PERFORMING LEGACIES AND SUBVERSIONS OF WHITE SUPREMACY: CO-PERFORMANCE, COMMEMORATION, AND CULTURAL IDENTITY IN THE POST-CIVIL WAR UNITED STATES

by

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(Under the Direction of Emily Sahakian, Ph.D.)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation employs critical ethnography to study performances that subvert and affirm white supremacy in the U.S.. I argue that American cultural identities are, in part, formed in collaboration with embodied and mediated co-performances. Furthermore, these co-performances affirm or subvert fantastical memory, Confederate Stewardship, and the Confederate gaze—which I contend are important tenets of white supremacy in America. Building upon the work of Mechtild Widrich, this dissertation analyzes performance documents, audiences, sites, and monuments as *performative monuments* (that is, mnemonic, and often commemorative, objects as speech-acts) that engender moments of racial reckoning by revising or renewing dominant, white supremacist narratives of the past. *Performative monuments* also invite their audiences to participate in the transmission or disruption of white supremacy through co-performance. As a performance ethnographer, I hold a firm commitment to justice and truth while exercising the vulnerability and compassion needed to subvert white supremacist heritage in America.

INDEX WORDS: Commemoration, White supremacy, Co-performance, Ethnography, Cultural trauma, Confederate, Post-colonial, Heritage, Identity, America, Whiteness, White, Racism, Racial bias, White power, Racial hierarchy, Patriotism, Allyship, Anti-racist, Memory of slavery

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DEDICATION

To the struggle.

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Preface

When I was a little girl my family attended the Battle of Jonesboro reenactment festival every fall, some of my fondest childhood memories include recollections of these reenactments. Specifically, I remember singing *Dixie* and hoping that the Rebel Army would somehow win even though the Confederate Army lost the historic Battle of Jonesboro. As an adult, I am perplexed by the uneasiness I feel reminiscing over these childhood memories because I am left negotiating my nostalgia against the knowledge I have now about the legacy of the Confederacy.

For me, a middle class, White child living in Jonesboro, GA in the 1980s, a Confederate soldier was a symbol of bravery, courage, and the will to fight for independence. A Confederate soldier, or Rebel, was the epitome of individuality and honor. If a Rebel was the symbol of courage, then the Confederate battle flag was its emblem of honor and bravery. Confederate battle flags flew over every government building and most public spaces during my childhood because it was integrated into the Georgia state flag until 2001.[1] As an adult, I realize that these symbols are not the innocent interpretations of a child, they are the sophisticated instruments of white supremacy. This dissertation is a manifestation of that grappling.

[1] Georgia added the Confederate battle flag to its state flag in 1956 in response to school desegregation, it was changed again in 2001 and then again after a statewide vote in 2004. The current flag bears striking resemblance to the original Confederate flag, commonly referred to as the *Stars and Bars*.
"A History of Georgia's State Flag: Things to Know," *Atlanta Journal and Constitution,* October 23, 2018, accessed September 15, 2021.
https://www.ajc.com/news/local/history-georgia-state-flag-things-know/rQ0DK2QtuSP13EStbLC5iK/

Introduction: Defining White Supremacy in the Post-Civil War United States

This dissertation examines invitations to co-perform legacies and subversions of white supremacy in America. I examine legacy and subversive co-performances influenced by America's white supremacist history and/or Lost Cause mythology at heritage sites, sacred places, memorials, monuments, and digital spaces, asking how performance engages with commemoration and what can be gained from this nexus? Additionally, I look to protest artists, performance artists, social justice collaborators, and content creators to ask:

1. What is gained by putting performances that engage with commemorative/collective trauma in historical context?
2. How do protest performances shape, engage, or influence the issues they confront?
3. How do commemoration performances publicize and document alternate histories, or histories that have been overlooked and/or silenced by mainstream, dominant narratives?
4. How are acts of commemoration and co-performance shaped by conceptions of American Whiteness and American Blackness?[2]

[2] I have elected to capitalize the "W" in white as per *The Chicago Manual of Style's* section 8.38 which states, "Names of ethnic and national groups are capitalized." The White people discussed in this dissertation belong to a national group of American Whiteness, or, White Americans. I distinguish and reserve the capital "W" for people and their bodies. I employ the lower case "w" for concepts like whiteness and white superiority. Therefore, concepts like *white supremacy*, *white nationalism,* and *white privilege* are not capitalized, and terms for people/bodies like White women, White Northerners, and White bodies are. The capital "W" for White people in America is also affirmed by the MacArthur

5. Specifically, I examine what happens when people's performances confront long established cultural commemorative ideologies. I argue that social practice performances, by which I mean performances that engage with or confront political and social issues by using bodies (or their mediated representations) as the medium or material for the artwork, are catalysts in the cycle of reckoning America undertakes to confront and dismantle its legacy of white supremacy. My research explores performances of American Blackness and Whiteness within the framework of white supremacy and the afterlife of slavery and proposes that conflicting cultural histories precipitate moments of reckoning as well as contribute to one's sense of American cultural identity.

In many ways, the legacy of white supremacy is a performative artifact that bifurcates America—the separation divides American history and culture into two distinct modes: Black America and White America.[3] Black America and White America celebrate different independence days, sing different national anthems, and attest to two different founding narratives of American history. The racial dynamics between Black and White Americans are seemingly forever embroiled in a cycle of struggle as we (Americans) continue developing and performing methods to process the terrors and trauma of the transatlantic slave trade. For this

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Foundation which maintains, "We will also begin capitalizing White in reference to race. Choosing to not capitalize White while capitalizing other racial and ethnic identifiers would implicitly affirm Whiteness as the standard and norm. Keeping White lowercase ignores the way Whiteness functions in institutions and communities."
Kristen Mack and John Palfrey, "Capitalizing Black and White: Grammatical Justice and Equity," MacArthur Foundation, August 26, 2020, accessed February 27, 2023. *https://www.macfound.org/press/perspectives/capitalizing-black-and-white-grammatical-justice-and-equity*

[3] The genocide of indigenous peoples in the U.S. as well as the cultural traumas of non-White races are acknowledged but not included in this dissertation due to the complexities of colonial (and postcolonial) white supremacy in relation to each cultural group. For this study, I examine white supremacy in relation to Black and White cultural identities in the post-Civil War United States to understand how Americans project concepts of whiteness or Blackness onto other bodies.

reason, America has many historical narratives and many unreconciled social breaches to overcome, the enormity of which suggests that reconciliation is unlikely without the total overhaul of the nation's governing institutions; a full repair and reconciliation is impossible due to irrevocable circumstances engendered by the enormous breach of forced bondage and genocide. And since a new American revolution is unlikely to occur in my lifetime, although the events on January 6, 2021, might indicate that we are well on our way, commemorating (at least) two histories, two journeys, and two cultures, and two ways of being in America is the reality of American culture in the present and into the foreseeable future.

American white supremacy is a system of interconnected beliefs, or ideology, that purports a racial superiority wherein light skin (coded/projected as White) is the apex and (historically) dark skin (coded/projected as Black) is the nadir. The tenets of white supremacy proved imperative to America's early success and its ability to accumulate wealth and power. Since White people inferred Black people as beasts of burden, the Black body was exploited for free labor resulting in an enormous breach of humanity that denied freedom to Black Americans as well as created an enormous amount of wealth and power for White Americans. American white supremacy historically espouses that White, Heterosexual, Christian, Cis-gendered, Non-disabled, Neurotypical men (WHCCNNm) are divinely chosen by God to act as stewards for God's (lesser and/or unintelligent) creations. The WHCCNNm group became the arbiters of dominant culture in America and that continues today. Social movements and efforts made by American intellectuals reveal how white supremacy's systematic oppression limits freedoms to American citizens living outside the WHCCNNm group. Ron Eyerman says that intellectuals are, "mediators and translators between spheres of activity and differently situated social groups, including the situatedness in time and space. Intellectuals in this sense can be film directors and

singers of songs, as well as college professors."[4] The intellectuals, for me, are performance artists, reenactment participants, and rally attendees, and I rely upon these intellecutals in the following pages assist and influence my understanding of American Blackness and Whiteness in relation to white supremacy and the afterlife of slavery since the Civil War.[5]

The transatlantic slave trade and the profits amassed due to chattel slavery validated American beliefs in its own "uniqueness and exceptionalism."[6] The hubris of American "uniqueness and exceptionalism" translated into an embodied racial supremacy for American dominant culture. Saidiya Hartman explains how enslaved people's humanity was inferred through the WHCCNNm group and how it was the source of white supremacist desires to subjugate. Because WHCCNNm felt entitled to decide the level of humanity available to the enslaved based on a religiously perverse interpretation of God-sponsored-husbandry.[7] The American Civil War brought an end to the Confederacy's institution of chattel slavery, but remnants of the Confederacy would live on in perpetuity, most obviously spawned by and perpetuated within Lost Cause mythologies.

The Lost Cause

The Lost Cause is an American Southern myth that alleges the Confederacy's causes were just and noble and espouses that the South went to war to protect State's rights and individual freedoms. Perhaps most egregiously, the Lost Cause narrative claims that enslaved people were treated well, often considered members of the family, and that they were content

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[4] Ron Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2001), 4.
[5] Saidiya Hartman's concept of *the afterlife of slavery* is discussed in the following pages. Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*, (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007), 6.
[6] Ron Eyerman, *The Making of White American Identity*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 5.
[7] Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) 5

with their roles as slaves. The ubiquity of Confederate Monuments throughout the Southern states and elsewhere is due in large part to the United Daughters of the Confederacy. Karen L Cox provides a historiography of the Lost Cause narrative through an analysis of the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC). She insists that the UDC were the most influential and effective keepers of Confederate history, and that their insatiable desire to avenge their fathers and brothers became the fuel for how and why the Lost Cause narrative endures today.

Cox's arguments are twofold: 1. "[She] argue[s] that women were longtime leaders in the movement to memorialize the Confederacy, commonly referred to as the 'Lost Cause,' and were active participants in debates over what would constitute a 'new' South."; and 2. "[She] also argue[s] that the Daughters, as UDC members were known, raised the stakes of the Lost Cause by making it a movement about vindication, as well as memorialization."[8] Cox's research sets the stage for how and why the *Daughters* were able to mythologize and lionize a false narrative of the Confederacy, a narrative that perpetuates the importance of state's rights, Confederate honor, and a workforce of gratefully enslaved people. She describes the UDC as a fashionable, trendy social club, but one with a powerful, motivated agenda and the political connections and prowess to permeate institutions for generations to come.

The UDC was once a popular social club throughout the North and South and their efficacious indoctrination of millions of children since the 1890s has been successful at crafting an enduring brand of Confederate culture. During the same period as the UDC, Black Americans were establishing their cultural identities and commemorating their histories.[9] Both Black and White Americans built American cultural identities in relation to the memory of slavery and

[8] Karen L. Cox, *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida Press, 200)3, 1.
[9] Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma,*15-18.

experience with white supremacy, what Saidiya Hartman has referred to as the *afterlife of slavery*. Hartman argues, "If slavery persists as an issue in the political life of black America, it is not because of an antiquarian obsession with bygone days or the burden of a too-long memory, but because black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago. This is the afterlife of slavery—skewed life changes, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment. I, too, am the afterlife of slavery."[10] The afterlife of slavery and a perpetuated racial hierarchy are legacies of an adapting American racial bias that keeps repeating, recycling, and reproducing itself.

