Coast University, conducted a study on the connections between Confederate monument removal and cultural resource management organizations in Florida.[11] Another example is a 2019 case study of monument removal in Baltimore, Maryland conducted by Nicole M. Elias et. al, scholars in the Department of Public Management at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice.[12] This thesis will fill a gap in this existing research by looking specifically at the role of advocacy groups and their influence on Confederate monuments in circumstances where the local government is restricted from acting by state legislation.

[11] Irvin D.S. Winsboro, "The Confederate Monument Movement as a Policy Dilemma for Resource Managers of Parks, Cultural Sites, and Protected Places: Florida as a Case Study," *Journal of Tekirdag Agricultural Faculty* 13, Issue 3 (2016): 217–29. https://www.jstor.org/stable/44131254

[12] Nicole M. Elias, Sean McCandless, and Rashmi Chordiya, "Administrative Decision-Making Amid Competing Public Sector Values: Confederate Statue Removal in Baltimore, Maryland," *Journal of Public Affairs Education* 25, Issue 3 (2019): 412–22. https://doi.org/10.1080/15236803.2019.1601328

The results of this study have significance in a number of different ways. First, they highlight the extent to which SB-77 has been effective in preventing Confederate monument removal. Additionally, they show how this effectiveness changes based on factors such as the location, form, and original purpose of the monuments. Finally, they reveal the effectiveness of different removal alternatives implemented by advocacy groups in appeasing controversies around the monuments. This thesis can also serve as a framework for other cities in states with restrictive monument protection laws based on an analysis of the successes and failures of Atlanta's Confederate monument advocacy groups.

c. Definitions & Limitations

Monument vs Memorial

In the existing literature around Confederate monuments, two subcategories are traditionally outlined: monuments and memorials. Monuments are considered honorific, and often appear in public spaces like courthouse squares, whereas memorials are considered commemorative and typically are found in cemeteries or on historic battlefields. Of the two types, the former is typically seen as more controversial by academics. This thesis will defer to whichever term is used by the advocacy groups involved with the case studies. This is because of the differing connotations carried by the two terms. Ascribing the title of "memorial" to a Confederate statue implies that it has a commemorative value, whereas "monument" implies honorific value. As such, the chosen verbiage is important for understanding the underlying motivations of the studied advocacy groups.

Advocacy Group

This thesis will define the term 'advocacy group' based on the model developed by nonprofit researchers Boris and Mosher-Williams in their 1998 article for the Urban Institute.

Broadly, the authors define the term 'advocacy' as an attempt to impact public policy. The authors also outline three main functions that are characteristic of nonprofit advocacy groups: "…building social capital, facilitating civic participation, and providing public voice…" Based on these observations, they argue for a broader application of the term 'advocacy group,' to include not just politically-oriented groups, but also those concerned with the arts, religion, education, research, and more.[13] Thus, according to this definition, organizations that attempt to influence Confederate monuments and memorial landscapes in general undoubtedly qualify as advocacy groups. All of the advocacy groups studied in this thesis are non-profit organizations, although this attribute was not a requirement for their inclusion.

i. Parameters

It is important to note that the case studies in this thesis will be limited to Confederate monuments within the Atlanta city limits. This will exclude any monuments located in the metropolitan area. For the purposes of this thesis, it is important that the studied monuments are under the jurisdiction of the Atlanta municipal government. When this stipulation is met, the communities that interact with the studied monuments on a daily basis are made up of the city's constituents. The relationship between these constituents and the city government in light of state preemption is an important factor that this thesis will study, particularly through the role of advocacy groups and how they operate under SB-77's jurisdiction. The other important geographical consideration of this thesis is that the studied monuments can be located on both public and private lands. Existing studies of Confederate monument removal or interpretation typically pertain only to public monuments. However, because SB-77 changed Georgia law to

[13] Elizabeth Boris and Rachel Mosher-Williams, "Nonprofit Advocacy Organizations: Assessing the Definitions, Classifications, and Data," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 27, Issue 4 (1998): 488–506. https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/npvolsq27&div=33

extend state protection to private monuments as well as public, both are relevant to the scope of this thesis. A map showing the locations of the case study monuments is included for reference in Chapter Four.

There are several other parameters commonly used in the field that this thesis will not use. These include the time or era in which the monuments were erected and the purpose or intentions behind them. These two qualifications are often used to differentiate Confederate monuments into three phases: an early memorial phase, Jim Crow-Era monumentalization, and Civil Rights Era resistance. These attributes will be discussed as they are relevant to each monument, but they will not constitute limitations to which monuments are selected as case studies.

d. Methodology

i. Case Studies

This thesis consists of a series of seven case studies that generate a representative picture of the actions of advocacy groups towards Confederate monuments in Atlanta. The selected case studies are Confederate monuments within the Atlanta city limits that have been impacted by advocacy groups to some extent in the years since the enactment of SB-77 in 2019. The process of selecting and evaluating the case studies for this thesis will be further elaborated on in Chapter Four. Each monument is analyzed according to several different factors, including historical background, physical characteristics, any controversies or changes they have experienced since 2019, and the advocacy groups involved in those controversies or changes. Most of this information has been collected through a systematic review of digital archives and databases, utilizing primary sources such as newspaper articles, magazines, and websites. Important data

has been extracted from these case studies, including the motivations of the advocacy groups, the methods they utilized, and the effectiveness of their actions.

ii. Interviews

Interviews were conducted as a part of this research process in order to fill gaps where primary data was not available in archives or digital databases. Two representatives from studied advocacy groups were interviewed: Atlanta History Center CEO Sheffield Hale and BATL founder Henry Bryant. In addition to furnishing gaps in necessary information, this process provided an opportunity to analyze the motivations of certain advocacy groups on a more personal level.

e. Chapter Organization

The first chapter of this thesis has introduced the topic and the process by which the research question will be analyzed. The second chapter of this thesis consists of a review of the existing literature in the study of Confederate monuments. It is divided into three main sections—Confederate monuments, collective memory, and monument protection legislation. Major works in these two related fields are reviewed and synthesized in order to generate an image of the broader scholarship upon which this thesis builds.

Chapter three presents important historical background information that will provide readers with context relevant to this thesis' case studies. The chapter is not a comprehensive history of Confederate memorialization, but rather a curated selection of historical facts that aid in the development of an understanding of the social and political movements that produced the monuments.

The fourth chapter includes this thesis' seven case studies. The chapter includes data on each case study monument's historical background, physical characteristics, modern controversies, and current state.

The fifth chapter analyzes the data presented in chapter four by highlighting six major findings. A table summarizing the data being analyzed has also been included for reference. (Table 2)

Finally, chapter six synthesizes the findings from chapter five to answer the initial research question. It also includes recommendations and reflections for future research.

Chapter II

Literature Review

The first step in the methodology of this thesis is a review of the existing literature, encompassing a variety of different relevant topics. This chapter evaluates three existing areas of literature: Confederate monuments, collective memory, and monument protection legislation. Within these broad categories, smaller subtopics have also been identified. The first section on Confederate monuments includes studies that, similar to this thesis, look at monuments which have become controversial within their communities and analyze the methods of intervention applied to them. The second section on collective memory includes sociological studies of both the concept of collective memory and how it manifests in the public landscape. The final section on monument protection legislation looks at legal reviews of both SB-77 and laws from other states. By reviewing these areas of literature individually, this chapter situates this thesis and the questions it seeks to answer within the larger study of controversial monuments.

a. Confederate Monuments

There is a grouping of studies that, like this thesis, look at Confederate monuments and the different methods of intervention that have been or could be used on them. Often, these studies seek to categorize different types of Confederate monuments as those that should be removed and those that should not. This categorization is usually based on factors such as form, purpose, period, and location. Many studies then theorize about which amelioration methods should be applied to each monument category. Ultimately, the moral or ethical conclusions of these studies are irrelevant to this thesis' focus on efficacy. However, a review of this area of

literature is helpful in developing context for the choices and methods of the studied advocacy groups. It also situates this thesis within the larger field of study of Confederate monuments.

Erik W. Blasic's 2024 legal review, "Rebels Among Ruins," is a recent comprehensive study of the merits and drawbacks of different Confederate monument amelioration methods. Blasic identifies and evaluates seven different approaches: Donation to a museum, relocation to a battlefield or cemetery, relocation to a monument graveyard, destruction, donation to a private recipient, contextualization in situ, and relocation away from public view. Each of these methods, Blasic acknowledges, comes with its own set of problems. For example, relocation to a museum is one of the most popularly supported results of removal, but it is also one of the least feasible, mainly due to spatial restrictions. Another popular option, relocation to Civil War battlefields and cemeteries, is also often considered inappropriate. This is because the vast majority of Confederate monuments, particularly the more controversial ones, were constructed long after the end of the war and are therefore historically incompatible with Civil War sites. Despite this fact, there are many Civil War battlefield sites that house Confederate monuments today. Blasic also highlights approaches that have been implemented by other nations, including monument graveyards like the Fallen Monument Park in Moscow, and destruction, a method commonly used in Germany after the Second World War. Many of these methods are relevant to the plans and actions of the advocacy groups studied in this thesis, and as such Blasic's arguments provide important context for their viability. [14]

Interpretation is by far the most common amelioration method, and its efficacy has been heavily debated within this area of literature. For example, Professor of Historic Preservation Steven Hoffman highlighted the potential merits of interpretation in his 2020 case study of a

[14] Erik W. Blasic, "Rebels Among Ruins: Policies, Procedures, and Laws Surrounding Confederate Monuments Post-Removal," *Penn State Law Review* 128, Issue 2 (2024): 667–99. EBSCOhost.

Confederate monument in Cape Girardeau, Missouri's courthouse square. The monument had become highly contentious within the community and was vandalized in 2011. The city tried several different intervention methods, including installing a counter-monument honoring the United States Colored Troops and renaming the square after an African American Civil War soldier. Significantly, the city also decided to install interpretive panels "Inspired by the model proposed by the Atlanta History Center…"[15] Hoffman states that after this installation, public opposition to both the monument and the counter-monument decreased. He argues that "Although it may be impossible to know for certain, the choice to broaden the interpretation instead of removing or replacing the existing monuments was probably a factor in the lack of significant public opposition."[16] Hoffman argues that this could serve as a model for other cities with similar monuments. Reviewing cases like this one is helpful for contextualizing Atlanta's Confederate monument conflicts within the national conversation.

Like Hoffman, art historian Sarah Beetham uses a singular monument as a case study in her 2016 article on vandalism and protest against Confederate monuments. The Rockingham County Confederate Monument was hit by a car in 2011, an event which set of a series of reckonings by the city of Reidsville, North Carolina over its memorial landscape. Ultimately, the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC), which owned the monument, relocated the monument's base to a cemetery and erected a replacement statue upon it. The relocation only heightened the tensions within the community, however, with vandalism and protest occurring from both those opposed to the monument and those in favor of it. Beetham's work ultimately calls into question the effectiveness of not just the method of relocation, but all existing

[15] Steven Hoffman, "A More Inclusive Civil War Interpretation in Cape Girardeau, Missouri's Public Square: A Case Study," *Preservation Education & Research* 12 (2020): 1–23. doi:10.5749/preseducrese.12.2020.0001.
[16] Hoffman, "Cape Girardeau," 11

amelioration methods, with the author arguing, "...the debate over Confederate memory hinges on powerful emotions that tap into fundamental questions about the American experience. Finding a solution to the monument question that suits all parties may not be possible without achieving greater consensus on the underlying history."[17] Beetham concludes that whatever the solution, it should be determined and conducted at the local, grassroots level. Again, the findings of this study on the effectiveness of certain Confederate monument intervention methods help to contextualize this thesis' own findings.

Overall, these articles represent some of the existing scholarly approaches to the study of Confederate monuments and methods of intervention applied to them. This thesis differs from these studies in its focus on advocacy groups and on a city, rather than a single monument or a broader, national scope. This section is particularly useful in that it details findings of other researchers that this thesis can build upon in its own case study process.

a. Collective Memory

The concept of collective memory is rooted in a sociological theory about how groups of people form a unified recollection of past events. It is important for this thesis to look at the literature in this field because the concept of collective memory is relevant to the process through which communities decide to reject or continue to accept Confederate monuments. The issue is especially complex in this case, because the monuments themselves were erected with the explicit purpose of shaping collective memory of the Civil War and the Confederacy.

Sociologist Jeffrey Olick has had one of the strongest influences on the field of collective memory in the Twenty-First Century. In his works, Olick often uses Germany's reckoning of its

[17] Sarah Beetham, (2016) *From Spray Cans to Minivans: Contesting the Legacy of Confederate Soldier Monuments in the Era of "Black Lives Matter,"* Public Art Dialogue 6, Issue 1 (2016), 9–33. https://doi.org/10.1080/21502552.2016.1149386

Nazi past as a case study, examining the way collective memory of unpleasant or shameful events develops. Two connected lines of inquiry that Olick poses in his book, *The Politics of Regret,* are particularly relevant to the issues addressed in this thesis. First, he asks "If narrative is constitutive of identity, an instrument of politics (i.e., rhetoric) and an expression of culture (i.e., representation), what happens when an organization—small or large, family, social movement, or nation state—cannot tell such stories in an unproblematic fashion?"[18] This question is relevant to the state protection of public monuments, a process which automatically transforms those monuments into forms of government speech. As such, it is also relevant to this thesis' analysis of how monument protection laws consolidate power with the state and restrict the ability of localities to alter their public commemorative landscapes.

The second major question that Olick poses in *The Politics of Regret* is "At what point should or does a past pass away?"[19] This question underlines the entire issue of Confederate monuments and the conflict over whether they should remain or be removed. According to Olick, what results from this problem is a continuation of a past conflicts in the modern political sphere—in other words, the Civil War lives on in the Confederate monument debate. Olick also argues that the existence of competing collective memories results in a stalemate that prohibits any change in the traditional historical narrative. By not allowing a "past to pass away," monument protection laws perpetuate the conflict between competing collective memories. This is the environment in which the advocacy groups studied in this thesis are operating, and it is their failures and victories on this eternal battlefield that will be analyzed.

[18] Jeffrey K. Olick, *The Politics of Regret : On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility* (Routledge, 2007), 5.
[19] Olick, *The Politics of Regret,* 54.

There is a subsection in the field of collective memory that looks at the role of monuments in actively shaping it. Norwegian geographers Waldemar Cudny and Håkan Appelblad contribute to this field of study in their article in which they outline six major functions of monuments in the public sphere: symbolic, commemorative, political, social, marketing, and religious. While the initial purpose of Atlanta's Confederate monuments may have been commemorative, in the modern landscape they serve primarily political and symbolic functions. Cudny and Appelblad analyze the symbolic functions of monuments primarily through their physical attributes. This concept is relevant to the case study monuments, all of which were designed with specific symbolisms in mind.

The political function of monuments, the authors argue, often has to do with the spaces that the monuments occupy, noting that "The areas surrounding monuments often become the venues for various political events, such as rallies, meetings with voters, or demonstrations."[20] In the case of Confederate monuments, as the selected case studies will show, the two most common of these events are Confederate Memorial Day celebrations and protests. In this way, they can transform what should ideally be a place of national unity and order (Namely a courthouse square or a capitol building) into a place of political division.

Kirk Savage, Professor of History of Art and Architecture at the University of Pittsburgh, is another seminal author in the study of Confederate monuments. In his 2018 book *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves*, Savage explores many different aspects of Confederate monuments and their relation to the public, analyzing how collective memories of the monuments and their purpose have changed over time. Savage argues that while Confederate

[20] Waldemar Cudny and Håkan Appelblad, "Monuments and Their Functions in Urban Public Space," *Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift - Norwegian Journal of Geography* 73 (2019): 273-289. https://doi.org/10.1080/00291951.2019.1694976

monuments may appear to have had broad public support in the nineteenth century, it is debatable whether they can be considered "democratized." This is because their erection was simultaneously dependent on funding from the elite as well as approval from the broader public. Savage argues that whether or not these two groups had differing initial motivations in supporting the monuments, "In the process, elite and popular interests inevitably intertwined and reshaped one another."[21] Savage then goes on to argue that over time, as the monuments became fixtures in the public landscape, any political aspects of their foundations faded away and it became easier for the public to accept them as constants.[22] This argument helps to explain the way that collective memories regarding Confederate monuments and their ties to white supremacy have changed over time.

Another work in this field is political science professor Jocelyn J. Evans' 2021 study, which looks at two monuments in Montgomery, Alabama: The Alabama Confederate Memorial Monument and The National Peace and Justice Memorial. Evans suggests that the typology introduced by philosopher Nelson Goodman in his book *The Structure of Appearance* can be applied to the study of Confederate monuments and their influence on the public landscape. Goodman's typology applies three different lenses to a memorial to obtain a holistic picture of its effects: Denotation, exemplification & expression, and mediated reference. The denotation lens looks at the surface level elements of a memorial, particularly inscriptions that contain literal references to its purpose or message. The exemplification & expression lens looks at the symbolic elements of a memorial, including its location, material, and form. Finally, the mediated reference lens looks at the context in which the memorial was erected as well as the

[21] Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America (New Edition)*, Princeton: Princeton University Press (2018). https://aaeportal.com/?id=-31904.
[22] Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves*, 8.

associations that it has accrued over time.[23] As recommended by Evans, this thesis keeps these three lenses in mind during the case study process, with the goal of achieving an understanding of the messages that the monuments convey to their communities.

Overall, while this thesis is not a sociological study of collective memory, it does include several elements relevant to the field. These elements include both the idea that Confederate monuments shape the political and historical narratives in their communities, as well as the idea that states influence these narratives by forcing the preservation of said monuments through monument protection laws. An understanding of the existing literature in the field of collective memory, therefore, is a helpful basis for interpreting the conclusions drawn by this thesis.

b. Monument Protection Legislation

The existence of SB-77 is an important variable in this thesis' analysis of the effectiveness of actions taken by advocacy groups toward Atlanta's Confederate monuments. As such, it is necessary for this thesis to develop an understanding of how the legislation functions and its potential implications. There is an area of literature that studies monument protection legislation and its various merits and flaws. A review of these works provides this thesis with background information on both Georgia's monument protection law and those implemented in other states. Many of these studies are law reviews, and as such they contribute legal critiques that are helpful in evaluating the selected case studies and the extent of the abilities of the studied advocacy groups.

Law professor Zachary Bray provides one of the most comprehensive critiques of monument protection legislation in his 2020 law review. In it, Bray identifies several major flaws

[23] Jocelyn J. Evans, and Bruna Fernandez, "The Social Meaning of Competing Memorial Spaces: Examining the Alabama Confederate Memorial Monument and the National Peace and Justice Memorial in Montgomery, Alabama," *Social Science Quarterly (Wiley-Blackwell)* 102, Issue 3 (2021): 1199–1218. doi:10.1111/ssqu.12981

that are common to "statue statutes," including the fact that many of them fail to include a basic definition of what qualifies as a monument. More generally, Bray argues that because these laws are often reactionary, they are hastily developed and riddled with loopholes. The most significant flaw common to these laws, Bray argues, is that they "entirely eschew any role for community self-determination or the participation of affected citizens in determining what monuments should be protected."[24] It is because of this limitation that advocacy groups have had to take on such a dominant role in Confederate monument controversies—not just in Atlanta but also in other municipalities.

Much of the literature on monument protection laws studies the potential loopholes that localities, advocacy groups, and individual community members can use to get around them. Law professor Emily Behzadi proposes a potential counter method in her 2022 study, arguing that individual citizens can use the doctrine of 'public nuisance' to get a monument removed when the state has protective legislation in place. One of the ways to achieve standing in a public nuisance case is to prove "special injury." Behzadi argues that "the 'special injury' requirement to satisfy a public nuisance claim is satisfied by the 'cultural trauma' suffered by Black Americans in the United States."[25] Behzadi's study is also particularly relevant to this thesis because one of the case studies she conducts is the state of Georgia. Behzadi argues that in Georgia, the monument protection law is contradicted by the state's nuisance statute, which authorizes a county judge to remove public nuisance that '…tends greatly to corrupt the manners and morals of the public.' Additionally, according to Behzadi, precedent on this issue was set in 2020, when a Decatur judge ruled that public nuisance could warrant removal of a monument even in

[24] Bray, "We Are All Growing Old Together," 1294.
[25] Behzadi, "Statues of Fraud," 43.

violation of SB-77. Thus, there is precedent in Georgia for conducting removals in spite of the law when there are applicable legal loopholes such as a public nuisance claim.[26]

Attorney Elisabeth Dannan also conducts case studies of monument protection-related court cases in her 2022 law review. In one of these cases, *State v. City of Birmingham*, the city argued that the presence of the state's monument protection legislation violated its First Amendment rights. The court ruled that municipalities do not have any federal constitutional rights that they may assert against their state government. However, Dannan argues that in another case, *Walker v. Texas Division, Sons of Confederate Veterans, Inc*, precedent was set that municipalities should be considered government speakers, and that they do have a constitutional right to control the message of that speech by removing Confederate monuments if they so wish. Ultimately, Dannan argues that the most viable claim that a monument protection law is unconstitutional would be through the doctrine of equal protection, because "the history of Confederate monuments shows that often their purpose was to promote white supremacy."[27] These cases are important to consider because they show the many challenges to monument protection legislation that have been brought in recent years, several of which have had some measure of success.

Associate Attorney William Stoll outlines what is the most common method of countering restrictions to monument removal in this thesis—defiance—in his 2022 law review. According to Stoll, many cities, rather than attempting removal through legal channels, simply choose to remove their Confederate monuments without permission and accept the punishment dictated by the legislation. Stoll states that for most states, fines are miniscule in comparison to

[26] Behzadi, "Statues of Fraud," 21-22.
[27] Elisabeth A. Dannan, "Rights to Remove: Constitutional Municipal Rights to Remove Confederate Monuments from Public Property," *Syracuse Law Review* 72, Issue 3 (2022): 1355–85. https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/syrlr72&div=36&&collection=journals

the overall state budget, and so far, many states have failed to prosecute such cases.[28] This is a realistic option for municipalities that want to claim a degree of autonomy in the face of state monument protection legislation, and as such it is an option that will become relevant in several of this thesis' case studies.

Overall, although the literature reviewed in this chapter does not constitute a comprehensive summary of the field, the particular literature chosen will be used to help shape the arguments put forth in later chapters. The areas of study analyzed—Confederate monuments, collective memory, and monument protection legislation—also provide scholarly background information that is relevant to the selected case studies. They have also helped generally to situate this thesis within the existing field of literature. The next chapter will delve into important historical background that will also help to develop the basis of information upon which the case studies can be built.

[28] William Stoll, "The Problem with Confederate Monuments: State Laws as Barriers for Removal and Methods Available to Localities," *UC Davis Social Justice Law Review* 26, Issue 1 (2022): 91–131. https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/ucdajujlp26&div=7

CHAPTER III

BACKGROUND

This chapter includes a curated selection of historical information on Confederate memorialization that is necessary to create context for the case study monuments in the next chapter. A complete understanding of Confederate monuments in the modern landscape is impossible without having a grasp on the history of their existence. As Norwegian geographers Cudny and Appelblad argue, historic monuments have a political function in the contemporary memorial landscape. Cudny and Appelblad state that "Sometimes, the character of a monument has been imposed by its creator or those who commissioned it in cases when it expresses the political or military domination of one nation over another."[29] This function, when applied to Confederate monuments, is transformed from political or military domination to sociocultural domination. By studying the history of Confederate memorialization, Confederate monuments can be better understood as vehicles for this kind of domination. This section will explore three main aspects of Confederate memorialization: The Lost Cause, memorial groups, and the monuments themselves. The information in this section provides background for this thesis' case study monuments, which can then be used to exemplify the ways in which the monuments affect their contemporary landscapes and communities.

The Lost Cause

The Lost Cause is the historical narrative behind many of the Confederate monuments erected in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. David Blight, Professor of American

[29] Cudny and Appelblad, "Monuments and Their Functions," 280.

History at Yale University, is one of the preeminent scholars in the field of Confederate memory. Blight argues that there were three different camps of memory vying to become the dominant narrative following the Civil War: reconciliationist, white supremacist, and emancipationist. He traces these three versions of Civil War memory from the end of the war, through the different stages of Reconstruction, and beyond. He argues that African American cultural leaders, such as Frederick Douglass, shaped the emancipationist school of memory in the years following the war's end. This camp, according to Blight, promoted "an African American patriotic memory, characterized by the insistence that the black soldier, the Civil War Constitutional Amendments, and the story of emancipation ought to be at the center of the nation's remembrance."[30]

However, Blight argues, "A segregated society demanded a segregated historical memory."[31] As such, particularly with the end of Reconstruction and the return of home rule in the former Confederate states, the Emancipationist vision was eclipsed by an overwhelming push towards reconciliation and a widespread acceptance of the Lost Cause. In addition to federal intervention during Reconstruction, the national social and political environment at the time was a major contributing factor in the development of the Lost Cause doctrine in the South. Gaines M. Foster, Professor of History at Louisiana State University, asserts that the Lost Cause "…helped fade the scars of defeat while providing a ritual model of an ordered, deferential, conservative society. The Confederate tradition thereby helped the southern social order weather a period of social stress with a minimum of disruption and, more important, only a modicum of change."[32] Thus, there was a direct correlation between periods of social political unrest—

[30] David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Harvard University Press, 2001), 300. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvjk2tsw.
[31] Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 361.
[32] Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865-1913* (Oxford University Press, 1988), 144. https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ugalib/detail.action?docID=679472

Reconstruction, waves of immigration, contentious election cycles, and industrialization, for example—and the intensification of the Lost Cause.

Emily Behzadi, a professor at the California Western School of Law, argues that there are three main principles in Lost Cause doctrine:

> (1) the Confederacy's fundamental goal was to protect states' rights and not slavery; (2) enslaved people were content in their station and the Civil War and subsequent Reconstruction upset a natural racial hierarchy; and (3) Confederates were among the greatest soldiers in history and they were defeated only because of lack of manpower and resources.[33]

The majority of Lost Cause activity centered around furthering these three narratives in the historical record, in the public memorial landscape, and in the minds of southern youths. According to Blight, in the 1880s, Confederate memorial groups began to look outward, spreading Lost Cause doctrine beyond the South in a movement known as Reconciliation. Blight describes the ideology of the movement, stating, "Southerners found they could transform loss on the battlefield into a reunion on terms largely of their own choosing."[34] These reconciliationists, as well as Lost Cause advocates at large, utilized memorial activity as the main vehicle through which to further their ideology.

Moreover, Foster argues that memorial activity was not simply a result of Lost Cause ideology, but also its central driver. Monument unveiling celebrations, Confederate Memorial Day parades, and veterans' reunions, according to Foster, "focused less on death and more on vindication and history."[35] In the Reconstruction Era South where the physical landscape, economy, and social fabric had been dismantled by the war, this kind of rhetoric was both validating and comforting, making memorial activity ever more popular. Thus, while

[33] Behzadi, "Statues of Fraud," 5.
[34] Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 264.
[35] Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy*, 128.

Confederate monuments often honor the dead, they are products of an environment that was more celebratory than bereaved. Considering these factors, Confederate monuments today are intrinsically tied to an ideology that denies slavery as a cause of the Civil War and seeks to promote Antebellum culture (including slavery) through the image of a romanticized, utopian society. As such, even today they are active participants in exhibiting a specific historic narrative, a narrative that African Americans often—understandably—consider to be oppressive.

Memorial Groups

There would not be any Confederate monuments today if it were not for the memorial groups that erected them. These were primarily women's groups, operating under the Lost Cause principle that the memory of the Confederate cause should be passed on to future generations. Historian Karen Cox is the most prolific scholar in this field of study, focusing specifically on the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC). According to Cox, the UDC were the most prominent monument builders of their time, and as their numbers grew, so did the number of Confederate monuments. She also argues that rather than simply erecting monuments to honor the dead, the Daughters consciously and purposefully attempted to shape the historical narrative.[36] This is important to consider when studying UDC-erected monuments, as they should be seen primarily as Lost Cause symbols rather than symbols of grief or memorialization. Cox also drives home the idea that the UDC played a significant role in maintaining the racial status quo in the former Confederate states, asserting that "There was nothing innocuous about imparting the Lost Cause narrative to a younger generation, as that narrative was replete with racial stereotypes, emphasized the inferiority of blacks, and exaggerated the benevolence of slave

[36] Karen L. Cox, *Dixie's Daughters. New Perspectives on the History of the South* (University Press of Florida, 2003), 2.

ownership."[37] Thus, according to Cox, UDC monuments cannot be separated from the white supremacist values that produced them, and which they continue to project into their communities.

Historian Caroline Janney, like Cox, focuses on the work of a memorial organization—the Ladies' Memorial Associations (LMAs). The LMAs is also relevant to this thesis, as the Atlanta chapter was responsible for two of the case study monuments. The LMAs preceded the UDC, and Janney argues that they set the stage for the other group's success. Unlike the UDC, the primary function of the LMAs was to bury the dead, not to memorialize the Confederate cause, although they often erected monuments within the cemeteries they formed. As Janney states, "Tributes to the war dead naturally belonged in cemeteries; therefore LMA women declared that they would have total control of such projects…"[38] Janney also gives the LMAs credit for beginning the development of the Lost Cause ideology, arguing that "The women of the LMAs, and not the United Confederate Veterans nor the United Daughters of the Confederacy, were responsible for remaking military defeat into a political, social, and cultural victory for the white South."[39] As such, even though the LMAs were operating within an earlier, more memorial-focused time period than the UDC, their monuments can carry a similar association with Lost Cause values. This association is evident in the actions of advocacy groups toward the two LMA-constructed monuments studied in this thesis.