This dissertation cites the end of the Civil War as the beginnings of racial demarcations as they exist in America today. Ron Eyerman writes, "The Civil War laid open a cultural trauma through which the foundations of a fragile collective identity, the notion of being an American, fractured into a bloody conflict centering around slavery and white supremacy."[11] White Northerners and White Southerners, despite fighting on opposite sides of the Civil War, reconciled themselves by affirming a grandiose interpretation of Southern heritage together and by jointly demonizing the Black body, as I will discuss further in this introduction. It is important to note, that even though White Northerners have a different relationship to the Civil War than White Southerners, both groups of White Americans bonded over the collective subjugation of Black Americans directly following the Civil War. This is evidenced by public lynching celebrations throughout the American North as well as a national obsession with Southern culture as a model for gentility.

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[10] Hartman, *Lose Your Mother,* 6.
[11] Ron Eyerman, *The Making of White American Identity,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 161.

Eyerman contends that the memory of slavery is the locus for both Black and White American cultural identity. He writes, "Through various media forms or representation black artists and writers reconstituted slavery as the primal scene of black identity. In this emergent identity, slavery, not as an institution of experience but as a point of origins in a common past, would ground the formation of a black 'community.'"[12] Twenty years later, Eyerman contends that "the Civil War became a primal scene in the formation of white American identity."[13] This dissertation examines how white supremacy continues to shape American cultural identities emanating from the afterlife of slavery and the memory of the Civil War. I aim to better understand how co-performance and commemoration work together to shape Black and White American cultural identities within online and in real life (IRL) public spheres. In this introduction, I provide a history of the White Power Movement as well as define the tenets of white supremacy which I argue work together to produce and perpetuate white power. Next, I explore the overarching scholarly themes of this dissertation, and I introduce co-performance as a method to engage with legacy and subversive performances of white supremacy.

Neo-Confederates and The White Power Movement

The resurgence of Confederate culture within mainstream America is due mostly to the White Power Movement that developed in response to the Vietnam War. Katherine Belew argues that a renewed zeal for white supremacy was born out of the Vietnam era, unlike white power movements before such as the Klu Klux Klan. Belew writes, "Unlike previous iterations of the KuKluxKlan and white supremacist vigilantism, the White Power Movement did not claim to serve the State. Instead, white power made the State its target, declaring war against the federal

[12] Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma,* 16.
[13] Eyerman, *The Making of White American Identity*, 161.

government in 1983."[14] The new White Power Movement begins post-Vietnam War with veterans returning home and developing both paramilitary organizations and paranoia that the government was targeting White men. Ron Eyerman writes, "Using apocalyptic cosmologies, they developed tragic narratives of betrayal and victimhood that served to legitimate their militancy and armed resistance."[15] White Vietnam War veterans felt abandoned by the nation they had served and began organizing themselves around an idea of *true patriotism.*[16] Media artifacts, political endorsements, and powerful alliances would follow.

In 1978 *The Turner Diaries* was published, inspiring generations of white supremacists to wage war against a State that wanted to replace a White majority with non-White communists. [17] *The Turner Diaries* depicts protagonist Earl Turner's journey to save America from communists and immigrants intent on systematically destroying White Americans (and White American Christian values). The turner diaries refer to "the System" in which destabilizing the state's currency, poisoning the water, assassinating political targets are among some of the techniques implemented to reveal "the System" to the general masses in hopes of fomenting a race war.[18] People indoctrinated into neo-confederate, or white nationalist philosophies, believe that White Americans are fighting against an oppressive system that limits their freedoms and alienates them from the rest of the country. Texts like *The Turner Diaries* are the movement's foundational texts and have inspired anxieties within the white nationalist community ultimately leading to other conspiracy theories.

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[14] Kathleen Belew *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 3.
[15] Eyerman, *The Making of White American Identity*, 117.
[16] Eyerman, 117.
[17] Andrew McDonald, *The Turner Diaries*, (Hillsboro, WV: National Vanguard Books, 1974). The book has three editions and has been reprinted six times in eight languages.
[18] Belew, *Bring the War Home*, 112.

One of these conspiracy theories, known as The Great Replacement, has inspired white supremacists to target Black and Jewish people specifically. The Great Replacement is the idea that non-White immigrants would replace a White, Christian, American majority, and it stems from (among others) Renaud Camus's 2011 essay, *Le Grand Remplacement*.[19] Replacement theory, sometimes referred to as White Replacement Theory, bolsters white power sentiments in America because it portrays an America controlled by a Jewish elite. The paranoia of a Jewish aristocracy advocating for the proliferation of illegal immigrants so that Jewish people might (somehow) control these immigrants to vote for liberal agendas has led to dozens of mass shootings within the twenty-first century, especially an uptick of white-power-inspired mass shootings within the last decade.[20]

Media personalities and politicians use Replacement Theory rhetoric to alienate White Americans from non-White Americans. White power groups have been operating with reinvigorated momentum since the election of Donald Trump in 2016; his white supremacist fanbase extends today through white nationalist groups like the Proud Boys, established in 2016, and Patriot Front, established in 2017 and operating in forty-three states.[21] During the writing of this dissertation, in May 2022, an eighteen-year-old man drove hours from his rural town in New York to a Black neighborhood in Buffalo, New York and murdered ten people in a rage fueled by white power literature and white supremacist anxieties. The eighteen-year-old White,

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[19] Renaud Camus, *You Will Not Replace Us!*, (Plieur, France: L'Auteur, 2018).

[20] Wisconsin Sikh Temple shooting in 2012, Charleston Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church shooting in 2015, Charlottesville Car Attack of 2017, Pittsburgh Tree of Life Synagogue shooting in 2018, Escondido Chabad Synagogue shooting in 2019, El Paso Walmart shooting in 2019, Buffalo Tops Friendly Market shooting in 2022.

[21] Patriot Front was originally known as Vanguard until an internal coup led to a rebranding of Vanguard into what is now called Patriot Front in 2017.
"White Nationalist," *Southern Poverty Law Center,* accessed September 4, 2022. https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/white-nationalist

Heterosexual, Christian, Cis-gendered, Non-disabled, Neurotypical man (WHCCNNm) specifically targeted the grocery store because of its location in a Black neighborhood. The shooter wrote a white power manifesto in which he pointed to Replacement Theory as his inspiration for racially motivated terrorism. President Biden likened white supremacy to a poison during a speech he made from the site of the mass-shooting, Tops Friendly Markets, “White supremacy is a poison. It's a poison running through our body politic, and it's been allowed to fester and grow right in front of our eyes. No more.” President Biden went on to explain, "We need to say as clearly and forcefully as we can that the ideology of white supremacy has no place in America.”[22] However, white supremacy continues to thrive in America largely due to the rebranding of the White Power Movement and its merging with evangelical Christianity espousing traditional gender roles.

This new White Power Movement in the post-Vietnam era emanates from a re-masculinization of White, Heterosexual, Christian, Cis-gendered, Non-disabled, Neurotypical men’s (WHCCNNm) cultural identities rather than a recycled version of the Klan. Belew writes, “While white power featured a diversity of views and an array of competing leaders, all corners of the movement were inspired by feelings of defeat, emasculation, and betrayal.”[23] The soldiers returning home from the Vietnam War often felt betrayed by the criticism of civilian Americans, who disapproved of the war. Belew argues that a social movement begins to manifest from White soldiers feeling abandoned by their nation. She writes, “White power also qualifies as a social movement through its central features: the contiguous activity of an inner circle of key

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[22] Ashley Westerman and Becky Sullivan, “Visiting Buffalo, President Biden Denounces White Supremacy as a Poison,” *National Public Radio*, May 17, 2022, accessed May 23, 2022. https://www.npr.org/2022/05/17/1099396561/president-biden-will-travel-buffalo-today-to-meet-with-shooting-victims-families

[23] Belew, *Bring the War Home*, 10.

figures over two decades, frequent public displays, and development of a wide-reaching social network."[24] *The Turner Diaries* functions like a religious text to white power members, narrating/foreshadowing the fall of democracy and supplanting Christianity should white supremacist ideologies fail. Some of the key figures of the movement include: Robert J. Mathews, Louis Beam, Tom Metzger, Richard Butler, William Pierce, James Ellison, David Lane, Louis Beam, Robert Miles, Don Black and David Duke. This organization structure is reminiscent of Lost Cause mythology and the organizational structure of legacy groups like Sons of Confederate Veterans and the United Daughters of the Confederacy.

Unlike these groups, however, White Power Movement organizations did not want to be documented. As Belew notes, "White power activists routinely attempted to hide their activity, even when it was legal. Documentary resources are scattered and fragmentary. This is especially true of the period after 1983, when white power activists worked particularly hard to avoid being depicted as a coherent movement."[25] From the late 1970s through the turn of the century, Confederate culture proliferated through the country via white power sentiments and a revitalized enthusiasm for neoconservative ideologies especially heteronormative and small government ideologies. In fact, Ronald Regan created a *noble cause* mythology to "sustain the narrative that its veterans had been noble men."[26] President Reagan completely dismissed the antiwar movement and groups like Vietnam Veterans Against the War by referring to the war as a "noble cause" and by stating that the soldiers had been "denied permission to win."[27] Belew writes, "the systematic exclusion of an antiwar critique transformed what appeared to be an

[24] Belew, 10.
[25] Belew, 11.
[26] Belew, 23.
[27] Belew, 23.

apological, intimate style of memory and narrative into a conservative political project."[28] Since the 1980s, conservative politicians have aligned themselves with a white power base by signaling to conspiracy theories as well as to anxieties about losing control of the nation to a non-White majority.

Neo-Confederates and white power enthusiasts share a collective memory-as-fantasy, or, fantastical memory as I will define in the following pages, of the Vietnam War akin to Lost Cause mythology. This belief espouses that the government turned its back on Vietnam veterans, first by alienating them through a racially integrated army, and again by accepting immigrants from communist countries and helping them more than American veterans. Louis Beam, a white nationalist icon and the man foremost responsible for the success and proliferation of white power leaderless cells, would inspire generations of white power activists through a shared narrative about the war in his 1983 *Essays of Klansmen*. Beam later joined forces with David Duke to rebrand the KKK and rename them Knights of the Ku Klux Klan (KKKK). Duke attempted to spin KKKK as a bastion for family values, conservative Christian gender roles, and, most fervently, the new KKKK was not a hate group but a European pride group. Duke stressed the importance of celebrating and being proud of his Christian European heritage. This rebranding would later lead to campaigns like *Heritage Not Hate* and *Conquered Not Stolen* as well as a renewed zeal for reenacting American history, especially the Civil War.

White power is largely responsible for preying on the fears and anxieties of various cultural identities in America. There are overlapping themes within the White Power Movement; I note that there are four discernable themes: 1) Revisionist historiography; 2) A yearning to return to the fantastical memory of Lost Cause narratives; 3) Coded language often used by

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[28] Belew, 23.

media personalities or politicians. This language includes words such as patriot, replacement, socialists, brutes, beasts, and other coded words that signal to white supremacist ideologies; and 4) The sanctity of White womanhood and the perpetuation of "pure" blood lines. Below is an example of performative white chivalry, Louis Beam holds his wife just after being exonerated of sedition. Mrs. Beam is dressed in white, symbolic of her purity and chastity, and is barefoot, symbolizing her need for husbandry and protection.