Monuments

Often, the aspect of a Confederate monument that has the greatest effect on the way its community reacts to it is its physical form. The late geographer John Winberry conducted some

[37] Cox, *Dixie's Daughters*, 122.
[38] Caroline E. Janney, *Burying the Dead but Not the Past : Ladies' Memorial Associations and the Lost Cause* (University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 95.
[39] Janney, *Burying the Dead*, 3.

of the most comprehensive surveys of Confederate monuments and summarized their common thematic elements. In his groundbreaking 1983 article, Winberry separates Confederate monuments into several different categories. He first categorizes them based on their locations: battlefields, cemeteries, courthouse squares, and state capitol grounds.[40] Three out of four of these groupings are represented in this thesis' case studies. Winberry then categorizes the monuments by form, including: "The Confederate soldier atop a column; (…) The Confederate soldier atop a column with his weapon held at the ready; (…) The obelisk;" as well as a miscellaneous category including "plaques, standing stones, fountains, arches, and other memorials." Winberry states that the frequency of these types fluctuates based on the time period in which they were erected, with obelisks dominating the early post-war period and statues of Confederate soldiers becoming preeminent by the turn of the 20th century.[41] This finding is also reinforced by the case study monuments in this thesis, with the earliest taking the form of an obelisk and one of the latest including a depiction of a soldier. Overall, the forms of Confederate monuments can reveal the period and environment that produced them, and therefore the intentions behind them.

The historical background presented in this chapter, in conjunction with the previous chapter's literature review, forms an informational basis upon which the next chapter's case studies can be conducted. The coming case studies include elements relevant to several topics covered in this chapter, particularly the doctrines of the Lost Cause and Reconciliation, as well as the memorial groups associated with them.

[40] John J. Winberry, "Lest We Forget: The Confederate Monument and the Southern Townscape," *Southeastern Geographer* 55, no. 1 (2015): 19–31. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26233718.
[41] Winberry, "Lest We Forget," 22.

Chapter IV

Case Studies

This chapter presents information on this thesis' main methodology: the case study. The first part of this chapter includes a detailed explanation of the research process, and the second part details the data collected for each case study monument. This data will be synthesized, and the findings analyzed, in the next chapter. The case study methodology was chosen for this thesis because it allows for the collection of data from a representative sample of Confederate monuments and advocacy groups in Atlanta.

Methodology

Research for the case studies was conducted predominately with primary source material. News articles were the most commonly utilized of these primary sources. The case study monuments that were selected during this initial research process were chosen because they were both within the Atlanta city limits and *in situ* when SB-77 went into effect (Figure 10). The first condition is necessary for this thesis because one of the factors that will be studied is the effect of state monument protection legislation on Atlanta's autonomy over its own landscape. The second criterion is similarly important because monuments that were removed before SB-77 went into effect would not be cases through which the effects of the legislation could be studied. Ultimately, using these criteria, seven monuments were selected as case studies for this thesis.

Each case study discussed in this chapter has been organized into several subsections, which will allow patterns between them to be identified in the next chapter. Each case study begins with a thorough discussion of the monument's history, including its founders, dedication

ceremony, and any historic alterations or relocations. Next, the physical attributes of the monument are examined, including its form, inscription, and location. Then, any modern

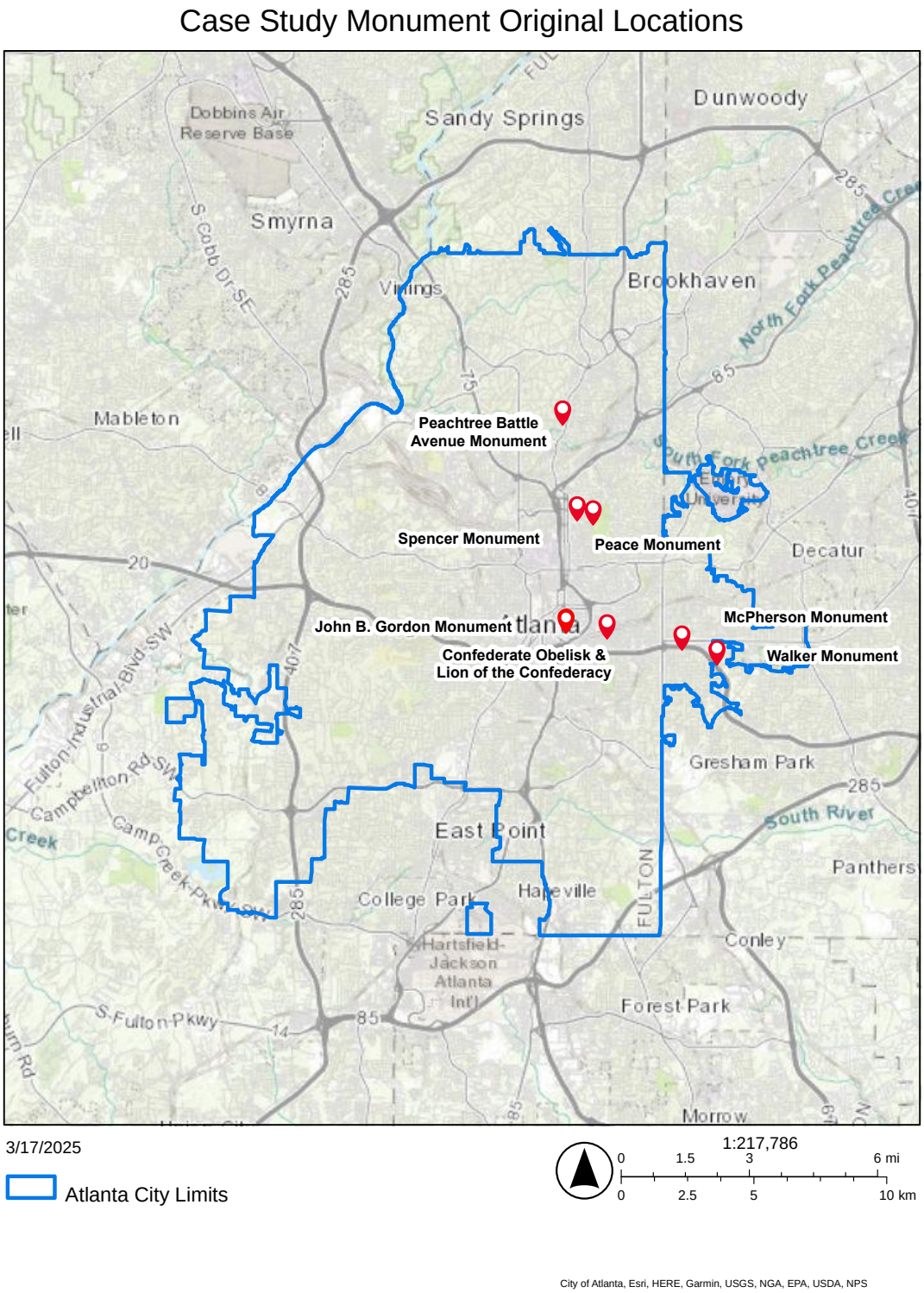

Figure 1. *Map of Original Case Study Monument Locations.* Created by author.

controversies or discourse surrounding the monument are highlighted, and the advocacy groups involved with them are identified. Finally, the current state of each monument is established, as well as any information about impending changes. In the next chapter, this data will be synthesized to form a larger picture of the significance of each case study in this thesis' overall findings.

a. Peachtree Battle Avenue Monument

The current site of the Battle of Peachtree Creek bears little resemblance to its appearance on June 20, 1864, when the Union achieved a decisive victory over the Confederacy. Today, the majority of the site has been overtaken by residential and commercial development. Despite this lack of preservation, many Confederate memorial groups have made attempts to commemorate the battle on the site, one of which resulted in the Peachtree Battle Avenue Monument.

Historical Background

The Peachtree Battle Avenue Monument was commissioned by a group called the Old Guard of the Gate City Guard of Atlanta in 1935. The original Gate City Guard began as a local militia in 1857 and was incorporated into the Confederate Army upon Georgia's secession from the Union in 1861. On their website, the Old Guard proudly proclaim the Gate City Guard to have been "the first militia company of the state to offer their services to the Governor" when war was imminent.[42] After Reconstruction, the Gate City Guard re-formed as the Old Guard of the Gate City Guard and converted its mission to one of "peace." The group routinely set out on "friendship tours" to northern cities, purportedly with the goal of reducing sectionalism. They also began to erect peace monuments across the country, including the Peachtree Battle Avenue Monument. While on the surface peace monuments may seem altruistic, they are a part of the

[42] John A. Dietrichs, "The Story of The Old Guard of The Atlanta Gate City Guard," (n.d.). https://oldguard-atlanta.org/history/the-story

larger trend of post-Reconstruction 'reconciliation,' through which former Confederates attempted to regain their antebellum political, cultural, and economic influence within the nation. The Old Guard was just one force within this movement, a fact made apparent by member John Green, who said of the organization in 2016: "We're a Confederate unit but we are a group that tries to continue the virtues of the old South."[43]

Physical Description

This monument was erected near the site of the Battle of Peachtree Creek, on what is today public land, across from an elementary school on Peachtree Avenue. As such, it has a very prominent, public presence within the community despite the lack of any remaining historic integrity in the site of the battle it commemorates. The monument's form is similar to that of a lectern-style headstone. The sides of the monument have a rough finish, while the front-facing surfaces are smooth. The slanted top surface includes carvings of a Civil War era musket and a World War One era rifle crossing over each other in an 'X' shape. Below the firearms are carvings of two different styles of military hats representing the Civil War and World War One respectively (Figure 2). This imagery symbolizes the connection reconciliationsts drew between the cause of the Confederacy and the cause of the Allied Powers in World War One. The purpose of the monument is reinforced by the inscription on the front, which states:

> This memorial is a tribute to American Valor, which they of the blue and they of the gray had as a common heritage from their forefathers of 1776, and to the pervading spirit thereof which, in the days of 1898 and the Great World conflict of 1917-1918, perfected the reunion of the North and the South.[44]

[43] Gracie B. Staples, "Rededicating a Confederate Monument to Peace," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution,* September 22, 2016, https://www.ajc.com/lifestyles/rededicating-confederate-monument-peace/FCAZ8OVP51wNkgycFVoS6K/

[44] Advisory Committee on City of Atlanta Street Names and Monuments Associated with the Confederacy Final Report, 12-13. November 20, 2017.

reconciliationist language pervades this inscription, which presents itself as “a tribute to American Valor” on both sides. Its reference to the First World War highlights a belief by the former Confederate states that their service in the war helped to restore their honor in the eyes of the nation.

Figure 2. *Peachtree Battle Avenue Monument (2017*). ”RoughDraft Atlanta,” 2019. https://roughdraftatlanta.com/2019/07/25/history-center-reveals-new-sign-giving-context-to-buckhead-confederate-monument/

Modern Controversy

The Peachtree Battle Avenue Monument is one of the Confederate monuments addressed by the Advisory Committee on City of Atlanta Street Names and Monuments Associated with the Confederacy. In September of 2017, less than a month after the events in Charlottesville, then Atlanta mayor Kasim Reed called for the formation of an advisory group to evaluate and make recommendations for the city’s Confederate memorials and monuments. The advisory council, co-chaired by Atlanta History Center CEO Sheffield Hale and National Center for Civil Rights CEO Derreck Kayongo, met four times between October and November of 2017. The result of

these meetings was a report consisting of several different recommendations for the city. [45] In 2019, however many of their plans had to be re-evaluated due to the signing of SB-77.

The Peachtree Battle Avenue Monument was one of two "peace" monuments included in the Advisory Committee's final report, both of which received recommendations for removal and relocation to private storage. In justification of this decision, the committee cited the context in which the Peachtree Battle Avenue Monument was erected—the Jim Crow Era—as an important contributing factor. They argued that "…this monument falsely depicts the character of post-Civil War reconciliation by reflecting Lost Cause mythology through the language of its inscription and omitting the experience of African Americans…"[46] Their final recommendation was to raise an interpretive marker on the site where the monument once stood that "…acknowledges the facts of the battle in an appropriate historical manner."[47] However, when SB-77 went into effect, the planned removal became largely impossible.

Once it had become clear that the city could not remove the monument as recommended, the focus shifted to interpretation. The group that has had the greatest influence on the interpretation of the Peachtree Battle Avenue Monument is the Atlanta History Center (AHC), a museum and research center located within the Atlanta perimeter. For the monuments originally recommended for removal, AHC developed Interpretive panels to provide context for visitors. These were installed on August 2, 2019, with funding also provided by the history center. Speaking to AHC's motivations, CEO Sheffield Hale stated that 'This is a diminutive statue in a place that nobody really goes, (…) so it's probably not at the top of list of major issues. But it's

[45] Atlanta History Center, "Confederate Monument Interpretation Guide," (n.d.). https://www.atlantahistorycenter.com/learning-and-research/projects-initiatives/confederate-monument-interpretation-guide/
[46] Advisory Committee Final Report, 20.
[47] Advisory Committee Final Report, 20.

also something that can easily be dealt with, in my view, with a contextualization marker.'[48] The text of the interpretive panel contextualizes the monument within the Reconciliation Movement and reveals the undertones of its inscription. It acknowledges that the monument romanticizes the post-Reconstruction era and "ignores the segregation and disenfranchisement of African Americans and others that still existed in 1935."[49] Aside from interpretation, Hale has also indicated that the history center would be interested in displaying the monument as a part of its American Civil War exhibit.[50]

The other group involved with this monument is the Old Guard of the Gate City Guard, who commissioned it. Today, the Old Guard functions similarly to other Confederate memorial organizations, celebrating Confederate Memorial Day and laying wreaths at grave sites. In September 2017, when the Advisory Committee had just been formed, former Old Guard Commandant John Green said of the Peachtree Battle Avenue Monument that "he believes it should stay, but fears it won't."[51] Then in July 2019, Old Guard Commandant John Dietrichs posted on the group's website informing members about the interpretive panels, stating "Gentlemen – Thought you would be interested in this article about to be published in the Atlanta Constitutional (what to do with it if you are short of toilet paper), since two of the four monuments are ours."[52] Other than these two public comments, there is no existing evidence that

[48] Evelyn Andrews, "Contextualize' Buckhead's Confederate Monument, History Center Head Says," *Buckhead Reporter*, September 2, 2018, https://roughdraftatlanta.com/2018/09/02/contextualize-buckheads-confederate-monument-history-center-head-says/
[49] Rosalind Bentley, "Atlanta Erecting Markers About Slavery Next to Confederate Monuments," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, July 24, 2019, https://www.ajc.com/news/local-govt--politics/atlanta-erecting-historical-markers-next-confederate-monuments/84aZJcUhOA7GparAHNOGCP/
[50] Sheffield Hale, discussion with the author, February 2025.
[51] Evelyn Andrews, "Confederate Monument Crossfire Hits Home in Buckhead," *Rough Draft Atlanta*, September 1, 2017, https://roughdraftatlanta.com/2017/09/01/confederate-monument-crossfire-hits-home-buckhead/
[52] John Dietrichs, "AJC on New Monument Markers," July 27, 2019, https://oldguard-atlanta.org/ajc-on-new-monument-markers

the Old Guard resisted AHC's interpretation efforts or made any other attempts to directly influence the monument since the enactment of SB-77.

There has been little negative reception to the Peachtree Battle Avenue Monument's interpretation. This could be due to efforts by the city and AHC to promote the interpretation as a way to stimulate discussion about the monument rather than rewrite the narrative. In July 2019, City Councilmember Natalyn Archibong—one of the officials charged with implementing the Advisory Committee's recommendations—asserted that "State law prohibits the removal of such monuments, so it is our hope that contextualization will serve as a conversation-starter around the importance of establishing an accurate historical record, while ensuring that we remain sensitive to our city's strong commitment to inclusion and diversity. (…) We do not want to rewrite history or to provide excuses."[53] The overall efficacy of the Interpretive approach utilized in this case will be further analyzed in the next chapter.

b. Confederate Obelisk

Atlanta's historic Oakland Cemetery is home to two of the city's most well-known and controversial Confederate monuments: the Confederate Obelisk and the Lion of the Confederacy. As was previously acknowledged, some scholars who work with Confederate monuments purposefully exclude those located within cemeteries from the discussion because they consider them to be commemorative rather than honorific. This thesis, however, argues that the environment of commemoration that exists in a cemetery does not preclude honorific monuments from existing on the site.

[53] John Ruch, "History Center Reveals New Sign Giving Context to Buckhead Confederate Monument," *RoughDraft Atlanta*, July 25, 2019, https://roughdraftatlanta.com/2019/07/25/history-center-reveals-new-sign-giving-context-to-buckhead-confederate-monument/

Historical Background

The Confederate Obelisk was commissioned by the Atlanta Ladies' Memorial Association (ALMA). The branch formed soon after the end of the Civil War, with Fanny Haralson Gordon— wife of General John B. Gordon—serving as its first president. Like other Ladies' Memorial Association branches, ALMA's first major function was to remove remains from battlefields around Atlanta and inter them in the new Confederate section of Oakland Cemetery. Less than ten years after the end of the war, however, ALMA turned their focus to erecting a memorial to the city's Confederate dead. They began fundraising in 1869, a process which continued for several years, with the cornerstone being placed in 1870 and the dedication occurring in January 1874.[54]

The monument's location within the memorial environment of Oakland Cemetery was selected only after a period of conflict within ALMA. The group's president, Fanny Haralson Gordon, wanted a more prominent location, and was so opposed to the idea of placing the monument in Oakland Cemetery that she resigned when the final decision was made.[55] This was, in fact, a consequential decision, as the setting—not just in a cemetery, but in Oakland specifically—has had an impact on modern perceptions of the Confederate Obelisk. Oakland has a controversial racial history, having separate, often poorly maintained, sections for Jewish and African American burials, for example. This controversial past may contribute to the modern perception of the monument as also controversial. Cemeteries in general also convey a sense of

[54] "Confederate Monument in Oakland Cemetery, Atlanta," *The Weekly Constitution* (Atlanta, Ga.) 1868-1878, May 05, 1874, https://www.gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu
[55] Advisory Committee Final Report, 7.

finality and permanence that supports the Lost Cause intent for monuments to stand as eternal symbols of the honor of the Confederate cause.[56]

The purpose of the monument, like the Peachtree Battle Avenue Monument, is more complicated than it may seem. As the steward organization of Oakland Cemetery, the Historic Oakland Foundation (HOF), acknowledges, "...it is a monument and not a grave marker. From its installation, the Obelisk was a gathering place for Confederate Memorial Day celebrations in Atlanta. These celebrations and the individuals who fought to vindicate the Confederacy helped to perpetuate Lost Cause ideology in the South and beyond."[57] (Figure 3) Thus, despite its location within a cemetery and its erection within the early years following the war, the Confederate Obelisk should be considered within the context of the Lost Cause.

Figure 3. *"Confederate Memorial Day" at the Confederate Obelisk* by Timmons Willis. Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center, 26 April 1976. https://album.atlantahistorycenter.com/digital/collection/athpc/id/2029/rec/3

[56] Mark Beaver, "No Rest for the Lion," *Salvation South*, Nov 10, 2022, https://www.salvationsouth.com/no-rest-for-the-lion-oakland-cemetery-atlanta/

[57] Historic Oakland, "Frequently Asked Questions about Confederate Monuments and Vandalism at Oakland," May 27, 2022, https://oaklandcemetery.com/frequently-asked-questions-about-confederate-monuments-and-vandalism-at-oakland-2/

Physical Description

The Confederate Obelisk was sculpted from Stone Mountain granite. It stretches to a height of sixty-four feet, making it at one time the tallest point in the city. The obelisk form was commonly used for grave markers during the period, so its application in a monument reflects a desire on the part of ALMA to project both a sense of mourning and of permanence. The obelisk's inscription is simple, reading "Our Confederate Dead 1873." The monument is located at a prominent central location in Oakland Cemetery, and in addition to its imposing height, it is raised on an earthen platform. Aside from its looming presence, the monument's form is overall fairly innocuous, particularly in comparison to other Confederate monuments in the city. However, it has nonetheless received criticism as a part of Atlanta's broader Confederate monument conflict.

Modern Controversy

The Confederate Obelisk is another monument for which the Advisory Committee made recommendations. For both of Oakland Cemetery's Confederate monuments, the committee recommended that they remain *in situ*, and that interpretive panels be installed.[58] Sheffield Hale justified this decision in November 2017, stating 'Those monuments which really reflect the early time of loss – Confederate loss – and they're in a cemetery or next to graves, (…) It was determined it was appropriate for those to remain.'[59] Thus, the Advisory Committee concurred with the position that Confederate monuments erected soon after the war and in cemeteries should be considered less controversial than those erected later and in public spaces.

[58] Advisory Committee Final Report, 19.
[59] Edgar Treiguts, "Atlanta Mayor's Committee Determining Which Confederate Monuments Stay or Go," *WSB*, November 14, 2017, https://www.wsbradio.com/news/local/atlanta-mayor-committee-determining-which-confederate-monuments-streets-stay/u5wRUkbevb2vOyvyPDGZPP/

The interpretive panels for the Oakland Cemetery monuments were written by the Historic Oakland Foundation (HOF), the non-profit group that works in conjunction with the city to preserve and interpret the cemetery. While HOF aids in managing the cemetery, it is the city that ultimately has jurisdiction over the Confederate Burial Grounds and the monuments. The delegation of interpretive duties by the Advisory Committee to HOF, therefore, gave the group a unique opportunity to directly influence the narrative presented at the cemetery.

HOF ultimately developed several interpretive panels for different parts of the cemetery's Confederate Burial Grounds, which were installed on August 2, 2019, with funding provided by AHC. The content of the panels was developed by HOF in collaboration with students from Kennesaw State University and Georgia State University.[60] The first panel includes information on ALMA and their functions, as well as a brief description of the obelisk's history. A bottom section titled "The Struggle for Equality" details the context of racial inequality throughout the monument's existence, including information on the Reconstruction constitutional amendments and *Plessy v. Ferguson*. However, the panels do not depict the monument as a tool for perpetuating this struggle, or comment on the monument's implications beyond its memorial function. The efficacy of this interpretive approach in mitigating conflict around the monument will be further analyzed in the next chapter.

The Confederate Obelisk has also been subject to vandalism, with instances increasing since the killing of George Floyd in 2020. Several vandalism events have occurred at Oakland, but only one resulted in significant damage to the Obelisk. This occurred on February 28, 2021, when vandals spraypainted messages of protest on the Obelisk, the Lion of the Confederacy, and the cemetery's interpretive signage. Graffiti left on the Obelisk included "Stop killing black

[60] Atlanta History Center, "Confederate Monument Interpretation Guide."

people" and "Dead loser" (Figure 4). Thus, while the Advisory Committee might make distinctions for Confederate monuments based on the time and place in which they were erected, protesters in Atlanta have not made such distinctions. Moreover, the interpretive panels were vandalized with the words "No apologis" [sic]. Despite the vandalism, the Confederate Obelisk still stands in its original location, along with the interpretive panel.

Figure 4. *Confederate Obelisk Following Vandalism on February 28, 2021.* Credit: Oakland Cemetery. 11aive, March 3, 2021. https://www.11alive.com/article/news/crime/historic-oakland-cemetery-vandalized/85-8ab10a60-f75a-4ee9-8f82-44afa78cf880

c. The Lion of the Confederacy

Historical Background

Like the Confederate Obelisk, the Lion of the Confederacy, also known as the Lion of Atlanta, was commissioned by the Atlanta Ladies' Memorial Association (ALMA) in 1874. However, it was not dedicated until 1894, post-Reconstruction, making it the product of a

different social and political environment than the one the LMAs primarily operated in. So, while the Lion was erected by a traditionally more memorial-focused group, its purpose should be analyzed within the context of Jim Crow and the Lost Cause. The Historic Oakland Foundation acknowledged this distinction in a 2021 press release, stating "Though the Lion of Atlanta was installed to mark the graves of unknown Confederate dead, both the timing of its installation and the themes found in its design indicate that it also serves as a monument to the Confederacy."[61] Thus, while the Lion was erected within a cemetery, its purpose is plainly rooted in the Lost Cause, and it cannot be considered purely commemorative. It is important to note, however, that the Lion was also erected to mark the graves of 3,000 bodies belonging to unknown Confederate soldiers.[62]

One important aspect to consider when determining the intentions behind Confederate monuments is the character of their dedication ceremonies. HOF provides a synopsis of the Lion's dedication ceremonies that took place on Confederate Memorial Day, 1894:

> ...speakers declared that the 'sacred' cause for which the soldiers fought was that of 'righteousness and truth,' and that the war was fought over states' rights to secede (…). Speakers described the outcome of the Civil War as 'disastrous peace,' condemned the north 'with its growing jealousy of power…its fanatical antagonism of slavery,' denied that the Confederacy was guilty of treason, and proclaimed that 'the principles for which you fought and your comrades fell are not 'lost' and can never die. They stand today with renewed strength.[63]

This is characteristic Lost Cause rhetoric, and it suggests that the monument was erected with the explicit purpose of glorifying the Confederate cause and furthering the notion that the war was not fought over slavery. This purpose is undoubtedly a contributing factor in the differing fates of the Lion and the Obelisk, as the next chapter will explore.

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[61] Historic Oakland, "The Removal of the Lion of Atlanta from Oakland Cemetery," August 20, 2021, https://oaklandcemetery.com/the-removal-of-the-lion-of-atlanta-from-oakland-cemetery/
[62] Beaver, "No Rest for the Lion."
[63] Historic Oakland, "The Removal of the Lion."

Physical Description

The Lion was carved out of Georgia marble by a sculptor from Canton, Georgia—T.M. Brady. It is a miniature copy of the Lion of Lucerne carving in Switzerland, which is also a military memorial. The Lion's expression is pained, as a spear protrudes from its back. The statue includes other elements related to the Confederacy, including a Confederate battle flag, a cannonball, and a rifle. (Figure 5) The Lion's physical characteristics are tied to its purpose as a Lost Cause monument. This was understood from the monument's dedication, with a May 1894 article in *The Sunny South* stating, "The design of the monument is eminently appropriate to the purpose for which it is designed," and later "Though the lion is dying, there is evidence of strength in the figure, and the whole monument is exceedingly impressive."[64] The overall effect is one of mourning, not just for the soldiers in the burial grounds but also for the Confederacy itself.

Figure 5. *Lion of the Confederacy.* Credit: Andrew Kuchling via Flickr CC BY-SA 2.0. Smithsonian Magazine, July 31, 2019. https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/new-markers-atlanta-aim-put-confederate-monuments-context-180972767/

[64] "The Lion of Atlanta," *The Sunny South* (Atlanta, Ga.) 1875-1907, May 05, 1894, Image 11, https://www.gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu

Modern Controversy

The Lion of the Confederacy is one of the most contentious of Atlanta's Confederate monuments. The monument received recommendations from the Advisory Committee in 2017, who suggested that it be contextualized *in situ* because of its location within Oakland Cemetery. As Sheffield Hale stated on the topic, 'The Oakland Cemetery is essentially an outdoor museum, and it's a place where you can really contextualize those monuments.'[65] Like the Obelisk, the Lion is owned by the City of Atlanta and managed by the Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs, but it also receives support from the Historic Oakland Foundation. As previously stated, HOF developed interpretive panels for both the Lion and the Obelisk, with help from Georgia State University and Kennesaw State University students. The Lion's panel, which explicitly acknowledges the statue as part of the Lost Cause, was installed on August 2, 2019, with AHC funding.[66]

HOF has tried to interpret the cemetery in a more inclusive way, acknowledging the site's controversial past and promoting dialogue around it. In March 2021, HOF issued a statement on their commitment to racial equity in response to the death of George Floyd in June 2020:

> Historic Oakland Foundation is committed to truth-telling and sharing the whole history of Atlanta, especially the injustices faced by many of its citizens. We stand in solidarity with all Black people in the fight against racial injustice and inequality. As a historic site, we have the responsibility to recognize and challenge historic oppression. As a city park, we strive to make Oakland more inclusive, accessible, and sustainable for everyone. As members of the Atlanta community, we will listen to and support our fellow Atlantans as we all fight for real and lasting change.[67]

This stance is clearly one that the organization felt they were upholding in installing interpretive markers in Oakland's Confederate Burial Grounds.

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[65] Treiguts, "Atlanta Mayor's Committee."
[66] Historic Oakland, "Frequently Asked Questions."
[67] Historic Oakland, "An Update on our Racial Equity Commitments," March 25, 2021, https://oaklandcemetery.com/an-update-on-our-racial-equity-commitments/

While HOF does take an active role in keeping the cemetery relevant to modern Atlanta residents, it also has shirked responsibility when these efforts receive negative feedback from the community. For example, in the very same statement in which HOF recommitted themselves to the goal of racial equity, they state ”As Oakland is a city park, HOF must defer to the City of Atlanta on matters concerning its Confederate monuments (…). The city oversees all upkeep of these monuments, (…) and is ultimately responsible for whether or not they are removed.”[68] Despite this position, HOF is heavily involved in the pubic-facing aspects of Oakland's management, making it the organization onto which blame is most often placed during periods of controversy around the two monuments.

The Lion of the Confederacy has been vandalized eight times, with the majority of the incidents occurring in 2020 and 2021, by protestors calling for its removal. The most extensive vandalism occurred on February 28, 2021, when the Obelisk was also graffitied. Red paint was poured over the lion, and messages were spraypainted on it, including: “ACAB,” “Death 2 Racists,” “Dead Loser,” “BLM,” and “Racist Traitor.” (Figure 6) The city had previously attempted to protect the monument by erecting a fence around it and installing security cameras, but they failed to prevent both the damage and the calls for its removal. [69] Ultimately, with the repeated vandalisms and continued conflict within the community, the city and HOF turned to removal as the only remaining course of action.

[68] Historic Oakland, “Racial Equity Commitments.”
[69] Beaver, “No Rest for the Lion.”