Figure 1 Louis Beam holding his wife after being acquitted of sedition.
Photo credit: Danny Johnston/Associated Press in Laura Smith's "Lone Wolves Connected Online: A History of Modern White Supremacy," New York Times, January 26, 2021, updated May16, 2022, accessed, May 28, 2022. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/26/us/louis-beam-white-supremacy-internet.html

White chivalry is the long-established need to protect White women and children within white supremacy ideology. Belew writes about the need to protect White women and children using a photograph of Louis Beam holding his wife after being found not guilty of sedition. Belew argues, "Women in the white power movement would shape the [Louis Beam] sedition trial, both because of the symbolic invocation of their bodies as terrain in need of defense, and because of the work real women did in forming the movement, furthering its war on the state,

and performing White womanhood to garner sympathy from jurors and the public—White women's purity resonated with mainstream (White) Americans. Richard Dyer contends, "White women's role in reproduction makes them at once privileged and subordinated in relation to the operation of white power in the world."[29] White nationalist women were both "symbols of and actors in a common struggle: to protect white women's chastity and racial reproduction and, with it, the future of whiteness itself."[30] The heteronormative protection of white womanhood and the purity of the white race has been the catalyst for domestic terrorist acts like the Tulsa Race Massacre as well as dozens of other race riots.[31]

The protection of white womanhood also worked to solidify ideas about traditional family structures and the need to protect personal property, as evidenced by the events at Ruby Ridge. The events at Ruby Ridge in Idaho (August 21-31, 1992) demonstrates the culmination of white power rebranding and the need to protect family and property from the government. U.S. Marshals killed Samuel Weaver and Vicky Weaver; some reports indicate Vicky was shot while holding her infant as authorities tried to apprehend her (self-proclaimed white separatist) husband, Randy Weaver. Mr. Weaver was allegedly being apprehended for a bench warrant for a failure to appear in court violation; however, an undercover ATF agent had recently discussed plans for sedition with Mr. Weaver days before the siege. Vicky Weaver was killed because of her allegiance to her husband and to the heteronormative and racist ideologies they supported. The standoff between the Weaver family and the marshals lasted eleven days and resulted in four deaths: U.S. Marshal W.F. Degan, Vicki Weaver, Samuel Weaver, and the Weaver family dog, Striker. The events at Ruby Ridge strengthened the resolve of white power sympathizers across

[29] Richard Dyer, *White*, Twentieth Edition, (New York: Routledge, 2017), 29.
[30] Belew *Bring the War Home*, 169.
[31] Chris M. Messer, *The 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre: Crafting a Legacy*, (Pueblo, CO: Colorado State University Press, 2021).

the country because it was perceived as proof that the state was turning against its citizens, specifically its White citizens.

Using online media and message boards, the White Power Movement's attempts to go mainstream aligned its mission with evangelical Christian philosophies. Beam was able to outsmart police because his underground, leaderless cells were operating just as he had imagined. The military equipment now offered to police, coupled with the media/police underestimation of the white power movement and its proliferation and influence of white power cells, led to the tragedies at both Ruby Ridge and Waco, TX. As Belew and Eyerman attest, the events at Ruby Ridge coupled with online engagment inspired Timothy McVey to bomb the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, killing 168 innocent people. Eyerman cites the burgeoning Internet which provided safe spaces for white power enthusiasts to "post verbal and virtual messages on virtual pasteboards, find practical information about whom to contact, what to read, how to train, how to build a bomb, and so on…. The white power traditions and groups that turned Timothy McVeigh into an activist and provided him with allies, ideology, and strategic direction combined digital media and more traditional means of communication and coordination."[32] As I will demonstrate in Chapter One, online message boards and digital white nationalist content continue to offer avenues for Americans to craft and hone white supremacist ideologies and cultural identities. Belew writes, "That the Oklahoma City bombing, which stood as a singular event of mass-casualty terrorism on American soil—deliberate violence as a scale unsurpassed, at that time, since the bombing of Pearl Harbor—did not solidify a public understanding of the white power movement and its capacity for violence is remarkable."[33] America's unwillingness to face its white power problem coupled with white power's covert

[32] Eyerman, *The Making of White American Identity*, 211.
[33] Belew, *Bring the War Home*, 236.

functionality has bolstered division amongst its citizens and foments additional acts of domestic terrorism from the WHCCNNm group including mass shootings and violent protest demonstrations.

Defining White Supremacy in America

Academic publications of the 1990s and early 2000s have shifted the discourse regarding critical race studies and performative aspects of race. Black scholars like Sandra L. Richards, Saidiya Hartman, and Derek Bell gave voice to the Black American experience and the permanence of racism, and White scholars like Peggy McIntosh, Richard Dyer, and Robin Diangelo articulated the advantages and taken-for-granted-ness of whiteness in America. Scholarship regarding American cultural identity has, thusly, honored two Americas: a Black America and a White America.

As I understand, American white supremacy operates using three specialized tools: 1. Fantastical memory; 2. Confederate Stewardship; and 3. The Confederate gaze. These three characteristics of white supremacy manifest in overt and covert instances of racial bias or trauma leaving behind white power as a performance artifact/remain of performative white supremacy. Derek Bell wrote that racism is a permanent condition in American society because of its ability to adapt, or, more precisely, because of the WHCCNNm group's ability to adapt racism and to legislate racist policies. Bell writes, "Black people will never gain full equality in this country. Even those herculean efforts we hail as successful will produce no more than temporary 'peaks of progress,' short-lived victories that slide into irrelevance as racial patterns adapt in ways that maintain white dominance. This is a hard-to-accept fact that all history verifies. We must acknowledge it, not as a sign of submission, but as an act of ultimate defiance."[34] The story of

[34] Derek Bell, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well*, (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 15.

American white supremacy is best understood through its varying historical narratives as well as in maneuvers made to adapt racial superiority through memory devices such as films and television, museums and monuments, acts of commemoration, and online content that reflect the social mores of racial dynamics in America.

Fantastical memory

After reading the scholarship about collective memory and historicization (the production of history), I put forth a concept of fantastical memory inspired by ideas regarding *complicated fictions* and *collective amnesia*.[35] Fantastical memory is a constructionist conception of historical events that perpetuates fantastic, or unbelievable, versions of history. I am not suggesting that fantastical memory sits in opposition to an authoritative historical truth. Fantastical memory is a collective delusion masquerading as a collective memory, it is an interpretation of history that contradicts the experiences of others, and, yet it does not assume that there is one, authoritative version of history. Scholars like Ron Eyerman, Claire Whitlinger, and Karen Cox cite the reconciliation between White Northerners and White Southerners just after the Civil War as the impetus for Lost Cause mythology. Both Black and White Americans were re-shaping or *re-membering* their cultural identities during the era of Reconstruction; the dominant narrative of slavery became rooted in Lost Cause mythology and fantastical memories of enslavement:

> The meaning of slavery was a focal point of reference. A similar process was underway amongst whites, and black attempts to negotiate cultural trauma were intimately intertwined with this national project…. As the nation was re-membered through a new narration of the [Civil W]ar, blacks were at once made invisible and

[35] *Complicated fictions* and *collective amnesia* are discussed further in the following paragraphs.

> punished. Reconstruction, and blacks in general, were made the objects of hate, the Other, against which the two sides in the war could reunite and reconcile. The memory of slavery was recast as benign and civilizing, a white man's project around which North and South could reconcile.[36]

The memory of slavery morphed into a perverse understanding of a *Lost Cause*—a lost way of life that rebranded Southern White Americans as elegant and gentile and reenforced ideas that Black Americans were humanly inferior to Whites. As previously explained, Lost Cause mythology assessed slavery as a charitable act well regarded by Blacks and Whites alike, in doing so, it recast White Southerners as noble caregivers to an inferior race whose Confederacy fought for states' rights and courageously pursued its independence.

The real-world implications of fantastical memory are ensnared in the production of history. As Michel-Rolph Trouillot writes, "History is what happens, but it's also what is said to have happened."[37] Trouillot thinks of history from two viewpoints: positivism and constructionism — he wants to look at history beyond these two viewpoints. He notes the positivist viewpoint is the dominant mode of historicizing in Western culture and privileges power (those who dominated) over other methods of historicization. We can think about positivist history as history without considering privilege or power since it doesn't factor into the narrative. The constructionist view interprets history as fiction. Trouillot maintains, "Narratives are necessarily emplotted in a way that life is not. Thus they necessarily distort life whether or not the evidence upon which they are based could be proved correct. Within that viewpoint, history becomes one among many types of narratives with no particular distinction except for its

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[36] Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma*, 4-5.
[37] Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 3

pretense of truth. Whereas the positivist view hides the types of power behind a naive epistemology, the constructionist one denies the autonomous of the sociohistorical process."[38] Trouillot, in showing us how history is made, reveals that "the epistemological break between history and fiction is always expressed concretely through the historically situated evaluation of specific narratives."[39] Thus, the production of history is not only activated by intellectuals and artists, but also by *amateur historians*—and we are all amateur historians.[40]

My concept of fantastical memory is also influenced by scholars like Kirk Savage, Claire Whitlinger, and Saidiya Hartman who anticipate fantastical memory by using different terms such as *complicated fictions, collective amnesia,* and *the fiction-of-factual-representation.* Kirk Savage writes about collective memory as *complicated fictions*: "We think collective memory—and indeed the 'people' who supposedly share this memory— as complicated fictions, manufactured to serve ideological ends."[41] Savage is writing about how monuments and commemorative public art "speak to or for the larger collective," and argues that a dominant narrative emerges in the public sphere through the visual and material culture of public memory, and, most often, this memory becomes inculcated within a racially biased dominant national memory. [42] And since there are (at least) two Americas there cannot be a single narrative, thus a dominant narrative is also one that necessarily divides and supplants American cultural identities.

Claire Whitlinger likens Lost Cause mythology to a kind of collective forgetting or collective fantasizing about the terrors of slavery and the antebellum South. She writes, "Indeed,

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[38] Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 6.
[39] Trouillot, 8.
[40] Trouillot, 19-20.
[41] Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 6.
[42] Savage, 6

philosophers have long noted the social significance of collective amnesia as the starting point from which to build a new society. Undergirded by this logic, societies emerging from violent conflict have adopted public forgetting as state policy.[43] Whitlinger employs the fiftieth commemoration of the Mississippi Burning Murders as a case study revealing *collective amnesia:*

> Acknowledging the commemorative activities of local African Americans thus casts new light on memory practices in Philadelphia and Neshoba County [Mississippi]. It reveals two parallel mnemonic trajectories: one embedded within Philadelphia's dominant white public sphere, and the other enacted within Philadelphia's black counterpublic—a space where local African Americans and their allies preserved competing versions of the past.[44]

In America, fantastical memory and critical memory compete for validation and recognition—each are branded and marketed as essential to cultivating an *authentic* American identity.

Expounding upon Hayden White's idea of the "fiction of factual representation," Saidiya Hartman writes, "I acknowledge history's 'fiction of factual representation,' to use Hayden White's term, I also recognize the political utility and ethical necessity of historical fiction."[45] Hartman acknowledges a need for the *fiction-of-factual present* to dismiss or obfuscate how America parodies liberty. Hartman encourages us to think about American liberty as a distortion, a fiction, or a contradiction in terms. In other words, Hartman invites us to reevaluate how "American freedom, liberty, justice, democracy came into being through slavery, genocide, rape,

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[43] Claire Whitlinger, *Between Remembrance and Repair: Commemorating Racial Violence in Philadelphia, Mississippi,* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 5-6.
[44] Whitlinger, 17.
[45] Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe,* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1973.
Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection,* 14.

dispossession, murder, and terror."[46] Hartman is not necessarily inviting us to think about memory as fantasy, but she encourages the re-synthesizing of American narratives to include a completer and more holistic understanding of America's founding principles. I argue that this re-examination must necessarily include Lost Cause mythologies as an exemplar of fantastical memory exposing, "the repression of slavery's unspeakable features and the shockingly amnesic portrait of the peculiar institution [that] produced national innocence [for White Americans] yet enhanced the degradation of the past for [Black Americans] still hindered by its vestiges because they became the locus of blame and the site of aberrance."[47] Fantastical memory, then, shapes and continues to shape American cultural identities along a color line that remembers the genealogies of chattel slavery very differently.

Confederate Stewardship

Christian Stewardship is a theological principle that asserts Christians are responsible for the world, humanity, and the blessings bestowed to them by God. Many other religions and spiritual practices espouse concepts of stewardship. Today, Christian Stewardship is strongly linked to ideas about environmentalism and citizenship. Yet, during the Confederacy and lasting until desegregation, Christian Stewardship was perverted by those who used *the curse of Ham* to define racial superiority. *The curse of Ham* has been interpreted throughout centuries to foment some of humanity's most egregious offenses. As Wongi Park writes, "Most often referred to as the 'curse of Ham,' Gen 9:18-29 has been enlisted as a justification for numerous atrocities from

[46] Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, "The Enduring Power of 'Scenes of Subjection,' *The New Yorker,* October 17, 2022, accessed October 19, 2022. https://www.newyorker.com/books/second-read/the-enduring-power-of-scenes-of-subjection-saidiya-hartman

[47] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*,133.

the Crusades, transatlantic slave trade, Rwandan genocide, American slavery and segregation."[48] As Park demonstrates, *the curse of Ham* has been used beyond the context of American slavery; however, for my study, I employ the term Confederate Stewardship to identify how the Confederate WHCCNNm group used this parable as a divining rod to sustain and perpetuate chattel slavery and a racial hierarchy in service to their power and to their self-actualization of perceived human superiority in America.

The curse of Ham is a parable in which one of Noah's three sons, Ham, is cursed for seeing Noah naked and intoxicated and then telling his brothers, Shem and Japheth, about what he's just witnessed. When Shem and Japheth use extreme caution to clothe Noah without gazing upon his naked and intoxicated body, Noah wakes up and intuitively knows what has just transpired. Noah conscripts Ham's son, Canaan, into Shem and Japheth's bondage. The descendants of Shem and Japheth are blessed in perpetuity and Canaan's descendants are relegated to slavery and suffering. Christians are not the only religious order to infer a sense of superiority from Canaan's plight. As Park maintains, "Arguably, no other sacred text in Christianity, Islam, or Judaism has been misused and abused in the interest of racism more than the curse of Ham in Gen 9:18-29."[49] Historically, Confederate Stewardship has been used to frame the transatlantic slave trade and chattel slavery as moral endeavors, as evidenced by Lost Cause mythologies.

In the antebellum American South, interpretations of Ham gave way to certain racialized entitlements taken on behalf of the WHCCNNm group. Among these, a God-granted authority to not only assume the apex of a racial hierarchy but to also drive a noble and dutiful sense of

[48] Wongi Park, "The Blessing of Whiteness in the Curse of Ham: Reading Gen 9:18–29 in the Antebellum South," *Religions* 12, no. 11: 928, (October 25, 2021): 1-18, 2. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12110928
[49] Park, 2.

husbandry for God's lesser creatures—this extended to their wives, other humans, plants, animals, and everything else on earth. Park argues that *the curse of Ham* created "a biblical foil for circumscribing a social hierarchy of race," in doing so, the rationale for Confederate Stewardship is "rooted in a deracialized whiteness that was biblically produced and blessed with divine authority."[50]

Antebellum views about racial (and gendered) hierarchies would leak through after the Confederacy's defeat creating palimpsests of antebellum ideologies in post-Civil War American culture. Vestiges of the Confederacy proliferated through Lost Cause mythologies and cultural attitudes about Blackness that encouraged a litany of disgusting acts, chiefly among them the lynching of Black Americans as popular entertainment. As Robert P. Jones writes, "Much of the recorded history of slavery, segregation, and racism gives scant treatment to the integral, active role that white, Christian leaders played in constructing, maintaining, and protecting white supremacy in their communities."[51] Confederate Stewardship is a uniquely American branch of white supremacy that materializes as systemic racism—*the afterlife of slavery*. Jones contends, "white churches were the institutions of ultimate legitimization, where white supremacy was divinely justified via a carefully cultivated Christian theology."[52] The legacy of white supremacy and the afterlife of slavery, endures as the WHCCNNm group continues to move socially upwards at the harm and disenfranchisement of those not in the group. Sophia Driscoll Gamber argues that white supremacy is in and of itself an American theology. She contends, "[A] white Jesus is working for the success of the American project [and this idea] allows white Americans to feel as though white supremacy stretches back thousands of years and stretches forward

[50] Park, 3.
[51] Robert P. Jones, *White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity*, (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2020), 32.
[52] Jones, 33.

through sacred space to heaven, where it sits at the right hand of God. Holy whiteness is used to sanctify racial hierarchy, American exceptionalism, and Manifest Destiny, which sits at the root of U.S. imperialistic agendas. It builds a narrative that positions white people as God's Israelites, chosen people in a chosen land destined to bring about a new world order predicated upon their greatness."[53] Therefore, Christian principles, American liberty, and an understanding of the WHCCNNm group's superiority are imbricated in and through antebellum residues that, as Gamber claims, significantly impact one's construction of American cultural identity.[54] The embodiment of this social positioning and its effects on Southern cultural heritage are what I describe as the Confederate gaze.

The Confederate Gaze

The Confederate gaze is a performative discourse that not only characterizes Southern heritage but also constructs a frame, or point of view, with which to see the world. The Confederate gaze positions the WHCCNNm group as the subject viewing all others as objects and defining existential parameters for those not in the group. Richard Dyer argues that the concept of whiteness is based on a historically complicated relationship to Christian purity and heterosexuality.[55] I extend Dyer's ideas to Southern culture and heritage. A Confederate gaze reproduces characteristics of Southern heritage that include (among others): a declaration of Christian values, a passion for the Second Amendment, resistance to outside cultural norms (which are perceived as attacks on Southern culture), a perceived ownership of female romantic and/or sex partners, and an expression of virile masculinity which typically resonates and reproduces in mediated representations of country music, large trucks, hunting, football, and beer

[53] Sophia Driscoll Gamber, "Our Christian Nation: White Supremacy and the Making of an American Theology," *Religious Studies Summer Fellows*, (2017): 1-51, 23-24.
[54] Gamber, 1-3.
[55] Dyer, *White*, 15-25.

campaigns. Therefore, the Confederate gaze includes an interpretation of masculinity that constructs characteristics of Southern cultural heritage based on religious and cultural attitudes about race, gender and sexuality.

The Confederate gaze stems from Confederate Stewardship and continues to privilege the WHCCNNm point of view as the de facto American view, the taken-for-granted-ness point of view, a necessarily masculine point of view. Dyer argues that the model for white masculinity "can be characterized as low, dark and irremediably corporeal, reproduc[ing] the structure of feeling of the Christ story…. The model for white women is the Virgin Mary, a pure vessel for reproduction who is unsullied by the dark drives that reproduction entails."[56] Dyer contends that White men are encouraged to conflate their existence with the temptations of Christ while White womanhood is conflated with the sanctity and purity of the Virgin Mary. Men are taught that controlling their sexual desire is their single moral vice, while women are taught to protect their virginity and to cater to men (first to their fathers and brothers and then to their husbands).

White women are the necessary progenitors of a white race, and, therefore, are also positioned as the locus for White male anxieties. Dyer argues, "as the literal bearers of children, and because they are held primarily responsible for their initial raising, women are the indispensable means by which the group—the race—is in every sense reproduced. Women are also required to display the signs, especially the finery, of the social groups to which they are bonded in heterosexuality, be it class or race. White women thus carry—or, in many narratives, betray—the hopes, achievements and character of the race. They guarantee its reproduction, even while not succeeding to its highest heights."[57] I extend Dyer's conception of whiteness and heteronormativity to understand how the Confederate gaze produces traditional gendered roles as

[56] Dyer, 28-29.
[57] Dyer, 29.

well as engenders masculine interpretations of ownership, objecthood, and a compulsion to protect the sanctity and purity of White women. Thus, perceptions of White womanhood become another facet of white supremacy and foment anxieties expressed through acts of white chivalry.

White anxiety and white chivalry are two sides of the same coin: one reifies itself in the other. As I have previously explained white anxiety stems from a fear that Black (and Jewish/immigrant) bodies will replace White bodies, *Le Grand Remplacement*. White chivalry, the protection and sanctity of white women and children, has morphed from its origins in the medieval era. Chivalry was a written code of ethics for French knighthood, and as chivalry became romanticized in the literature and culture of France, chivalry spread and adapted. Maurice Keen writes, "The military experience of the fourteenth century had cemented a mental equation of chivalry and *gentilesse* [or kindness], which now included the esquires, and had anchored it firmly in the mind-set both of the gentry themselves and of their superior patrons."[58] Chivalry moved beyond the realms of knighthood and the upper echelons of French society and became acculturated not only in France but was quickly adopted by the English. White chivalry is a proliferation of this code of ethics.

In addition to interpellating women as passive objects, the Confederate gaze projects Black people as inferior, less intelligent, and more prone to acts of violence and criminality. My conceptualization of the Confederate gaze is inspired by Harvey Young's assertion that Blackness is a projection cast onto bodies. Young views Blackness as a phenomenon projected onto flesh: "When a driver speeds past a pedestrian and yells, *"N-----,"* she launches her epithet at an idea of the body, an instantiation of her understanding of blackness."[59] Similarly, the

[58] Maurice Keen, "Chivalry," in *Gentry Culture in Late-Medieval England*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020).
[59] Harvey Young, *Embodying the Black Experience*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 7.

Confederate gaze projects race onto a body; the person projecting their idea of Blackness is *making-it-so* onto another's body. If Blackness is a projection, then the Confederate gaze is its projector.

Black American experiences are not identical; they are uniquely individualized except for the mantle/projection of Blackness that touches each Black American life. Black American existence has been forced to delicately walk "the color line," negotiating the "double consciousness" that W.E.B. DuBois put forth in 1905 and has been long established within the academy as the fundamental experience of Black Americans.[60] Harvey Young asserts that Black Americans experience similar conditions and consequences due to the shared phenomenon of *double consciousness* despite the reality that all Americans are individuals and no Black person has the same experience.

The Confederate gaze defines what Blackness looks like for both Black and White bodies in a white supremacist America. Young writes, "The black body…is a body that has been forced into the public spotlight and given a compulsory visibility. It has been *made to be given to be seen*. Its condition, as DuBois famously observed, is a 'sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others.' This awareness of one's status as the seen/scene structures behavior."[61] The Confederate gaze persists in "the eyes of others," this is the effect of generations of White bodies projecting racialized stereotypes onto non-White bodies. The "compulsory visibility" may be thought of as a performance that remains from generations of White Americans imbuing non-White bodies with subhuman qualities. I describe this gaze as *Confederate* because of the historical formation of White American identity, as being created

[60] W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches.* (Chicago: A. G. McClurg, 1905) reprinted (New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1968).
[61] Young, *Embodying the Black Experience*, 12.

alongside Black American identity, in response to Jim Crow era imagery, narratives, and social understandings of white superiority and Black inferiority. This identity formation was developed during the era of Reconstruction and perpetuated again during the Civil Rights era and the move to desegregate American institutions.