Figure 6. *"Confederate Lion damaged at Oakland Cemetery."* Credit: Handout. Atlanta Journal-Constitution, August 17, 2021. https://www.ajc.com/news/atlanta-news/atlanta-to-remove-lion-of-the-confederacy-statue-from-oakland-cemetery/SXR6Q3UP2REKXP2VMXJZHBCJ5Q/

The repeated vandalism of the Lion led HOF to issue a statement denouncing the actions of the protesters, stating "Historic Oakland Foundation does not condone destructive actions and remains committed to empathy, nonviolence, and positive dialogue."[70] The vandalism events also earned the Lion the attention of one of the most prolific Confederate monument advocacy groups, the Sons of Confederate Veterans (SCV). Their rhetoric around the city and HOF's interpretive efforts had been generally positive, with spokesperson for the Georgia Division of the Sons of Confederate Veterans Martin O'Toole stating in 2019, "I'm OK with the panels. They are mostly fact-based and within the law. I just say thanks to the legislature for passing a law to make sure the Lion is still here. Or else it most assuredly would be gone."[71]

[70] Historic Oakland, "Monuments and Interpretive Sign Damaged by Vandals," May 29, 2020. https://oaklandcemetery.com/monuments-and-interpretive-sign-damaged-by-vandals/
[71] Patrik Jonsson, "The Future of America's Past: Should We 'Explain' Confederate Statues?," *Christian Science Monitor*, August 22, 2019, https://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Society/2019/0822/The-future-of-America-s-past-Should-we-explain-Confederate-statues

However, after the Black Lives Matter protests that occurred across the country following the death of George Floyd, the Georgia SCV took on a more hostile tone in its defense of the Lion. In June 2020, they announced that they were offering a $2,000 reward for information on the culprits of the recent vandalisms. They also released a statement opining 'It saddens us that these cowardly vandals would use the death of George Floyd (…) as an opportunity to commit acts of violence against individuals, private property, and historical monuments here in the State of Georgia.'[72] They have also decried vandalism of monuments dedicated to veterans as "…an act of terrorism, equivalent to acts performed by the Taliban and Isis."[73] Ultimately, despite their disapproval, discourse put forth by Georgia SCV about the Lion and the conflict around it did nothing to prevent future vandalisms or the eventual removal of the monument.

The Lion was removed from its site in Oakland Cemetery on August 18, 2021 and relocated to an undisclosed location at the cost of $30,000 taxpayer dollars.[74] The decision was made by the Atlanta City Council on August 16, 2021, who deemed that it was '…necessary and appropriate for the preservation, protection, and interpretation of the monument.'[75] Thus, the city utilized one of the only allowances of SB-77—removal for preservation purposes—to relocate the Lion. City Councilmember Carla Smith, who sponsored the bill to remove the monument and had also led the 2017 Advisory Committee, cited the work of the vandals as the direct impetus

[72] WGXA Digital Staff, "Sons of Confederate Veterans Offer $2,000 Reward Toward Info on Damaged Monuments," *WGXA News,* June 8, 2020, https://wgxa.tv/news/local/sons-of-confederate-veterans-offer-2000-reward-toward-info-on-damaged-monuments
[73] WGXA, "Sons of Confederate Veterans."
[74] Jessica Moore, "Atlanta Confederate Monument to be Removed from Oakland Park Cemetery," *11alive,* August 19, 2021, www.11alive.com/article/news/local/lion-of-the-confederacy-monument-removed-from-oakland-park-cemetery/85-9cb97fc9-6122-4d57-b4a8-d9a2e32ab6fa
[75] Historic Oakland, "The Removal of the Lion."

for the City Council's decision, stating "While the committee never recommended the removal of the lion, vandals have left the city little choice but to move it to an undisclosed location."[76]

Following the Lion's removal, HOF renewed its commitment to interpretation of the site, stating "HOF will work with the Atlanta History Center and Civil War and southern history scholars to install a new interpretive sign to educate visitors about the soldiers buried in Lion Square."[77] As of today, however, this has not occurred, nor is there any further evidence that it is actively in development. Additionally, according to HOF, another vandalism occurred in the Confederate Burial Grounds on May 27, 2022, almost a year following the Lion's removal.[78] Thus, even removal has failed to totally quell the intense conflict around the Oakland Cemetery Confederate monuments. The overall efficacy of the actions of advocacy groups on both sides toward the Lion of the Confederacy will be further analyzed and contextualized in the next chapter.

d. The Samuel Spencer Monument

Historical Background

The Samuel Spencer Monument is unique because it was not commissioned by a Confederate memorial group. Spencer, a Georgia native and former member of the Confederate cavalry, was the first president of the Southern Railway Company, and the monument was erected in his honor by his employees after he died suddenly in a 1906 train wreck. An article on the dedication ceremonies published in the *Atlanta Georgian and News* emphasized that "…it was the employees, and the employees alone, that built it, each contributing according to the

[76] J.D. Capelouto, Rosalind Bentley, and Bo Emerson, "Atlanta Removing 'Lion of the Confederacy' Statue from Historic Oakland Cemetery," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution,* August 17, 2021, https://www.ajc.com/news/atlanta-news/atlanta-to-remove-lion-of-the-confederacy-statue-from-oakland-cemetery/SXR6Q3UP2REKXP2VMXJZHBCJ5Q/
[77] Historic Oakland, "The Removal of the Lion."
[78] Historic Oakland, "Frequently Asked Questions."

amount of his salary. No outside contributions of any kind were received." [79] The dedication occurred on May 21, 1910, in front of the Atlanta Terminal Railway Station, and afterward the commissioners bequeathed the monument to the City of Atlanta.

The Spencer Monument is also unique because detailed records were kept of the speeches made at the 1910 dedication ceremony. One of the main themes found in theses speeches was that the statue should stand as a model for future generations. W.W. Finley, who succeeded Spencer as president of company, stated that "This monument will stand as a perpetual inspiration to the youth of Georgia who, by patriotism, strict integrity, a high Christian character, and untiring industry, won honor and success in life and a reputation that endures after death."[80] While Finley was referencing Spencer's life as a whole and not just his service to the Confederacy, this kind of rhetoric reflects the Lost Cause theme of passing values of honor, patriotism, and faith on to the next generation.

There were also many overt references to the Civil War throughout the dedication speeches, as Spencer was depicted as a crusader against Northern imposition during Reconstruction. Atlanta Mayor Robert F. Maddox summarized these ideas, stating:

> He had seen the South in ashes, her manufacturing plants destroyed, her farms a wretched wilderness of weeds, and her people defeated but still undaunted, after a long and terrible war. But from out the gloom and desolation of that hour, he caught the vision of the dawning of a better day, for he knew that the courage and spirit of the people which followed the Stars and Bars for four long years, would not rest in idle mourning, but would in God's own time, rebuild a greater South, to the glory of this section and to the credit of the nation.[81]

[79] "A Gift to Atlanta," *Atlanta Georgian and News* (Atlanta, Ga.) 1907-1912, May 21, 1910, Image 1, https://www.gahistoricnewsopapers.galileo.usg.edu
[80] "A Gift to Atlanta."
[81] Southern Railway Company, *General committee of employees. In memoriam Samuel Spencer: exercises at the unveiling of the monument erected by the employees of the Southern railway company, Atlanta, Georgia, May twenty-first, nineteen hundred and ten,* (1910), http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000458850

Thus, for Maddox, Spencer was deserving of memorialization not simply because of his importance in railroad development, but also because of his service to the South and the Confederacy. Another speaker, Judge Alexander P. Humphrey, also tied Spencer's personal honor to Confederate honor, stating "Samuel Spencer was an imperial son of an imperial state. It is altogether meet that his presentment should be placed here in this Capital City of his native state—a city once reduced by the heat of conflict literally to a heap of ashes."[82] While the Spencer Monument honors an individual who, although formerly a Confederate soldier, was notable primarily for his work after the war, the character of the dedication speeches shows that the monument has underlying ties to the Lost Cause.

Physical Description

The Spencer Monument is also unique in its design. The sculptor was Daniel Chester French, who later became famous for sculpting the statue of Abraham Lincoln that occupies the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. The Spencer statue is considered by some to be the prototype for the statue of Lincoln.[83] The 1910 *Atlanta Georgian and News* article on the monument's dedication ceremony detailed its physical form, stating

> The statue represents Mr. Spencer seated in what might be an office chair. He leans slightly forward with one hand (the left) grasping one arm of the chair and the right elbow resting on the other. (…) The feet are drawn well back to look as if he might easily rise from the chair. It was intended to suggest in the attitude the alertness and quickness of motion, characteristic of the man. The statue, if in standing posture, would be about nine feet in height.[84] (Figure 7)

The overall effect is both imposing and honorific, raising Spencer to a place of reverence. The monument includes two inscriptions: one of which reads "A Georgian, a Confederate Soldier,

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[82] Southern Railway Company, *In memoriam Samuel Spencer*, 26.

[83] "Confederate Statue in Atlanta Likely to be Relocated," *WSB-TV,* April 15, 2021, https://www.wsbradio.com/news/local/atlanta/confederate-statue-atlanta-likely-be-relocated/YHCDTBYS5BFWPBDURWKRKQWITE/

[84] "A Gift to Atlanta."

first President of the Southern Railway Company. Erected by the Employees of that Company."[85] Thus, Spencer's Confederate service is specifically highlighted in the inscription of the monument, preceding even his title as president of the company that erected it.

Figure 7. *Samuel Spencer Statue (2015).* Credit: Bcballard via Wikipedia, CC BY-SA 4.0. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Statue_of_Samuel_Spencer

Modern Controversy

The Samuel Spencer Monument has been relocated several times in its history. The first move occurred in 1970 due to the closing and eventual demolition of Terminal Station, during which the monument was relocated to Peachtree Station in Brookwood. In 2009, Norfolk Southern—as the Southern Railway Company is now called—moved the Spencer Monument to the front of their headquarters on Peachtree Road NE. In 2021, however, Norfolk Southern

[85] "A Tribute from His Men," *Atlanta Georgian and News* (Atlanta, Ga.) 1907-1912, May 07, 1910, Images 1 & 12, https://www.gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu

obtained permission from the city to remove the monument and place it in temporary storage until a new home for it could be identified. The company initially justified their decision by stating "At the request of the new ownership of the Goode building, and to allow the city to determine an appropriate, new location, we have agreed to house the Spencer statue temporarily at one of our warehouse facilities."[86]

Norfolk Southern's public statement omitted any mention of the fact that the removal had to do with Spencer's ties to the Confederacy. However, the official legislative request for removal that was submitted to the Atlanta City Council, reveals the company's true motivations, stating 'This monument is now deemed controversial because it was recently published that the railroad founder had served in the Confederate Calvary. Because the historical narrative has changed recently, the best plan is to store the monument until a permanent solution for displaying the monument can be determined.'[87]

Many, including Sheffield Hale, do not consider the Spencer Monument to be a Confederate monument. Hale calls it "One of the most important pieces of public art in the city," and argues that it was not regarded as a Confederate monument until the nationwide protests in 2020.[88] Despite this, its removal received a great deal of criticism from pro-Confederate monument advocates, who regarded the company's actions as supplication to those advocating for Confederate monument removal. One Atlanta citizen published an opinion piece on the issue, arguing "Norfolk Southern, the railroad, headquartered in Atlanta, has unjustifiably made a decision that smacks of bad management and yielding to pressure," and asserting that "The

[86] "Confederate Statue in Atlanta Likely to be Relocated."
[87] Wilborn P. Nobles III, "Atlanta City Council OKs Removal of Railroad Statue with Confederacy Ties," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution,* April 20, 2021, https://www.ajc.com/news/atlanta-news/atlanta-city-council-oks-removal-of-railroad-statue-with-confederacy-ties/J5IGSW4L3FFQ3LG3DRQMBO3X5U/
[88] Sheffield Hale, in discussion with the author, February 2025.

railroad's excuse to store away the statue seems a shoddy and unnecessary maneuver to disgrace the memory of their company's founder."[89] Despite resistance to the Spencer monument's removal, the city of Atlanta did ultimately allow Norfolk Southern to store it temporarily and agreed to find a new home for it.

AHC eventually acquired the Spencer Monument from the city on a 50-year lease.[90] In December 2023, the monument was moved from storage to the history center, where it was placed in a courtyard alongside other sculptural figures. In a public statement, the AHC argued that "Its placement is intended to help to promote discussion about Samuel Spencer, public art, and the complex legacies of the Old and New South."[91] According to Hale, the location had been bookmarked for the monument by the former chairman of the Atlanta Historical Society (as the ACH was previously known), Louise R. Allen, thirty years prior.[92]

The history center developed two interpretive panels to sit in front of the Spencer monument, which acknowledge Spencer's service to the Confederacy but assert that it has been overemphasized by his biographers. While AHC does not dwell on Spencer's Confederate service in their discussion of the monument, they do acknowledge the racial injustices within his company, stating "As with all railroads in the South, Southern Railway operated segregated 'Jim Crow' cars for Black passengers on its passenger trains. Railroad craft unions reserved the best jobs for white male workers. Black workers had access to crucial yet lower-paying positions."[93] They do not, however, comment on the implications that the monuments have in today's society. Hale says that there has been little visitor feedback on the monument since its relocation, either

[89] Elliot Brack, "Norfolk Southern Makes Grievous Mistake on Spencer Statue," *Gwinnett Forum,* April 23, 2021, https://www.gwinnettforum.com/2021/04/brack-norfolk-southern-makes-grievous-mistake-on-spencer-statue/
[90] Sheffield Hale, in discussion with the author, February 2025.
[91] Atlanta History Center, "Samuel Spencer Memorial," March 5, 2024, https://www.atlantahistorycenter.com/blog/samuel-spencer-memorial/
[92] Sheffield Hale, in discussion with the author, February 2025.
[93] AHC, "Samuel Spencer Memorial."

positive or negative.[94] As such, the long-term efficacy of AHC's interpretive approach is yet to be seen.

e. Case Study #5: The John B. Gordon Monument

Historical Background

John Brown Gordon was a prominent Confederate General who went on to serve first as Senator and then as Governor of Georgia. An article published in *The Atlanta Georgian* not long after Gordon's death emphasized his significance to the Confederacy, stating "In all the long list of Southern leaders he stands without a peer, except the incomparable Lee himself, whose right hand he was."[95] Gordon is commonly believed to have been the leader of the Ku Klux Klan in Georgia. He also served as the first president of the United Confederate Veterans (UCV), a position he held until his death. Despite his background, Gordon was well regarded nationally during his political career, with President Theodore Roosevelt saying of him, "A more gallant, generous, and fearless gentleman and soldier has not been seen by our country."[96] Soon after Gordon died in 1904, the John B. Gordon Monument Association was formed to raise funds for a public monument in his honor. A bill to secure state funding was introduced in Congress, which appropriated $15,000 to the cause, and Confederate memorial groups raised an additional $10,000.

The John B. Gordon Monument is meant to honor a single figure who was very clearly associated with the Confederacy. Because the effort to create the monument was so widely publicized, supporters explicitly stated their intentions in the public record. In many such

[94] Sheffield Hale, in discussion with the author, February 2025.
[95] "The Gordon Monument," *The Atlanta Georgian* (Atlanta, GA.) 1906-1907, August 14, 1906, Image 6. https://www.gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu
[96] Mimi Kirk, "What Should I Do with My Family's Confederate Hero?," *Bloomberg,* April 10, 2018, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-04-10/my-family-s-confederate-hero-under-fire-in-atlanta

statements, the Lost Cause theme of passing Confederate values on to the next generation appears repeatedly. For example, the author of a 1906 article in *The Atlanta Georgian* opined "It is hoped that the time will never come when the name and the glorious achievements of Gordon will not awaken a responsive thrill in the hearts of every Georgian and of every Southerner."[97] At the monument's dedication ceremony, Confederate General Clement A. Evans stated:

> A monument, (…) admonishes the mind to consider the sentiments, the virtues and the acts of the noble life it is designed to represent. Such monuments (…) will illustrate the noble character of the builders as well as the virtues of the men whom they honor. This splendid equestrian statue (…), was first wrought upon the mental tablet of the Confederate soldiers. It was also formed upon the mind of the state by the thought of the people. The idea broadened over all the South, and I shall not hesitate to add that the sentiment spread over all the Union…[98]

This statement also shows that in erecting the Gordon Monument, former Confederates were not just honoring Gordon but also themselves and the values they esteemed.