Young further clarifies how a Confederate gaze creates a double vision for Black Americans. He tells the story of Rev. Jesse Jackson walking down the street and hearing footsteps behind him. Jackson thinks he's about to be mugged and he envisions a Black man doing the mugging. When he realizes the would-be mugger is a White man Jackson is filled with chagrin and grief. Young writes, "His pain emerges from his (mis)reading of the absent black body from the same outside perspective that conceivably could be used to (mis)read his own body… Jackson's self-revelation suggests that the black body is both an externally applied projection blanketed across black bodies and an internalization of the projected image by black folk. Black folk also suspect the black body."[62] Young surmises, "this double vision is accompanied by an internalized double voice."[63] This example shows how the Confederate gaze is not merely a performance remain resonating in White bodies, Black bodies, too, can project a Confederate gaze.

Overt and Covert Racial Bias

The machinations of white supremacy perform explicitly and implicitly—there are examples of blatant racism which I identify as overt, and the more coded, less obvious examples which I identify as covert examples of racial bias. Ron Eyerman interprets overt and covert types of racism as hot and cool expressions of white supremacy: "The cooler and more banal of these two articulations aligns with white privilege and assumes there is value inherent in light skin

[62] Young, 13.
[63] Young, 13.

tone…. The hot articulation exists as a conscious expression of this taken-for-granted entitlement; it explicitly asserts and justifies it and calls for its collective defense."[64]

Covert Racism

Covert racism includes code words and dog-whistle politics. Perhaps the most flagrant explanation of covert racism can be found in a quote from Lee Atwater given during an anonymous interview regarding President Richard Nixon's southern strategy:

> You start out in 1954 by saying, "N-----, n-----, n------!" By 1968, you can't say n----- – that hurts you. Backfires. So, you say stuff like forced busing, states' rights and all that stuff. You're getting so abstract now, you're talking about cutting taxes. And all these things you're talking about are totally economic things and a byproduct of them is [that] blacks get hurt worse than whites. And subconsciously maybe that is part of it. I'm not saying that. But I'm saying that if it is getting that abstract, and that coded, that we are doing away with the racial problem one way or the other. You follow me – because obviously sitting around saying, "We want to cut this," is much more abstract than even the busing thing, and a hell of a lot more abstract than "N-----, n-----!"[65]

Covert racism has many iterations; dog-whistling politics uses coded language to influence and inspire Americans to vote towards racially biased policies. In *Dog Whistle Politics: How Coded Racial Appeals Have Reinvented Racism and Wrecked the Middle Class*, Ian Haney López defines dog-whistle-politics as, "coded racial appeals that carefully manipulate hostility towards nonwhites. Examples of dog whistling include repeated blasts about criminals and welfare

[64] Eyerman, *The Making of White American Identity*, 6.
[65] Craig S. Pascoe, Karen Trahan Leathem, and Andy Ambrose, *The American South in the Twentieth Century*. (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2005), 230.

cheats, illegal aliens, and sharia law in the heartland. Superficially, these provocations have nothing to do with race, yet they nevertheless powerfully communicate messages about threatening nonwhites."[66] Dog-whistle politics and coded racial bias work surreptitiously to prevent equal access to liberties by politicizing equity and by employing a theory of scarcity—an idea that political equity is synonymous with robbing or taking power away from the dominant group.

White Cultural Identity—White Americans between Two Poles

After reviewing the scholarship regarding whiteness and White American cultural identity, I believe that identities for White Americans exist and are best interpreted on a binary spectrum of patriotism and allyship. I choose terms like *patriot* and *ally* because of their use by advocacy groups, media personalities, and political branding campaigns. *Patriotism* refers to Americans that adhere to and proselytize the tenets of white supremacy. Patriots believe in the heroic version of American history which casts the WHCCNNm group as courageous rebels fighting for independence and liberty. Patriots deny racial bias and assert that "We are just one race here. It is American" (a phrase used by Justice Antonin Scalia to formally deny reparations for Black Americans in 1995).[67] *Allyship* represents those White Americans that identify and appreciate that white privilege is a legacy of white supremacy. Allies strive towards processing the cultural trauma of slavery and Jim Crow era violations in attempts to amend racialized bias and advantages assumed by White bodies. Allies believe that America is still working towards its promise of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for every American.

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[66] Ian Haney López, *Dog Whistle Politics: How Coded Racial Appeals Have Reinvented Racism and Wrecked the Middle Class*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), ix.
[67] Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*,166.

White Power

White Power is the product of white supremacy, its legacy can be understood as a component in the afterlife of slavery. White power is the racialized perpetuation of circumstances such as governance, societal, and media representations that allow the WHCCNNm group's power to remain viable. Some argue that "white power" began as a protest chant in response to the Black power protest chant. Since then, it has come to signify the manifestations of white supremacy and the legacy of white dominance (and non-white submission). I argue that white power is a sense of authority enjoyed by the WHCCNNm group in America. Those who do not qualify for WHCCNNm status do not enjoy the full American freedoms because they do not have full access to the white power. Saidiya Hartman writes, "Two and a half centuries of chattel slavery had successfully conflated race and status; the faltered attempt to unloosen this snarl illumined the degree to which race operated to obscure the very presence of the Euro-American lower orders by promoting them to the other side of the color-line."[68] Hartman contends that post-Civil War segregation elevated sub-White races (those of Irish, Italian, and Polish descent) to the level of the WHCCNNm group. White supremacy has, thus, continued to flourish and permeate through various and insidious interpretations of the racial hierarchy in America since its inception and especially since the Civil War. I use the term white power to refer to the political, financial, military, and cultural power of the WHCCNNm group in America today, and I argue that it's the most enduring legacy of white supremacy. White power can be understood as the raison d'être of white supremacy.

Literature Review

Performing History

[68] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*,167.

Performance Studies and Art History scholars who write about cultural memory, memorialization, and reenactments have bolstered academic interest in creative memorialization practices. In *Performative Monuments*, Mechtild Widrich argues that monuments and memorials provoke performances from their spectators and that these performative acts contribute to community building as well as assuaging collective traumas.[69] Widrich argues that monuments evoke performances from their visitors and that these interactions result in a new genre of public action. She further explains how the burgeoning 1960s performance art scene paved the road for new modalities of commemoration in 1980s Europe. She concludes that the dialectic between performance art and monumental objects/spaces creates a quasi-symbiotic relationship in which "political responsibility is performed by historically aware individuals in acts of commemoration."[70] Like Widrich, I analyze how performance documents, audiences, sites, and monuments extend invitations to co-produce/co-perform cultural memory as social practice—often with significant political and relational consequences. I expand upon Widrich's study to examine heritage performances, commemoration rallies, and online content that engage specifically with legacies and subversions of white supremacy in America.

Widrich surmises that the significance of performative monuments factors in through their assemblage of cultural memory and collective trauma; my work examines social practice performances and acts of commemoration that create cultural identities and publicize histories of domination and resiliency. The case studies in this dissertation use social practice performance to transform the cultural meanings and historical narratives associated with heritage performances,

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[69] Mechtild Widrich, *Performative Monuments: The Rematerialisation of Public Art,* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014.
[70] Mechtild Widrich, "Performing Monuments: Public Art, Commemoration, and History in Postwar Europe," abstract, PhD dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2009. https://dspace.mit.edu/handle/1721.1/54554

sacred places, rallies, social media forums, and online content. Widrich explores how monuments perform community building, while I am interested in what is made by performing alongside commemorative rituals, online message boards, sacred sites, and digital content. I wonder how these performances create new cultural identities and perhaps might even lead to a reexamination and a reframing of American history. Therefore, my study, building on Widrich's theorization of performative monuments as speech-acts and agents of community building, foregrounds performative monuments as agents for social justice, historical reckonings, and (also) white supremacy.

Diana Taylor's close reading of an annual fiesta in the Mexican town of Tepoztlán is another site-specific study that influences my research. Taylor argues that performance reactivates histories and has the power to change political outcomes, government dealings, and municipal practices. She invites her readers to redefine history because, as she argues, history is not linear: it is holistic, even rhizomic. In "Performance And/As History," Taylor, building on her influential *The Archive and the Repertoire*, further clarifies the value of performance as a more inclusive way of learning about cultural heritage, especially from societies that do not privilege literate artifacts. Taylor demonstrates how history and performance have a kind of symbiotic relationship in which performance and history combine to create epistemological opportunities. Together, history and performance create an innovative approach to thinking about performance as episteme. Taylor uses the annual festival in Tepoztlan as a case study for understanding how performance reactivates the past and how these performances shape municipal practices. Taylor successfully demonstrates how commemoration performances influence political policies; I will apply her ideas to demonstrate how specifically American

performances of commemoration and content-making reactivate history to establish and perpetuate American cultural identities in the present.

Freddie Rokem provides an understanding of how performance links us to the past on a cognitive and emotional level in his canonical book, *Performing History.* Rokem investigates how audiences experience history through performance. For Rokem, various *theatrical energies* (the ability for collaborative performances to "bring together diverse ontological spheres")[71] combine in a theatrical setting to produce moments of catharsis. Rokem argues, "theatrical practices can be seen as a point of convergence or union for these differently constituted energies, which are generally conceived of as belonging to completely different ontological spheres."[72] The intersection of these social and *theatrical energies* becomes "the point where history becomes fully integrated within a performance."[73] More simply, performances create an amalgam of varying ontologies like aesthetics, history, semiotics, and societal ideologies, among others, and this amalgam transmits from actor to spectator creating a personal experience of the historical.

Rokem wrote about how actors in performances act as *hyper-historians* linking audiences with historical material that fuses the spectators' subjective notions of history with the actors' portrayal of history.[74] This relationship between spectator and actor-historian demonstrates how performance art in public spaces operates. Rokem speaks specifically about theatrical acting, but I will use Rokem's ideas about hyper-historians to discuss what is created during the exchange between social practice artists and their environments, which include spectators/citizens.

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[71] Freddie Rokem, *Performing History: Theatrical Representations of the Past in Contemporary Theatre,* (Iowa City, University of Iowa Press, 2000), 191.
[72] Rokem, 190.
[73] Rokem, 191.
[74] Rokem, 202-205.

Rokem's concept of the hyper-historian creates a mode for creative learning. I will extend Rokem's concept of the hyper-historian in Chapter One to demonstrate how Confederate Americans become *living memorials.*

Rebecca Schneider's research on battle reenactments melds the actor to history using another meaningful but different method. Schneider's work focuses on how the past remains through reenactment and argues that reenactment offers a way of learning about history, similar to photographs; reenactment is like a double negative of history. Like Taylor, Schneider suggests that embodying history through performance is possible and meaningful and that it also creates space to learn and promote marginalized histories. However, Schneider's work is much more concerned with the archive and how live theatre exists both somatically as well as in the archives. Schneider reconsiders performance as not "of" disappearance,[75] but as both the act of remaining and as a means of re-appearance and "reparticipation." For Schneider, "performance does not disappear when approached from this perspective, though its remains are the immaterial of live, embodied acts. Rather, performance plays the 'sedimented acts' and spectral meanings that haunt material in constant collective interaction, in constellation, in transmutation."[76] This dissertation similarly asks its readers to reconsider what performance means and how it operates under commemorative and historiographical lenses. This dissertation relies upon Schneider's theories, especially in Chapter Three, to examine how white supremacy remains performative in the articulation of white power as well as how white power is itself a performance remain/artifact of white supremacy.

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[75] Peggy Phelan famously surmises that live theatre becomes itself through the act of disappearance in "The Ontology of Performance: Representation without Reproduction," *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993):146-166.

[76] Rebecca Schneider *Performance Remains: Art and War in Time of Theatrical Reenactment,* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 101-102.

Cultural Identity

Cultural studies presents the concept of cultural identity as a discursive practice that constructs ideas about the self through imbricated experiences substantiated by culture. Stuart Hall argues that identity is a layered web of how one perceives themselves in comparison to the Other. Hall argues that identities are "always in progress" and "constructed through, not outside difference."[77] Hall warns, "This entails the radically disturbing recognition that it is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called its *constitutive outside* that the 'positive' meaning of any term—and thus its 'identity'--can be constructed."[78] Cultural identities are constructed by considering oneself in relation to the Other, but in America, one's relational experience with white supremacy adds an additional dynamic layer of cultural identity in the post-Civil War United States.

Cultural identities in America are uniquely charged artifacts of multiculturalism, which Homi K. Bhabha describes as, "a portmanteau term for anything from minority discourse to postcolonial critique, from gay and lesbian studies to chicano/a fiction." He expands further saying, "[multiculturalism] has become the most charged sign for describing the scattered social contingencies that characterize contemporary *Kulturkritik [critique of our civilization or culture]*."[79] More simply, it is difficult to discuss cultural identity as a multi-played, plastic, persona despite the best efforts of academic thinkers through generations of critical theory. I argue that cultural identities in America are formed in relation to one's experiences with white supremacy and Otherness. Cultural identities are self-realized through experiences in popular

[77] Stuart Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'?," *Questions of Cultural Identity*, Eds. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay, (London: Sage Publishing, 1996): 1-17, 2, 4.
[78] Hall, 4-5.
[79] Homi K. Bhabha, "Culture's In-Between" in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, Eds. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay, (London: Sage Publishing, 1996): 53-60. 55

culture, this includes performances of commemoration. Cultural identities commemorate cultural memories specific to one's culture. For example, a person may identify as Confederate American because they celebrate and commemorate Confederate ancestry.

Human experience cannot be compartmentalized into discrete sections; the overlapping systems that create American cultural identity are often referred to as intersectional identities. I include intersectionality as an example of how Americans may belong to different cultural identities simultaneously, and that race is an important part of cultural identity in the post-Civil War United States. Intersectionality has experienced some mutation since Kimberle Crenshaw introduced the term in 1989 to explain legal biases emanating from the intersection of race and sex.[80] Intersectionality is the understanding that some people experience myriad oppressive categories in an overlapping dynamism and that legal biases exist to exploit and perpetuate these overlapping systems of oppression. Before Crenshaw labeled this phenomenon as intersectionality, bell hooks, Audre Lorde, and Gloria Anzaldúa were writing about the interdependent systems of oppression experienced by non-white women.[81] Yet, in popular culture, intersectionality has been expanded outside the discipline of women's studies to include people who identify as and/or experience the world as non-white, non-heterosexual, transsexual, disabled, and/or non-neurotypical.

Intersectionality has gone mainstream, so to speak, and, according to Sirma Bilge has become a point of contention in feminist academic writing. Bilge argues that disciplinary intersectionality, or, the institutionalized product of academically conditioned intersectional

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[80] Kimberle Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum*: (Volume 1989: 1.8): 139-167.

[81] bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*, (Boston: South End Press, 1990).
Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, (New York: Crossing Press, 1984).
Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987).

theory, has purposely depoliticized the power of intersectionality through the "whitening of intersectionality."[82] This "whitening" refers to the academic fawning of intersectionality as "the brainchild of feminism" and an erasure of black feminist scholars for "other (usually white) mothers."[83] Bilge writes, "The appropriation of a whitened intersectionality needs to be countered by insistently emphasizing intersectionality's constitutive ties with critical race thinking and (re)claiming a non-negotiable status for race and the racializing processes in intersectional analysis and praxis."[84] This dissertation grapples specifically with legacies and subversions of white supremacy. Culture in America is commemorated and performed along racialized interpretations of American history. Intersectionality is a discipline originally intended to examine the legal biases non-white women experience, however, as Bilge criticizes, it has been appropriated by (mainly white) women's studies scholars.

American cultural identities are also relational to one's experience with nationalism. The actual concept of nationalism, and cultural identity, are based on imaginary demarcations publicized by mediated, popular culture. bell hooks argues that representations in the media contribute to a cultural stereotype of blackness: hooks implores us to exercise a critical gaze when viewing pop-culture representations of Otherness.[85] hooks argues that existing in the margins of society can carry a powerful and transformative agency with it. She writes, "Marginality as a site of resistance. Enter that space. Let us meet there. Enter that space. We greet you as liberators. Spaces can be real and imagined. Spaces can tell stories and unfold histories. Spaces can be interrupted, appropriated, and transformed through artistic and literary

[82] Sirma Bilge, "Intersectionality Undone: Saving Intersectionality from Feminist Intersectional Studies," *DuBois Review*, 10:2 (2013): 405-424.
[83] Bilge, 413, 416.
[84] Bilge, 413.
[85] bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 220-227.

practice."[86] The paradox of "real and imagined" spaces as well as the transformative and political power they possess is the locus for critical theories regarding nationalism.

Benedict Anderson warns that even though nationalism, like race and gender, is a fundamentally imaginary distinction, the consequences and effects of nationalism are visceral and authoritative. Anderson writes, "It would, I think, make things easier if one treated [nationalism] as if it belonged with 'kinship' and 'religion,' rather than with 'liberalism' or 'fascism'."[87] This dissertation examines how American cultural identities perform or subvert white supremacy. Understanding that American cultural identities are part of a web of relational "kinship" and "religion" bolsters my argument that the racial hierarchy in America has deep roots in cultural heritage and religious ideology. I argue that considering legacy and subversive performances of white supremacy add another layer of consciousness to racialized dynamics that create existential boundaries for both the WHCCNNm group and everyone else.

Cultural identities in America are, as Hall describes, "layers" of comparisons one makes to the Other.[88] The combination of othering signifiers has come to be known in American popular culture as intersectionality. Before intersectionality was appropriated by mainstream identity critics, multiculturalism was used as a qualifier for overlapping cultural identities, what Bhabha refers to as "partial cultures." Historically, Others have been assessed and critiqued as existing in liminal spaces as "an imposition coming from the outside and making its demands from there," but Bhabha argues, "the challenge is to deal not with them/us but with historically and temporally disjunct positions that minorities occupy ambivalently within the nation's

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[86] bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* Boston: South End Press, 1990, 151-152.
[87] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London: Verson, 1983), 5.
[88] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity*, Edited by Jonathan Rutherford, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990): 222-227.

space."[89] This dissertation understands White American cultural identities as shaped in comparison to the Other as well as to one's relationship with and experience of white supremacy. One's cultural understanding of and experience with generational trauma acquired through engagements with and through white supremacy add an additional "layer" to American cultural identity. White Americans may experience degrees of racialized trauma by bearing witness to commemorative practices and celebrations of American histories that engage with subversions of white supremacy; however, as I demonstrate in Chapter Two, the white body is limited in this regard.

Methodology

I rely upon performance studies methods like commonplace witnessing, activism, and co-performance to research transmissions and disruptions of white supremacy in the post-Civil War United States. Commonplace witnessing is a performative act Americans engage with when we commemorate our various cultural heritages. I rely upon it specifically to analyze the audience (and my role in the audience) during the Confederate Memorial Day celebration at Beauvoir Historic House and Jefferson Davis Presidential Library in Biloxi, MS. Activism is a core component of practicing performance studies because activism engenders opportunities for co-performance. The final methodology, co-performance, is a collaborative epistemology I use to research cultures in a supportive role. These methodologies allow me to research alongside other groups without perpetuating the long-criticized power dynamic between researcher and subject. The relationship between myself and the case studies in this dissertation is substantiated by invitation, collaboration, and vulnerability.

<u>Commonplace Witnessing</u>

[89] Bhabha, "Culture's In-Between," 57.

Commonplace witnessing refers to the ways people commemorate, confirm, and reproduce histories. Bradford Vivian maintains, "One bears witness so that one's person, as well as one's story will be affirmed—so that oneself will be legible as a model of conduct."[90] Witnessing belongs in a repertoire of social performance: Vivian argues that witnessing is "an adaptable rhetorical practice, consisting of customary persuasive forms and techniques, disseminated through diverse mediums of communication in order to advance a variety of civic and humanitarian goals."[91] For Vivian, we are the history to which we bear witness.

Commonplace witnessing employs rhetorical inventions, ideas about authenticity, and the compossibilty of witnessing, "We are all witnesses; none of us are witnesses."[92] In other words, witnessing is part of the dominant culture's initiative to repair difficult histories, and witnessing requires a certain kind of suspension of logic, or make-believe for it to be effective—the person bears witness to a past atrocity of which they were not present. The person bears witness to rhetorical inventions that evoke atrocities and create a memory of an atrocity they did not themselves bear witness. In doing so, one may finally bear witness to the atrocities of the past in the present. It is a kind of history unfolding into the present and future through witnessing that allows us to process the difficult histories and finally begin to open up to forgiveness. A kind of forgiveness for humanity's failings because witnessing in this way allows us to finally see the past through evocative rhetorical inventions. People invent rhetoric for witnessing by repeating themes and commonplace tropes to communicate authenticity, regret, habituation (among other things) regarding historical atrocities. The speaker and their audience create the aporia, or suspension of logic, and this is how we bear witness to atrocities that have already passed. We

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[90] Bradford Vivian, *Commonplace Witnessing: Rhetorical Invention, Historical Remembrance, and Public Culture,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. 48.
[91] Vivian, 9.
[92] Vivian, 163.

are, in effect, bearing witness to something that we can only bear witness to by proxy. Compossibility, the ability for witnessing to be simultaneously both possible and impossible, is a sign of our era's societal and political morays.[93]

Activism and Assembly

Activism, along with art-making and critical analysis, belongs to the triad of performance studies as conceived by Dwight Conquergood and later expounded upon by his colleague and student, D. Soyini Madison.[94] Conquergood dedicates an entire tine of the performance studies trident to citizenship/articulation. He describes the articulation of performance studies as, "activism, outreach, connection to community; applications and interventions; action research; projects that reach outside the academy and are rooted in an ethic of reciprocity and exchange; knowledge that is tested by practice within a community; social commitment, collaboration, and contribution/intervention as a way of knowing: praxis."[95] Conquergood and Madison foster a branch of performance studies grounded in communication studies, cultural studies, and anthropology. Diana Taylor, inspired by performance studies icon--Richard Schechner, and borrowing from Conquergood and Madison's ideas about practicing performance ethnography, describes her activism as being ¡presente!:

> Presence, as ¡presente!, as embodied engagement, as political attitude, asks us to reexamine what we (think) we know, how we know, and the obligations and responsibilities that accompany such knowledge… ¡Presente! As an organizing concept informs my project in several key

[93] Vivian, 191-192.
[94] Dwight Conquergood, "Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research," *TDR,* Vol 46 no 2, MIT Press (Summer 2002): 145-156.
D. Soyini Madison, "Co-Performative Witnessing," *Cultural Studies,* Vol. 21, no 6. (November 2007): 826-831.
[95] Conquergood, "Interventions and Radical Research," 152.