Physical Description

The Gordon Monument stands in front of the Georgia Capitol Building, a location selected because of Gordon's career in Georgia state government. The statue was sculpted and cast in bronze by Solon Borglum, brother of one of the sculptors of the Stone Mountain Confederate Monument. The pedestal was carved from Georgia marble by an Atlanta architect, Alexander Campbell Bruce. The equestrian form of the statue is common for Confederate monuments at large, but it is the only one of its kind in Atlanta. In the statue, Gordon is shown as an elderly man, but he is depicted atop his wartime horse and dressed in a Confederate uniform (Figure 8). According to a 1906 article published in *The Atlanta Georgian*, within the John B. Gordon Monument Association, "It was unanimously decided that the memorial should be an

[97] "The Gordon Monument."
[98] "Eloquent Oration Delivered by Gen. Clement A. Evans," *Atlanta Georgian and News* (Atlanta, Ga.) 1907-1912, May 25, 1907, Image 3, https://www.gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu

equestrian statue, as General Gordon was best remembered as he appeared, on horseback."[99] The monument also honors Gordon through two bronze reliefs showing him as a general and a politician. At some point in recent history, a plaque was added to one side of the pedestal, providing a detailed biography of the general.

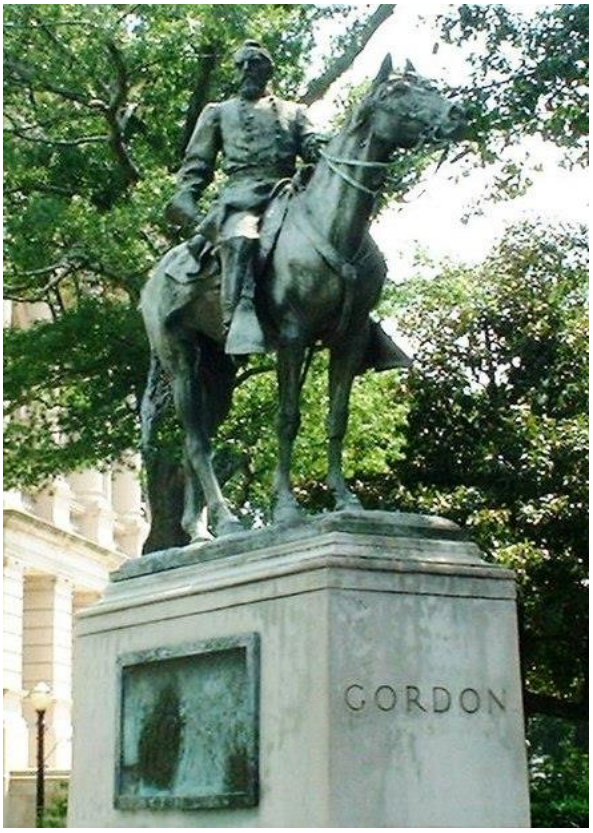

Figure 8. *John Brown Gordon Statue (2005*). Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Equestrian_statue_of_John_Brown_Gordon

Modern Controversy

Partly because it so clearly honors a Confederate general and partly because of its prominent location in front of the Georgia Capitol Building, the Gordon Monument has been the subject of a great deal of controversy in recent years. The Gordon Monument's very public

[99] "Judge Calhoun Reviews History of Monument," *The Atlanta Georgian*, May 25, 1907, https://www.gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu

setting has made it a convenient target for anti-Confederate monument protesters. On June 6, 2020, protesters gathered in front of the capitol building, shouting "tear down Gordon."[100] One protester was even arrested for writing the words "tear down" on the monument in chalk.[101] The movement against the monument even generated a popular Twitter hashtag, with the same message, "#TEARDOWNGORDON."[102] Thus, the Gordon Monument became a lightning rod for anti-Confederate Monument sentiment during the larger Black Lives Matter protests that occurred in summer of 2020.

On June 22, 2020, forty-four of Gordon's descendants wrote a letter to Governor Brian Kemp urging him to remove the monument from State Capitol grounds. They argued that the "...primary purpose of the statue was to celebrate and mythologize the white supremacists of the Confederacy, (…). The continuing presence of this statue on public property serves to negate and undermine the past and ongoing struggle of Georgians to overcome and reverse the legacy of slavery and oppression of black Americans."[103] This was not the first time that Gordon's descendants had spoken up about the monument. In 2018, Mimi Kirk, his great-great-great granddaughter, wrote an article on the subject. She argued "…when I consider the prospect of John Gordon leaving the lawn of the Georgia capitol, I'm struck by how such a change is less an erasure and more a correction."[104] Thus, just as the Gordon monument had support in unlikely places upon its founding, support for its removal has also come from unexpected individuals.

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[100] Pete Corson, "Photos: Confederate monuments in Atlanta Georgia," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, April 14, 2023, https://www.ajc.com/news/local/photos-confederate-memorials-metro-atlanta/FH1y7URHRaoVx9xofRbqjP/
[101] Corson, "Photos: Confederate Monuments."
[102] Greg Bluestein and Christian Boone, "Inside the Standoff Over a Rebel Statue at Georgia's Capitol," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, June 8, 2020, https://www.ajc.com/blog/politics/inside-the-standoff-over-rebel-statue-georgia-capitol/lnRyJz5YqdMLsLOYceQF7K/
[103] Tia Mitchell and Greg Bluestein, "John B. Gordon's Descendants Plead for His State Capitol Statue's Removal," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, June 22, 2020, https://www.ajc.com/blog/politics/the-jolt-john-gordon-ancestors-plead-for-his-state-capitol-statue-removal/5cxJfDjN4UARzBCU7j9xpK/
[104] Kirk, "What Should I Do with My Family's Confederate Hero?"

The main advocacy group involved with the Gordon Monument is the Atlanta branch of the NAACP. In response to the protests against the monument, in conjunction with the private company 22Squared, the Atlanta NAACP developed a program called "Invisible Hate" utilizing data from the Southern Poverty Law Center's "Whose Heritage?" map.[105] The purpose of the program is stated on the website: "The goal of the initiative is to build awareness, stimulate conversation, encourage education and enable action against the invisible hate that Confederate monuments represent, and empower more people to see the full context of American history. Further it advocates for the removal of all Confederate monuments and symbols."[106] The overall effectiveness of the program will be analyzed in the next chapter, but it is worth noting that the Gordon Monument has not been removed and is currently still standing in front of the Georgia State Capitol Building.

f. The Walker Monument:

Historical Background

The Walker Monument was erected in 1902 by the Walker Monument Association. It was intended as a companion to the 1877 McPherson Monument erected by federal troops in 1877. Both William H.T. Walker, a Confederate general, and James B. McPherson, a Union general, were killed during the Battle of Atlanta on July 22, 1864. The two monuments are located on the site of the battlefield, about one-third of a mile apart. In 1937, the Atlanta Ladies' Memorial Association moved the Walker monument to a different location on the former battlefield, now a small island in an intersection leading to Highway 1-20.[107] The fact that the

[105] The program is an interactive map that zooms in on the user's location to show them nearby Confederate monuments and provides information on the history of each one. Additionally, contact information for the government representatives for each monument's area is included, and users are provided with a standard email template and encouraged to send it to them. Additionally, users are provided with pictures of the monuments on which they can add stickers with slogans including "Tear Them Down," which they can then share on social media.
[106] Atlanta NAACP and 22Squared, "Invisible Hate," https://invisiblehate.org/
[107] Advisory Committee Final Report, 11.

Walker Monument was erected as a companion to the McPherson Monument reveals its Reconciliation function, essentially serving as a counter to a Reconstruction-era monument honoring a Union general.

The Walker Monument was unveiled on July 22, 1902, the 38th anniversary of Walker's death. The Walker Monument Association also decorated the McPherson Monument during the proceedings.[108] The ceremony was elaborate considering the size and prominence of the monument. The association also ensured that there would be representatives of the Union side in attendance, even inviting General O.O. Howard, who had led the charge that resulted in Walker's death.[109] The only speech from the unveiling of the Walker Monument that has been recorded is that of Julius L. Brown, president of the Walker Monument Association. Brown criticized the federal government for its decision to erect a monument to McPherson and not Walker, stating "I believe it is the duty of the government to erect monuments to valiant soldiers who fell in battle, and when governments fail to do their duty, then individuals should undertake that task." However, he also made efforts to reach across the aisle, furthering the reconciliationist narrative, by calling on his fellow southerners to honor McPherson as well as Walker, stating "Now, let those of us who have sworn to support the constitution of the United States and the principles of the Confederate flag aid in doing equal honor to the memory of that gallant major general who wore the blue and who fell upon this spot in defense of a cause he also believed to be right."[110]

[108] "Cannon Secured for Walker Monument," *Atlanta Semi-Weekly Journal* (Atlanta, Ga.) 1898-1920, June 05, 1902, Page 3, Image 3, https://www.gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu
[109] "Program for Gen. Walker Exercises," *Atlanta Semi-Weekly Journal* (Atlanta, Ga.) 1898-1920, July 21, 1902, Page 7, Image 7, https://www.gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu
[110] "Walker Monument Unveiled; Attended by Many Veterans," *Atlanta Semi-Weekly Journal* (Atlanta, Ga.) 1898-1920, July 24, 1902, Page 5, Image 5, https://www.gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu

Physical Description

The Walker Monument takes the form of an upturned cannon placed on a base of roughly cut stone, a common design for soldiers' burials at the time. (Figure 9) When it was erected, it was enclosed by a metal fence with smaller cannons at each corner, but these elements are no longer extant. The inscription is also simple, stating "In Memory of Maj. Gen. Wm. H. T. Walker, C.S.A." It was modeled on that of the McPherson Monument, which also features an upright cannon on a pedestal. One of the main physical differences between the two monuments is their current condition—The McPherson Monument is also located on an island in an intersection, but it is within a quieter, residential neighborhood on Atlanta's Monument Avenue. It also is surrounded by metal fencing, giving it an additional measure of protection. Both sites include Georgia Historical Commission plaques that provide details about the deaths of the respective generals but do not interpret the monuments themselves.

Figure 9. *The Walker Monument.* Credit: Henry Bryant. What It Means to Be American, March 3, 2017. https://www.whatitmeanstobeamerican.org/identities/in-atlanta-honoring-two-civil-war-generals-opens-a-discussion-on-race-and-history/

Modern Controversy

The Walker Monument and the McPherson Monument both have support from the advocacy group BATL—a 501c3 non-profit made up of local volunteers which focuses on

preserving the site of the Battle of Atlanta. The organization mainly conducts educational programs such as battlefield tours, but also advocates for preservation.[111] The group's founder, Henry Bryant, says that he is "Not a Civil War nut, but a neighborhood nut."[112] Bryant's goal is to preserve the remnants of the Battle of Atlanta within his community of East Atlanta, including the Walker and McPherson Monuments. He outlined his intentions to restore the two monuments in a 2017 article, arguing "Neither is in great shape. Walker's is particularly sad. (…) It has been hit by automobiles, many times. It's cattywampus—crooked—on its foundation."[113] Thus, the immediate goals of BATL regarding the Walker Monument are preservation related, not interpretation.

According to BATL, the goal of preservation has united the neighborhood in a way that reflects the supposed unity that produced the Walker Monument. Bryant argues that "We're a diverse group, of different races, ages, genders, and political ideologies. We want to fix up the McPherson and Walker memorials because they're one of the few remaining records of Atlanta's past."[114] However, Bryant acknowledges that the group has run into some local opposition to its actions, stating:

> There have been times when some of our black neighbors in East Atlanta and throughout the city have questioned the utility of dredging up the war's painful past. Our group's mission has always been to explore *American* history —not just the Confederacy and not just the Union. It's not a story of black and white, but a story that is shaded with a wide range of tones. We want to tell the whole story, not just one side.[115]

In 2012, Bryant gave an interview detailing BATL's accomplishments thus far. Bryant stated that BATL intended to create a trail that would connect the two monuments and include historic

[111] BATL, https://www.batlevent.org/
[112] Henry Bryant, in discussion with the author, February 2025.
[113] Henry Bryant, "In Atlanta, Honoring Two Civil War Generals Opens a Discussion on Race and History," *What It Means to Be American*, March 3, 2017, https://www.whatitmeanstobeamerican.org/identities/in-atlanta-honoring-two-civil-war-generals-opens-a-discussion-on-race-and-history/
[114] Bryant, "In Atlanta, Honoring Two Civil War Generals."
[115] Bryant, "In Atlanta, Honoring Two Civil War Generals."

markers along it. The future actions he outlined included fully restoring the cannons, extending the sidewalks and curbs around the monuments, relocating them to the center of their sites, replacing missing elements, and adding benches for "contemplation." [116] They also hope to excavate the stairs that originally led up to the Walker Monument.[117]

Today, BATL is still fighting to carry out their plans. The organization received a grant from the State Historic Preservation Office to conduct research on the Battle of Atlanta site, which resulted in a book detailing their findings. Bryant says, however, that BATL has encountered resistance from the Atlanta City Council in their requests for support. The group's two "champions" on the council include former Councilmember Natlyn Archibong and current Councilmember Liliana Bakhtiari, both representatives of the district encompassing East Atlanta. Bryant states that BATL's proposed trail has been adopted by the council, but the group would have to raise $120,000 in order to execute it.[118]

The Walker Monument was also one of the monuments discussed by the Advisory Committee. During the proceedings, AHC, BATL, and the Atlanta Preservation Center (APC) spoke to the committee on behalf of the monument's preservation.[119] The advisory committee ultimately recommended that the Walker Monument not be removed and went further to characterize it as a vital element of the battlefield's interpretation. The committee also considered the community organizing work that BATL had done, stating "Public comments indicated that the neighborhood has embraced the two monuments and its site on the location of the battlefield as an important part of its identity. The committee supports retention of the

[116] Peralte Paul, "East Atlanta's Guardian of History," *Patch*, July 16, 2012, https://patch.com/georgia/eastatlanta/east-atlanta-s-guardian-of-history
[117] Henry Bryant, in discussion with the author, February 2025.
[118] Henry Bryant, in discussion with the author, February 2025.
[119] Henry Bryant, in discussion with the author, February 2025.

monument and its continued support by BATL and the adjoining neighborhoods."[120] Thus, as with HOF, the Advisory Committee delegated handling of the monument to an advocacy group. The overall effectiveness of BATL's approach and the factors impacting it will be analyzed in the next chapter.

g. The Peace Monument

Historical Background

Like the Peachtree Battle Avenue Monument, the Peace Monument was commissioned by the Old Guard of the Gate City Guard. The purpose of the Peace Monument is more clearly centered around unity than many other Old Guard monuments. This is reflected in the speeches given at the dedication ceremony on October 11, 1911. Colonel Joseph F. Burke, commander of the Gate City Guard, highlighted the group's mission in his speech, stating:

> The South was just emerging from those dark days of reconstruction when the Gate City Guard, holding sacred memories of the past, and accepting, as all patriotic people of the South accepted, in good faith, the result of the war between the States, ignoring partisan strife and sectional animosity, went forth on a peaceful mission to their former antagonists in war…[121]

This differs from the traditional reconciliationist narrative in that it acknowledges the result of the war, however it still avoids discussing its causes or Confederate responsibility. Nonetheless, despite the fact that the intentions behind this monument seem to have been slightly more progressive, its physical elements do not make such intentions clear in the modern landscape.