> ways: epistemically, politically, artistically, and pedagogically. ¡Presente! Performs the methodology (walking), the attitude, and the existential urgency of the argument. It is the argument. We need to be ¡presentes![96]

Taylor roots her duty to be ¡presente! in Gayatari Spivak's "ethical imperative… to standup to and speak against injustice."[97] Madison grounds her belief that one's compulsion to act ethically is linked to a duty to preserve the goodness of humanity as theorized by David Hume and Jean-Jacque Rousseau.[98] Madison explains, "As critical ethnographers, we are compelled to act morally; in other words, we feel the responsibility to make *a difference in the world*—to contribute to the quality of life and to the enlivening possibilities of those we study."[99] Activism, as a core concept of performance studies, guides performance studies scholars in their fieldwork. Sometimes this fieldwork includes attending subversive assemblies, or protests, as well as performances of commemoration.

In *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, Judith Butler writes about activism through the theoretical framework of precarity and an analysis of the right to assemble. For Butler, the right to assemble is akin to "we the people" taken as a speech-act. They specifically point to the importance of embodied activism saying, "the gathering signifies in excess of what is said, and that mode of signification is a concerted bodily enactment, a plural form of performativity."[100] Butler goes on to explain the special effect of transforming from an "I" to a "we" as something confusing and ineffable, but also something that produces an energy through

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[96] Diana Taylor, *¡Presente!: The Politics of Presence*, (Durham: Duke University Press), 2020. 5.
[97] Taylor, 4.
[98] D. Soyini Madison, *Critical Ethnography: Methods, Ethics, and Performance*, (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2005), 83-88.
[99] Madison, 83.
[100] Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performativity Theory of Assembly*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 8.

co-performance. They write, “So this movement or stillness, this parking of my body in the middle of another’s action, is neither my act nor yours, but something that happens by virtue of the relation between us, arising from that relation, equivocating between the I and the we, seeking at once to preserve and disseminate the generative value of that equivocation, an active and deliberately sustained relation, a collaboration distinct from hallucinatory merging or confusion.”[101] Butler is hinting at the metaphysical energy produced through the co-performance of assembled bodies; their ultimate thesis about performing assembly argues that “acting in concert can be an embodied form of calling into question the inchoate and powerful dimensions of the reigning notion of the political.”[102] Butler continues by hinting again at the invisible force of assembled bodies: “After all, there is an indexical force of the body that arrives with other bodies in a zone visible to media coverage: it is *this* body, and *these* bodies, that require employment, shelter, health care, and food, as well as a sense of a future that is not the future of unpayable debt; it is *this body*, or *these* bodies, or bodies *like* this body or these bodies, that live the condition of an imperiled livelihood, decimated infrastructure, accelerating precarity.” [103] Butler’s “performative theory of assembly” suggests that the assembled body, formed of many bodies, generates the speech-act of “we the people” through collectively shared and/or commiserated precarities.

D. Soyini Madison also points to the importance of bodies in assembly, what she calls *radical performances for human rights* saying, “In every corner of the world, there are those heightened moments when public speech erupts into song, dance, poetry, chant, dramatic testimony, and a procession of symbolic acts. Sometimes these performances are planned but

[101] Butler, 9.
[102] Butler, 9.
[103] Butler, 9-10.

often they seem to surface from the passion and communion of public deliberation or dissent."[104] Madison points to these kinds of performances and assemblies as evoking *flow*. Madison defines flow as a holistic sensation experienced when acting in accordance with a group towards a shared goal. She argues that this holistic sensation becomes a state in which a group moves as a whole, where actions are followed by other actions in a tacit collaboration with others. She writes, "This unifying act of 'flow' for an individual is an experience of inspiration and deep involvement. When this *deep involvement* animates collective action, it rises in a temporal cohesion where individual identities come together in a kind of rapture, a transference of communal, affective energy. Flow moves to communion."[105] Tapping into the flow, or the *we the people as speech-act*, or allowing oneself to be "¡presente!" means engaging with vulnerability, and typically means becoming vulnerable. Empathy can be a tool used to build identity as well as to engage with vulnerability.

Empathy allows me as a performance ethnographer to engage with people who have experienced traumas unlike my own.[106] Trauma may be transferred through the act of bearing witness: one takes the experience of bearing witness to the commemoration of a traumatic event with them. This phenomenon is experienced by jurors and journalists who witness to violent testimonies; however, it is also experienced by performance studies practitioners and critical ethnographers. There is a transference that occurs in performing acts of commemoration,

[104] D. Soyini Madison, *Acts of Activism: Human Rights as Radical Performance*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 5.
[105] Madison, 6.
[106] It is important to note that empathy cannot be co-performed with others since empathy is a subjectively interpreted and expressed. I use empathy to activate vulnerability and allyship so that I may become ¡presente! during commemoration events, especially the commemoration of racial atrocities.

especially commemorating atrocities, a piece of the trauma stays with the witnessing subject, we can think of this as reconciliatory trauma transfer, or performative trauma transfer.[107]

Critical Performance Ethnography or Co-Performance

Dwight Conquergood writes about the virtues of performance studies, and explicitly how performing alongside someone or something creates a co-performance in which new knowledge and interpretations can be gleaned. He talks about the problems between performance studies practitioners and Art History proper, and he advocates for a nuanced method of research driven by witnessing and participating in performances of various cultures and their rituals. Conquergood believes this type of ethnographic-performative research can help circumvent issues of white supremacy by circumventing power-dynamics of Western/colonial epistemologies.

One of Conquergood's revered colleagues and collaborators, D. Soyini Madison, penned a scholarly tribute to Conquergood lamenting his sudden death, as well as clarifying and expanding upon his ideas regarding co-performative witnessing. Madison writes, "For Dwight, co-performance or co-performative witnessing meant a shared temporality, bodies on the line, soundscapes of power, dialogic inter-animation, political action, and matters of the heart. Each of these domains is infinitely charged with meaning and possibility. This brief writing attempts to pull tougher elements of these domains from Dwight's work. I hope to offer a beginning definition of sorts for co-performative witnessing, a brief comment toward a larger, necessary, and, hopefully, on-going conversation."[108] Madison clarifies co-performative witnessing by

[107] Unlike *trauma transference* which is a psychological phenomenon related to post traumatic stress disorder in which a traumatized person is re-traumatized by their environment, the performative trauma is transferred from one's bearing witness to the commemoration of a traumatic event or atrocity.
[108] Madison, "Co-Performative Witnessing," 827.

breaking it down into three concepts: 1) Coevalness and Borders; 2) Soundscapes and Metonym; and 3) Dialogue and Politics.

Coevalness and borders is a concept that signals to our coevalness – the characteristic of shared time, and the borders that delineate cultures. Madison lauds Conquergood's willingness to open himself to varying peoples who are eager to share their culture with him. Madison writes, "Co-performative witnessing is to live in and spend time in the borderlands of contested identities where you speak 'with' not 'to' others and where your (and their) ethnographic interlocutors are as co-temporal in the report and on state as they were in the field."[109] I am practicing co-performative witnessing when I am invited to (via open invitation to the public) and attend a cultural commemoration such as the Tulsa Race Massacre Centennial Commemoration. Co-performative witnessing differs from ethnography proper because both parties are simultaneously the researcher and the researched. Co-performance describes embodied research as the product, and that scholarly work is collaborative.

Soundscapes, and metonym as a concept, ask the researcher to decenter the script/text of a cultural product in lieu of soundscapes and metonymy. Madison argues that important data is lost by focusing on a transcript/script as the most important artifact from an encounter. Soundscapes became especially important to me when I recorded the candle-light-vigil in Tulsa, and again when I reviewed the recordings of my experience with a performative monument entitled *Society's Cage*. Madison writes, "Soundscapes are illuminated, coalesced, and most effectively politicized through cultural performances, it is through such cultural performances where subaltern counterpublics are sustained and generated…Co-performative witnessing is to be inside the breath and pulse of cultural performance as a feeling, sensing, being, and doing

[109] Madison, 828.

witness."[110] Reframing research and data-collection as a collaboration, or, something that occurs through immersion and personal activism interrupts systems of knowledge that are pro-Western. These learning models, sometimes referred to as European-centric, may also be categorized as white-supremacist systems of learning due to structures that privilege white scholarship and perpetuate researcher/Other relationships.

The final concept Madison purports is that of dialogue and politics. This is where performance studies and activism must unite. Performance studies can be thought of as an allyship, a willingness to become vulnerable and receptive to experience. Madison writes, "We cannot be subjects without dialogue, without witnessing. Counterbalance is central in the give and take of dialogue and in the meeting of two subjects whose objectives grow and deepen from their mutual encounter. Dialogic performance as co-performative witnessing is ultimately a political act because it requires that we do what Others do *with* them inside the politics of their locations, the economies of their desires and their constraints, and, most importantly, inside the materiality of their struggles and the consequences."[111] Using my body as a vehicle for allyship, or to be united in and empathetic with injustices experienced by marginalized communities is at the center of my co-performative witnessing. To be present in a shared cause, a shared body comprised of many bodies moving together figuratively and most often physically toward a shared goal is how performance studies is articulated in the world. Globally, we experienced this concept of co-performative witnessing during the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020 as millions around the globe organized and participated in demonstrations protesting systemic racism, especially institutionalized racism derived from white supremacy and colonization.

[110] D Madison, "Co-Performative Witnessing," 828-829.
[111] D Madison, 829.

I use Bradford Vivian's concept of commonplace witnessing, Dwight Conquergood and Soyini Madison's methodology of co-presence/co-performing combined with Diana Taylor's ideas about being ¡presente! to conduct critical performance ethnography. I lean on both the Northwestern brand of Performance Studies, which stems from communication studies, cultural studies, and anthropology, and the New York University's current brand of performance studies via its Western Hemisphere Institute as led by Diana Taylor. These two institutions' attitudes about performance ethnography, more specifically critical performance ethnography, influence the work I do regarding public commemorations and co-performance. To interpret this data, I will observe Mechtild Widrich's teachings on performative monuments as a type of community building as well as Saidiya Hartman's concept of *the afterlife of slavery* as a performative discourse that affects all Americans.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter One

Chapter One identifies and analyzes performed legacies of white supremacy at The Beauvoir Historic House and Jefferson Davis Presidential Library in Biloxi, MS. This chapter breaks down the components of commonplace witnessing to describe how legacies of white supremacy are perpetuated. I examine performances of Beauvoir's Confederate Memorial Day proceedings to describe how people become living memorials and how the audience re-constitutes performative monuments that engender and extend the afterlife of the Confederacy.

Chapter Two

Chapter Two examines the Centennial Commemoration of the Tulsa Race Massacre as a social practice that subverts white supremacy. I explore themes of erasure, silencing, and social justice to describe how the Tulsa Race Massacre transformed from counter memory to public

memory during the centennial commemoration and the national attention it inspired. Additionally, I explore vulnerability through my involvement as both a spectator and an actor in commemoration rallies and the limits that my White body presents in commemorating Black cultural trauma.

Chapter Three

Chapter Three expands the concept of critical performance ethnography to include mediated invitations of co-performance. I argue that content creators construct postcolonial digital worlds with subversive examples of satire, and that these performances invite audiences to subvert legacies of white supremacy as they also cultivate American cultural identities that resist the Confederate gaze. This chapter considers the postmodern concept of the Black body and the origins of Black humor to maintain that content creators recycle and reproduce types of humor employed by nineteenth century humorists. I also explore how sass and shade create digital safe spaces for Black content creators to subvert white supremacist ideologies.