The Peace Monument was sculpted by New York sculptor Allen George Newman, cast in bronze, and elevated on a granite pedestal. The Smithsonian American Art Museum describes the statue as such: "The Angel of Peace stands holding an olive branch beside a soldier, who is

[120] Advisory Committee Final Report, 19.
[121] Henry Clay Fairman, *Chronicles of the Old Guard of the Gate City Guard, Atlanta, Georgia, 1858-1915* (Byrd Print. Co., 1915). https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=5496f45a-6efb-3fcd-94e5-fe22718c3cf1.

about to fire his gun. She lays a restraining hand on his shoulder." [122] (Figure 10) The message being expressed is very clearly one of peace and anti-violence. Part of the inscription reiterates this idea, reading "Cease Firing - Peace is Proclaimed." The rest of the inscription, however, shows that peace was not the sole goal of the monument, praising the Old Guard for "the conscientious conviction of their duty to uphold the cause of the Southern Confederacy [and]… Desiring to restore fraternal sentiment among the people of all sections of our country and ignoring sectional animosity."[123] Thus, while the Old Guard espoused peace when erecting the monument, they also used it to validate their own actions during the war and to denounce Reconstruction.

Figure 10. *Peace Monument (2020*). Credit: JJonahJackalope via Wikipedia, CC BY-SA 4.0. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peace_Monument_(Atlanta).

[122] Smithsonian American Art Museum, "Peace Monument, (sculpture)," *Smithsonian Institution Research Information System*. https://siris-artinventories.si.edu/
[123] Smithsonian American Art Museum, "Peace Monument."

Modern Controversy

Just as the Peace Monument reflected the complex political environment of Atlanta when it was erected, it has become a lightning rod for the tides of social change in the city. The Old Guard strives to maintain the original message of the monument, rededicating it every year on the anniversary of its unveiling.[124] Like other post-civil war era peace monuments, however, it has come under scrutiny in recent years. In August 2017, protesters vandalized and attempted to tear down the Peace Monument, breaking a piece off of it.[125] That protest was attributed to All Out Atlanta, an anti-white supremacy advocacy group.[126] In response, Former Old Guard Commandant John Green stated that while he did not support the events at Charlottesville, he disliked the fact that Atlantans were taking out their frustrations on the Peace Monument.[127] Then Commandant Richard Straut elaborated on the group's opinion, arguing 'It's very disheartening, (…) That monument was dedicated to usher in peace between North and the South following the end of the Civil War. (…) To deface that monument is anything but peaceful…'[128] The Old Guard ultimately called for the monument to be reinstated after it had been cleaned and repaired.

Against the Old Guard's wishes, however, the Advisory Committee recommended that the Peace Monument be permanently removed. In its final report, the committee stated:

> Because this monument falsely depicts the character of the post-Civil War reconciliation by reflecting Lost Cause mythology in the language used in the inscription and omitting

[124] Staples, "Rededicating a Confederate Monument."
[125] Corson, "Photos: Confederate Monuments."
[126] Christian Boone, Chris Joyner, and Joshua Sharpe, "Atlanta Protesters Deface Peace Monument in Piedmont Park," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution,* August 13, 2017, https://web.archive.org/web/20180528051842/https://www.myajc.com/news/local/atlanta-protesters-deface-peace-monument-piedmont-park/6S670h6xMON2SqfzoKAc2M/
[127] Jennifer Brett, "Atlanta's Peace Monument, Desecrated by Protesters, Champions Unity, Not the Confederacy," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution,* August 14, 2017, https://www.ajc.com/blog/buzz/atlanta-peace-monument-desecrated-protesters-champions-unity-not-the-confederacy/ok4DoIQMdj4IINo05fclWJ/
[128] Elly Yu, "Atlanta Weighs Whether to Restore or Remove Piedmont Park Statue," *WABE,* August 14, 2017, https://www.wabe.org/atlanta-weighs-whether-restore-or-remove-piedmont-park-statue/

> from its narrative the experience of African Americans, the Committee recommends that this monument be removed from public display and preserved in City storage.[129]

They also recommended that the monument be replaced by a statue of a Civil Rights leader, naming Booker T. Washington specifically.[130] However, the enactment of SB-77 in 2019 barred these plans from being carried out, and the committee changed its recommendation to interpretation.

The Atlanta History Center took on the responsibility of developing the interpretive panels for the Peace Monument and funded their installation on August 2, 2019. CEO Sheffield Hale recalls physically carrying the large panels himself to the Atlanta City Council for review, showing the degree of involvement that the history center had in their development.[131] The first panel covers the history of the Gate City Guard, detailing their transformation from a volunteer militia to a Confederate unit, and then to a Lost Cause group. The text emphasizes that the Guard's "peace mission" cannot be separated from Lost Cause ideology. The panel also discusses the dedication ceremony speeches, emphasizing that while speakers acknowledged the "result" of the war, they ignored the most important aspect of that result—the abolishment of the institution of slavery. It also notes that while the monument honors white Civil War veterans, it excludes African American veterans. The final sentence of the panel seeks to change the way visitors regard the monument and its purpose in the modern landscape, arguing "This monument should no longer stand as a memorial to white brotherhood; rather, it should be seen as an artifact representing a shared history in which millions of Americans were denied civil and human rights."[132]

[129] Advisory Committee Final Report, 19.
[130] Advisory Committee Final Report, 19.
[131] Sheffield Hale, in discussion with the author, February 2025.
[132] Atlanta History Center & the City of Atlanta, "Peace Monument," 2019.

The second panel is an effort to interpret the Peace Monument in the context of Jim Crow segregation. It begins with a discussion of the Reconciliation Movement, then outlines important Supreme Court cases and Constitutional amendments that condoned and codified segregation. It issues a blatant condemnation of the Reconciliation Movement, stating "White Southerners who felt oppressed by black empowerment during Reconstruction welcomed Reconciliation, naming this period 'Redemption.'"[133] Thus, AHC clearly draws a connection between the Old Guard and Reconciliation at large, and Jim Crow Era segregation. The section most criticized is the discussion on African American resistance to Jim Crow, which feature the achievements of Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois. Richard Rose, former President of Atlanta's NAACP Branch, stated that "he was offended by the mention of educator and Tuskegee Institute (University) founder Booker T. Washington on the Piedmont Park 'Peace Monument' markers."[134] Rose has also expressed broader criticism of the method of interpretation, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

In response to Rose's comments, Sheffield Hale argued that "criticisms are actually part of a conversation the markers are meant to promote. The markers can be subject to change or addition as time goes on." [135] Calinda Lee, AHC Vice President, also defended the panel against Rose's criticism, arguing that "she included Washington because he gave his famous 1895 speech in the park during the Cotton State Exposition."[136] Despite the fact that AHC delved more deeply into the Peace Monument's Lost Cause connotations in its interpretive panels than it did

[133] Atlanta History Center & the City of Atlanta, "Race and Reconciliation," 2019.
[134] Rosalind Bentley, "Atlanta NAACP Criticizes Markers Around Confederate Monuments," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, August 21, 2019, https://www.ajc.com/news/local/atlanta-naacp-criticizes-markers-surrounding-confederate-monuments/J270cXywg1hiMAlUZQll0O/
[135] Khushbu Shah, "Atlanta's Confederate Monuments: How do 'Context Markers' Help Explain Racism?" *Guardian US*, August 3, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/aug/03/atlanta-confederate-monuments-racism-south
[136] Bentley, "Atlanta NAACP criticizes Markers."

for other monuments, they have received criticism from anti-Confederate monument advocates. Like the interpretive approaches taken with other Atlanta monuments, the Peace Monument panels have failed to appease anti-Confederate monument advocacy groups. In June 2020, the Peace Monument was vandalized again, with the words "No Peace" spraypainted across it.[137]

The case studies conducted in this chapter show that both pro-Confederate monument and anti-Confederate monument advocacy groups in Atlanta have taken different approaches in their attempts to either preserve or alter the city's Confederate monuments. Some are national organizations with local branches, such as the NAACP and the Sons of Confederate Veterans. Others are local organizations, such as BAATL, the Atlanta History Center, and the Old Guard of the Gate City Guard. In the next chapter, the effectiveness of the actions observed in the case studies is analyzed and observations are drawn about how advocacy groups have been able to impact Atlanta's Confederate monuments since the enactment of SB-77.

[137] Corson, "Photos: Confederate Monuments."

Chapter V

Analysis and Findings

The case studies in the previous chapter were conducted with the goal of answering this thesis' research question, "How have advocacy groups in the city of Atlanta been able to influence the removal, interpretation, or maintenance of the city's Confederate monuments since the establishment of Georgia's restrictive Monument Protection Law, SB-77?" Each case study was divided into several sections, including the historical background and physical description of the monument, as well as modern controversy surrounding it. This chapter synthesizes the data collected in these case studies and analyzes it in order to effectively answer the initial research question.

a. Method of Analysis

The first step in the analysis process was to convert the information from the case studies into a format in which they could be more effectively compared and contrasted. A spreadsheet was made for this purpose, with a row for each of the seven case studies and columns delineating categories such as advocacy groups involved, method of intervention, history of vandalism or protest, and current monument status. From this spreadsheet, five different approaches taken by the case study advocacy groups were identified: Contextualization, removal, relocation to a museum, digital database creation, and preservation. In the remainder of this chapter, six major findings about the effectiveness of these approaches are identified based on the results of the case studies. These findings have implications for the City of Atlanta as it deals with its monuments in the future, as well as for other cities facing similar problems.

b. Findings

Finding One: Contextualization is Often Ineffective at Mitigating Public Opposition

The first major trend identified through this thesis' case studies is that the advocacy groups that chose to contextualize their monuments often failed to quell public opposition to them in doing so. This finding is counter to the belief of many scholars. According to Professor of Historic Preservation Steven Hoffmaan,whose work was identified in chapter two of this thesis, his case study of Cape Girardeau, Missouri shows that interpretive panels—inspired by Atlanta History Center (AHC) panels—reduced public opposition to the city's Confederate monuments.[138] AHC CEO Sheffield Hale has also voiced opinions counter to the findings of this thesis on the effectiveness of contextualization, as noted in previous chapters.

Contextualization is the most common approach taken by the case study advocacy groups in this thesis, with five of the seven studied monuments receiving interpretive panels. Three of those monuments were found to have been vandalized after the installation of their interpretive panels. The Confederate Obelisk was vandalized in June 2020, following the addition of its own contextualization by the Historic Oakland Foundation (HOF) in August 2019. Importantly, the protesters spraypainted the words "No apologis" [sic.] on the Obelisk's interpretive panel, evidence that the contextualization may have in part aggravated the protest. Likewise, the Lion of the Confederacy was vandalized several times between 2020 and 2021, despite the installation of its own panel by HOF, also in August 2019. The final example is the Peace Monument, which was damaged by protesters in June 2020 after receiving interpretive markers from AHC, once again in August 2019.

[138] Hoffman, "Cape Girardeau," 11.

Several relevant factors in the case studies were identified that may have contributed to this result. One important consideration when analyzing these findings is the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police in May 2020 and the resulting Black Lives Matter protests that took place against symbols of white supremacy. All three of the above monuments were vandalized in June 2020, making it likely that those protests were also part of the larger Black Lives Matter movement taking place at the time. Because of these extraordinary circumstances, the results of this thesis relating to the effectiveness of contextualization in quelling public opposition may be unrepresentative of its actual efficacy. Another consideration is the content of the interpretive panels. Many have voiced the opinion that the panels are inadequate, including Atlanta NAACP President Richard Rose, who argued in 2019 that the language of the AHC markers "…doesn't give the story of why these monuments were built and the effect they have to this day."[139] This thesis found that many of the markers attempt to contextualize the monuments within the racial injustice of their time, but fail to recognize them as perpetrators of racial injustice themselves. This issue is especially prevalent for peace monuments, as it can be difficult to explain the Lost Cause undertones behind the monuments' messages of peace.

There are two exceptions to this trend found in this thesis' case studies. The Peachtree Battle Avenue Monument has no history of vandalism or protest, either before or after the installation of its interpretive marker in August 2019 by AHC. There are several possible explanations for this outlier, namely the fact that the monument is lower profile than many other Confederate monuments in Atlanta. The second exception to this trend is the Samuel Spencer Monument, which differs from the other contextualized monuments due to its location within a museum setting. According to Sheffield Hale, the Spencer Monument keeps a low profile at its

[139] Bentley, "Atlanta NAACP Criticizes Markers."

new home in the Atlanta History Center, garnering little consideration at all from guests, and has received no negative feedback as of yet.[140]

Finding Two: A History of Vandalism or Protest Increases the Potential for Removal

The second finding from this thesis' case studies is that Confederate monuments in Atlanta were more likely to be removed if they had a history of vandalism or protest. Of the two case study monuments that were removed, the Spencer Monument and the Lion of the Confederacy, the Lion is the best example of this trend. It was vandalized by protesters eight times between 2020 and 2021 leading up to its removal. The Atlanta City Council cited the "preservation, protection, and interpretation of the monument" as their primary motivation for removing it.[141] The Spencer Monument was never vandalized, but it was removed with a similar justification—the monument's safety during a transition of ownership of the property. Both of these cases make it clear that the main factor contributing to this trend is SB-77, which permits monuments to be (temporarily) removed for preservation or construction purposes. Neither of the case study monuments were removed temporarily, however. The Spencer Monument was held in storage by the city temporarily before being installed at the Atlanta History Center, and the Lion is currently in storage with no plans for its reinstatement.

It is important to note that none of the advocacy groups involved with these two monuments actively argued for their removal on these grounds. In the case of the Spencer Monument, the decision was made solely between the Atlanta City Council and Norfolk Southern, the company that owned the property on which the monument stood. In the case of the Lion, the City Council again made the final decision, with no apparent involvement from HOF or AHC. This fact will be returned to in the next chapter of this thesis.

[140] Sheffield Hale, in discussion with the author, February 13, 2025.
[141] Historic Oakland, "The Removal of the Lion."

It is also important to note that there are exceptions to this trend in the case studies, namely the Confederate Obelisk and the Peace Monument. Both have a history of vandalism, but neither have been removed despite the repeated calls of protesters. Again, there are several possible explanations for this finding. Though the Obelisk and the Lion share the same location, the Lion was vandalized and seriously damaged eight times, the Obelisk only once. Possible reasons for this disparity will be explored in a future section, but put simply, it is easier to argue endangerment for a monument that has been vandalized eight times than one that has been severely vandalized only once. This argument also applies to the Peace Monument and the Gordon Monument, both of which have seen only one or two major protests and suffered much less damage than the Lion.

Finding Three: There are Disparities in Public Opposition to High-Profile and Low-Profile Confederate Monuments

Many past studies of Confederate monuments have attempted to categorize them by time period, location, form, and purpose. Based on the results of this thesis' case studies, however, the appropriate method for mitigating public opposition to monuments is associated more with their degree of prominence as Confederate monuments than any of these individual elements on their own. This thesis proposes that Confederate monuments can be divided into two categories—high-profile and low-profile monuments—based on their degree of notoriety within their community, a factor which depends on a combination of different elements—mainly location, physical form, and context. As detailed in the section on collective memory in Chapter Two of this thesis, Professor of Political Science Jocelyn J. Evans' 2021 study found that the degree to which a monument impacts collective memory is tied to its "denotation" (Surface-level elements), "exemplification & expression" (symbolic elements), and "mediated reference"

(Context).[142] The proposal put for by this thesis, therefore, fits within Evans' framework, and asserts that the greater the influence on collective memory, the greater the public opposition to the monument and the more likely it is to be removed. In the following paragraphs, the seven case study monuments will be used to illustrate the three common factors that differentiated high-profile and low-profile monuments in this thesis. (*Table 1*)

Monument Name	*Original Location Type*	*Date Erected*	*Historical Context*	*Indicative Physical Elements*	*History of Vandalism or Protest?*	*Current Status*
High-Profile Monuments						
Confederate Obelisk	Cemetery (Public)	1874	Post-War (Memorialization)	"Confederate"	Yes	In Situ
Lion of the Confederacy	Cemetery (Public)	1894	Post-Reconstruction (Lost Cause)	"Confederate," Confederate Battle Flag	Yes	Removed
Gordon Monument	State Capitol Grounds (Public)	1907	Post-Reconstruction (Lost Cause)	Equestrian, Confederate Uniform	Yes	In Situ
Peace Monument	Park (Public)	1911	Post-Reconstruction, Reconciliation (Lost Cause)	Confederate Soldier Statue	Yes	In Situ
Low-Profile Monuments						
Peachtree Battle Avenue Monument	Residential Neighborhood (Public)	1935	Post-Reconstruction, Reconciliation (Lost Cause)	Confederate Hat and Musket	No	In Situ
Walker Monument	Residential Neighborhood (Public)	1902	Post-Reconstruction, Reconciliation (Lost Cause)	Cannon	No	In Situ
Spencer Monument	Private	1910	Post-Reconstruction (Lost Cause)	"Confederate"	No	Relocated

Table 1. *High-Profile and Low-Profile Case Study Monuments* (created by the author).

[142] Evans and Fernandez, "The Social Meaning of Competing Memorial Spaces."

Location is the first factor that plays a significant role in determining whether a Confederate monument is high or low profile. Many previous studies that have categorized Confederate monuments based on location make a distinction between those on private versus public property. This thesis finds that the ownership of the property is not the important factor, but rather the degree to which the public interacts with the monument. Locations that are heavily trafficked by the general population, whether they be public or private, are more likely to house high-profile monuments. In the case of this thesis' three low-profile monuments, the Spencer Monument was on private property, and the Walker Monument and the Peachtree Battle Avenue Monument are both on public land. Their settings, however, are all residential and much less frequently traversed than the locations of higher profile monuments like the Peace Monument or the Gordon Monument. Additionally, while funerary settings are considered by many scholars to make Confederate monuments less controversial, this thesis found the opposite to be true, as the Lion and the Obelisk were some of the most heavily criticized case study monuments. This is likely because they occupy the Confederate burial section of Oakland Cemetery, making it clear to the public that they are associated with the Confederacy.

In addition to location, physical form contributes to whether a monument can be considered high or low profile. Monuments that are easier for the public to recognize as Confederate monuments are more likely to fall into the high-profile category. Two of this thesis' most contested case study monuments, the Lion and the Obelisk, display the word "Confederate" prominently, with the Lion also bearing the image of the Confederate Battle Flag. The physical form of these monuments makes them instantly recognizable as Confederate monuments, contributing to their high-profile status and the resistance they receive from the public. This can also be observed in the difference between the two case study monuments that depict actual

people: The Gordon Monument and the Spencer Monument. The Gordon Monument depicts Gordon as a Confederate general in uniform and on horseback, while the Spencer Monument depicts Spencer as a businessman in plain clothes and seated. As a result, it is much easier for the public to recognize the Gordon Monument as tied to the Confederacy than the Spencer Monument. Another example monument is the Peachtree Battle Avenue Monument, which depicts a Confederate cap and musket alongside their World War One equivalents. While, as previously discussed, the merging of imagery from these two wars is tied to Lost Cause ideology, it also makes the monument more difficult for the public to identify as linked to the Confederacy. This confusion likely contributes to the monument's low-profile status and the lack of public opposition to it.

Finally, the results of this thesis concur with Evans' finding that historical context plays a part in the effects the monuments have on collective memory, and that it impacts both the likelihood that a monument might be removed and the degree of public opposition to it. Confederate monuments that have roots in the Lost Cause are more likely to be high-profile monuments and to receive public criticism. The differing fates of the Lion and the Obelisk are indicative of this finding. While both are considered to be high-profile monuments by this thesis, they have received different degrees of public opposition. The Lion was erected during the post-Reconstruction period, firmly within the Lost Cause Era, and has been vandalized eight times. The Obelisk, conversely, was erected only five years after the end of the Civil War and has only been significantly vandalized once. The Advisory Committee recognized the difference between these two periods of monument construction in its final report, as do many scholars of Confederate history. As such, this was likely a consideration of the Atlanta City Council when it chose to remove the Lion and leave the Obelisk.

Finding Four: Monument Ownership Affects the Abilities of Advocacy Groups

Another trend revealed by this thesis' case studies is that the ownership or jurisdiction of a monument or the land it occupies has an effect on the ability of certain advocacy groups to impact that monument. Monuments owned by the State of Georgia enjoy the strictest protection. The best example of this trend is the state-owned Gordon Monument, which—despite protest, vandalism, and public criticism—remains *in situ* and uninterpreted. Conversely, monuments owned by the City of Atlanta were found to be the easiest for advocacy groups to affect. This is largely due to the Advisory Committee and its collaboration with groups like HOF, AHC, and BATL to interpret city-owned monuments. The city also was found to have more power to affect the removal of its own Confederate monuments than any of the studied advocacy groups. In the cases of both of the monuments that were removed—the Lion and the Spencer Monument—the final approval was issued by the Atlanta City Council.

The case of the Spencer Monument shows that next to the city, property owners have the most power to remove city-owned monuments. Norfolk Southern, as the owner of the property on which the Spencer Monument resided, had more influence with the City Council than unaffiliated groups like BATL or the Atlanta NAACP. Similarly, as the caretaker of Oakland Cemetery, HOF was granted the right to interpret the monuments within its jurisdiction by the Advisory Committee.

Unsurprisingly, groups with no ownership over the monuments they wished to influence had the most difficulty influencing the case study monuments. The Atlanta branch of the NAACP has attempted to influence the city's Confederate monuments in the ways available to it, founding the digital database Invisible Hate to identify and bring awareness to the remaining monuments. As yet, however, there is no data showing whether this approach has had any

tangible impact on the monuments themselves. Although BATL is mostly made up of local property owners, the sites of both the Walker and McPherson monuments are public "beauty spot parks," as Henry Bryant calls them.[143] This has undoubtedly contributed to the difficulty the group has had in achieving their goals for the monuments.

Finding Five: SB-77 Enables Pro-Confederate Monument Advocacy Groups to Take a Passive Approach to Preservation

Another major finding of this thesis' case studies is that pro-Confederate monument advocacy groups intervened very little with any of the studied monuments. In the instances where they did comment on the monuments, it was usually done in reaction to an interpretation or removal attempt. The clearest explanation for this trend is that SB-77 is doing the work of actively protecting Atlanta's Confederate monuments, allowing the advocacy groups to take a more passive stance. Ultimately, as this thesis shows, SB-77 has made it increasingly difficult for Confederate monuments to be interpreted, relocated, or removed. As a result of the assurances the law provides them, pro-Confederate monument advocacy groups have been able to step into the role of mere enforcers of the law rather than advocates.

In this thesis' case studies, the actions of pro-Confederate monument groups were limited to relatively mild public comments, such as the 2019 statement by spokesperson for the Georgia Division of the Sons of Confederate Veterans (SCV) Martin O'Toole on the interpretation of the Lion: "I'm OK with the panels. They are mostly fact-based and within the law. I just say thanks to the legislature for passing a law to make sure the Lion is still here."[144] The Commandant of the Old Guard of the Gate City Guard responded in a similar fashion to an article on the 2019

[143] Henry Bryant, in discussion with the author, February 12, 2025.
[144] Jonsson, "The Future of America's Past."

interpretation of the Peace Monument and the Peachtree Battle Avenue Monument.[145] The other kind of action taken by pro-Confederate monument groups in the case studies was enforcement of SB-77, such as when SCV offered a $2,000 reward for information on the perpetrators of the vandalism of the Lion in 2020.[146] This thesis found no evidence of public resistance by pro-Confederate monument advocacy groups to the removals of the Spencer Monument or the Lion. Overall, these actions are minimal in comparison to the efforts of the pro-removal or pro-interpretation advocacy groups in the case studies.

Finding Six: SB-77 Does Not Support the Preservation of Confederate Monuments

The final finding drawn from this thesis' case studies is that while SB-77 purports to protect Confederate monuments, it only works to prevent their removal, not to aid in their preservation. This is most clearly evidenced by BATL's struggle to restore and interpret the Walker and McPherson monuments in East Atlanta. SB-77 mandates that if someone damages a public monument, they are liable for the cost of the repair and other potential fines. Henry Bryant recalls, however, that in 2020 when the McPherson Monument was hit by a car, he and his daughter had to restore the monument themselves. Additionally, SB-77 has no provision for preservation of the monuments that it is forcing Georgia communities to maintain. Advocacy groups like BATL have taken charge of immediate preservation needs, but long-term restoration plans require funding to carry out. Bryant says that BATL has brought their plans for the restoration and interpretation of the Battle of Atlanta site to the city council on several different occasions over the past decade, but so far have been unable to get approval or funding beyond a SHPO research grant.[147] While Georgia's monument protection law mandates that localities keep

[145] Dietrichs, "AJC on New Monument Markers."
[146] WGXA "Sons of Confederate Veterans."
[147] Henry Bryant, in discussion with the author, February 12, 2025.

their Confederate monuments standing, it does nothing to aid in their preservation, a task that has ultimately fallen to local advocacy groups.

Monument Name	***Year Erected***	***Founder***	***Current Owner***	***Advocacy Groups Involved***	***History of Vandalism or Protest?***	***Advocacy Group's Approach***	***Current Status***
Peachtree Battle Avenue Monument	1935	The Old Guard of The Gate City Guard	The Old Guard of The Gate City Guard	AHC	No	Interpretive Panel	In Situ
Confederate Obelisk	1874	Atlanta Ladies' Memorial Association	City of Atlanta	HOF	Yes	Interpretive Panels	In Situ
Lion of the Confederacy	1894	Atlanta Ladies' Memorial Association	City of Atlanta	HOF	Yes	Interpretive Panels	Removed (In Storage)
Samuel Spencer Monument	1910	Southern Railway Company employees	City of Atlanta	AHC	No	Relocation to Museum, Interpretive Panels	Relocated
Gordon Monument	1907	John B. Gordon Monument Commission	State of Georgia	ATL NAACP	Yes	Awareness Website	In Situ
Walker Monument	1902	Walker Monument Association	City of Atlanta	BATL	No	Preservation, Interpretation Plans	In Situ (Unaltered)
Peace Monument	1911	The Old Guard of The Gate City Guard	City of Atlanta	AHC	Yes	Interpretive Panels	In Situ

Table 2. *Case Study Data Summary* (created by author).

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This thesis has sought to answer the question "To what extent have advocacy groups in the city of Atlanta been able to influence the removal, interpretation, or maintenance of the city's Confederate monuments since the establishment of Georgia's restrictive Monument Protection Law, SB-77?" This question was answered through a series of representative case studies, which revealed that while SB-77 is restrictive, it has loopholes and a general lack of enforcement. This thesis found, however, that groups with some form of stake or ownership over a monument were more likely to be able to take advantage of these loopholes than outside advocacy groups. It was found that Atlanta advocacy groups have been most successful at interpretation, but that they bore the responsibility to fund their efforts without any help from the state.

Ultimately, while Atlanta advocacy groups were found to have louder voices within the Confederate monument conflict, their power over the memorial landscape was just as—if not more—restricted as the city government. In the case of the two case study monuments that were removed, the City Council gave the final approval and therefore took on the risk of potential consequences from the state. Advocacy groups were found to have been able to influence the City Council in some cases, and to have failed to get their approval in others. One important finding is that advocacy groups in Atlanta have not yet argued for a monument's removal on the basis of its physical endangerment. This thesis found that this approach is the most likely to be successful, especially when the monument has a history of vandalism, but that it has only been used by property owners and the city as of yet. Advocacy groups looking to get a monument

removed or relocated would have a greater chance of success if they opted for this argument when lobbying City Council.

a. Recommendations

The preservation of Confederate monuments is a deeply controversial issue, and as such there will be many potential opportunities for future research. The American memorial landscape is constantly changing despite monument protection laws like SB-77. The available data is generally up to date, with groups like the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) continuously monitoring the landscape. Some of the potential angles from which this data could be analyzed include:

1. Studying the relationship between protest events and the removal of Confederate monuments nationwide, particularly in the aftermath of the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020. The results of this thesis indicate that it could be worthwhile to factor in vandalism specifically.
2. Conducting an in-depth study of public perception of Atlanta's Confederate monuments within the communities that house them, analyzing the extent to which they influence collective memory and the historical narrative.
3. Analyzing the effects on public perception of a monument when it is moved to a museum. This could involve the collection of guest feedback on the Spencer Monument at the Atlanta History Center, which has not been done at this time.
4. Continue to monitor BATL's progress at the Battle of Atlanta site to discover whether they receive approval for their plans and the effects they might have on the public landscape.

The findings of this thesis are a testament to the fact that above all, SB-77 is a restriction on the autonomy of municipalities over their memorial landscapes. Even in cases where advocacy groups have sought approval from City Council for preservation projects involving Confederate monuments, they have run into problems due to the amount of funding required. At the same time that the State of Georgia dictates what its cities can and cannot do with their public monuments, it also provides inadequate funding for their preservation. The result of these issues is that Atlanta today is home to several damaged, decaying, and controversial Confederate monuments. Public opposition to these monuments ebbs and flows, but the reality is that a large proportion of Atlanta's population, particularly African Americans, see them as symbols of white supremacy. Advocacy groups have attempted to mitigate this issue, but ultimately, with the help of SB-77, it is a problem that is very much still prevalent within Atlanta's communities.

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