When considered together, these chapters reveal myriad ways of affirming and subverting white supremacy in contemporary America. Both embodied invitations and mediated invitations to affirm or subvert white supremacy abound in heritage performances, commemoration rallies, and online content creation/reception. I accept the invitation to co-perform *patriotism* (in a White body) at a Confederate Memorial Day celebration and on white nationalist social media platforms in the first chapter. In the second chapter, I accept an invitation to co-perform *allyship* (in a supportive role to/for Black bodies) by subverting white supremacy in various commemoration rituals in Tulsa, OK. I accept mediated invitations to subvert the Confederate gaze online by engaging with social media sites like YouTube and Instagram. I rely upon qualities like vulnerability and compassion to experiment with co-

performing *patriotism* and *allyship,* and I surmise that vulnerability, compassion, and a commitment to anti-racist endeavors remain important methods for examining race, white supremacy, and the panoply of cultural identities in America.

One important contribution of my study is the negotiation and analysis I make between an existential both/and. I am *both* grateful for and appreciative of my ancestry *and* I reject the racist ideologies of this heritage. In other words, I *both* love my grandmother and I hold fond memories of our loving (and adventurous) times together, *and* I reject her segregationist beliefs and renounce her racist inculcation. Arriving and living in the existential *both/and* of white supremacist heritage has not and is not easy, learning how to hold two truths (I love my grandmother, she is a racist-segregationist) at the same time is heartbreaking (in the easier times) and soul-crushing-relationship-ending (in the worst of times). I have battled with family members and within myself arriving, now, at acceptance, forgiveness, and compassion. Alongside a firm commitment to truth and justice, I hold acceptance, forgiveness, and compassion for my grandmother—whom I still adore—and I exercise acceptance, forgiveness, and compassion for myself during and through the process of arriving at this existential *both/and.*

Chapter One: Co-Performing Legacies of White Supremacy

Introduction

In April 2021, I observed the Confederate Memorial Day celebration at Beauvoir in Biloxi, Mississippi. Beauvoir is a historic house museum and the location of the Jefferson Davis Presidential Library, which is owned and operated by the Sons of Confederate Veterans (SCV). The SCV is a legacy group established in 1896 and organizes many of the American South's Confederate events via their state and local chapters throughout the country. At this memorial celebration, I observed SCV members and other female-driven, prolific, and enduring Confederate-heritage organizations such as the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) and the Order of the Confederate Rose (OCR). The audience also included an SCV motorcycle club, families, tourists, locals, and one news-media reporter, whom I observed to be the only non-white person in attendance.

In this chapter, I explore and discuss fantastical Confederate American identities, both online and in real life, and how they reflect gendered stereotypes emanating from white nationalist organizations, a Confederate gaze, and evangelical Christianity. I rely upon my experience co-performatively witnessing (which I review below) the Confederate Memorial Day celebration to understand that Confederate legacy celebrations evoke characteristics of reenactment to sustain a historical narrative/fiction of the Confederacy from which their

fantastical cultural identities derive. I argue that these fantastical identities rely on fantastical memories of the Lost Cause to sustain both the Confederate fantasy and systems of white supremacy.[112] This sustainment is achieved primarily through reconfiguring history onto bodies through commemorative acts and the rhetorical inventions of commonplace witnessing. Additionally, this chapter analyzes authenticity, regret rhetoric, and *Confederate performative monuments* as performance vehicles used to reproduce and reperform covert racial bias and white power.

Overt and Covert Racism or Racial Bias

As I discussed in the dissertation introduction, scholars have debated the qualifiers for what constitutes racism and racial bigotry; terms such as covert and overt racial bias explain obvious and/or highly nuanced examples and artifacts of white supremacy.[113] Distinguishing between covert and overt forms of white supremacy can be challenging. As Seward Darby writes, "White nationalism makes explicit ideas that are already coded, veiled, or circumscribed in the wider white imagination."[114] These codes are generally thought of as covert forms of white supremacy. As a result, White people can have difficulty discerning white supremacist artifacts within mainstream culture.

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[112] As discussed in the Introduction, Confederate folklore that suggests the Civil War, or the War Between the States in Confederate vernacular, was waged over a crisis of States' rights and had very little to do with slavery. Lost Cause mythology espouses pride in Southern heritage for its morality and refuses the idea that slavery was an egregious institution. It once dominated America's perceptions of the antebellum South, especially from 1890 to 1955, despite documented evidence with the official articles of secession that every Confederate state cited slavery as the reason, some as the primary reason, for leaving The Union.

[113] R.D. Coates, "Covert Racism: An Introduction," *Covert Racism: Theories, Institutions, and Experiences*, (Leidan, The Netherlands: Brill Publishers, 2011): 1-18.
Sean Elias, "Racism, Overt," *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Race, Ethnicity, and Nationalism*. Eds. Polly S. Rizova, et al…, (New York: John Wiley and Sons Limited Publishing, 2016): 1-3.

[114] Seyward Darby, *Sisters in Hate: American Women and White Extremism*, (New York: Back Bay Books, 2020), 7.

Overt racism, or racial bias, refers to a blatant form of racial discrimination practiced within society. The defining feature of overt racism is that it is easily detectable. This style of discrimination and/or violence adopts obvious methodologies through symbols such as the Nazi swastika, nooses, Rhodesian war iconography, Klu Klux Klan garments, and racial slurs. Overt racism does not require much, if any, deciphering because these forms of racist symbols, signs, and words are generally recognized within mainstream society and condemned as instruments of white supremacy.

Covert racism, on the other hand, is more challenging to address because it is often subtle or hidden. Mainstream society does not always agree on what constitutes covert forms of racism. Covert racist symbols may include thin-blue-line iconography, All Lives Matter campaign rhetoric, the white power ok hand gesture/symbol, a White employee who refuses to hand over change and instead lays it on the counter for a Black customer, a white person referring to an unknown Black person as "boy" or "girl," narrative devices in film and television such as stereotyping or erasure, and former President Donald Trump stating there were "good people on both sides" of a white nationalist rally in which Heather Heyer was murdered in 2017.

White power organizations have a long history of using *rhetorical invention* to craft conspiracies about the government, to stoke fears about racialized violence, and to perpetuate the sanctity of white womanhood. Bradford Vivian describes rhetorical invention as creative, public expressions meant to shape collective opinions and memories of historical narratives.[115] Rhetorical invention also functions as a call-to-arms to further perpetuate history-as-mythology for future generations. Cultural legacy groups, such as the UDC and SCV, employ rhetorical

[115] Bradford Vivian, *Commonplace Witnessing: Rhetorical Invention, Historical Remembrance, and Public Culture*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 26.

inventions to sustain fantastical cultural identities by bearing witness to fictious history in the present.

Methodology

Co-performative witnessing, sometimes called *co-performance* or *critical ethnography*, is a performance studies methodology pioneered by Dwight Conquergood in 2002 and later expounded by D. Soyini Madison in 2007. Co-performance/critical ethnography privileges embodied research gleaned through shared, performative experiences over Western research methods such as literary research or traditional ethnography, what Clifford Geertz characterizes as *thick description*. Participant observation is not co-performance because participant observation creates a power imbalance between the observer and the observed. Madison clarifies, "To displace participant-observation for co-performative witnessing or performative-witnessing is to emphasize performance over participation and witnessing over observation. Performative-witnessing is to be engaged and committed body-to-body in the field. It is a politics of the body deeply rooted in action with Others."[116] In this case study, the Others are those of us in the audience observing and performing commemoration alongside those celebrating their Confederate heritage. I participated in the event as an audience member and as a performance studies researcher.

[116] D. Soyini Madison, *Acts of Activism: Human Rights as Radical Performance*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 25.

Figure 2 Confederate reenactors and presenters socialize outside just after the Confederate Memorial Day proceedings at Beauvoir in Biloxi, MS. Photo credit: Sarah Morgan, used with permission.

The Confederate Memorial Day celebration is a cultural performance with political consequences. Conquergood writes, "Cultural performances remain at mirror distance from ongoing social processes and are important monitoring mechanisms, scanning devices whereby people can interpret themselves to themselves as well as to others… Cultural performances, such as rituals, ceremonies, celebrations, myths, stories, songs, jokes, carnivals, contests, games, parties, politesse, and other expressive traditions, are culturally reflexive events that focus, interpret, punctuate, and endow meaningfulness to experience… It is the capacity of cultural performance to induce self-knowledge, self-awareness, plural reflexivity, that makes it political."[117] Commemoration performances persuade us and mold our sense of American identity by teaching us about our cultural heritage.

[117] Dwight Conquergood, "Performing Cultures: Ethnography, Epistemology, and Ethics," first published in *Miteinander Sprechen und Handeln: Festschrift fur Hellmut Geissner,* ed. Edith Slembeck (Scriptor, 1986), in *Cultural Struggles: Performance, Ethnography, Praxis*, Edited by E. Patrick Johnson. (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2016): 15-25, 19.

Performance studies is always moving and expanding and shifting methodically and theoretically. And, because of this, performance studies will never be a monolith and will, according to Conquergood, consistently slip through structures of pedagogy and critical thinking.[118] When I perform critical performance ethnography in a cultural scenario, I also become and make myself vulnerable. The willingness to explore vulnerability is a necessary component of co-performance/critical ethnography. As Conquergood contends, "The performative view brings [performance] ethnographer and [performer] together as co-actors, mutually engaged collaborators in a fragile fiction. There is an interdependence between Self and Other in the performative view, both are vulnerable. Instead of the researcher presented as detached and controlling, the performative view admits the fragile situation of the [performance studies researcher]."[119] In other words, co-performance is a way of learning in agreement with (sharing an understanding that culture is being transmitted and shared willingly and openly) and interpreting through experience. Co-performance is better understood as an epistemological collaboration as well as an invitational request for others (outside a cultural group) to produce cultural expressions alongside the requesting cultural group.

The kind of critical performance ethnography I do also employs Madison's equally important concept of ethical research. She writes, "As critical ethnographers concerned with ethical practices we are faced with how we must critique, advocate, and communicate the multifarious forms presented in the empirical world that are not always experienced through our

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[118] Dwight Conquergood, "Of Caravans and Carnivals: Performance Studies in Motion," first published in *TDR/The Drama Review,* Winter 39.4 (1995), in *Cultural Struggles: Performance, Ethnography, Praxis*, Edited by E. Patrick Johnson. (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2016): 26-31.

[119] I have updated language in Conquergood's original quote which reads: "The performative view brings ethnographer and native together as co-actors, mutually engaged collaborators in a fragile fiction…. Instead of the researcher presented as detached and controlling, the performative view admits the fragile situation of the fieldworker."
Dwight Conquergood, "Performing Cultures," 21.

senses. How do we account for realities and 'truths' in the field that we cannot observe or experience due to our own biases? Lack of cultural knowledge, or insights? Does that mean those truths or realities do not exist simply because we do not see them?"[120] Critical ethnography and performance studies are necessarily bound to experiences of vulnerability, activism, and empathy.

Activism and empathy are among the key features of my methodology, but how does one advocate for and/or empathize with a cultural heritage upon which there is no agreement? Empathy requires an understanding of and an ability to share sentimentality with others. As I will explain in the following pages, I do not agree with Confederate heritage interpretations of the Confederacy and memories of slavery, but I am able to empathize with the grief and frustration expressed at the ceremony. My sorrow reverberates in Lost Cause mythology that I wish could be true and a sadness I feel for the little girl I was once, the little girl who believed that the Rebel Army valiantly fought for States' rights and that enslaved people were treated kindly and well cared for by gentle plantation owners. My empathy is a strange kind of empathy that values and appreciates the horrors of slavery and *the afterlife of slavery* while also tapping into an uncomfortable nostalgia that reperforms white nationalist scenes from my childhood. I am, thus, enmeshed in a both/and concept of *Us* /*Them* rhetoric*:* I am *both* part of a collective *we* that experiences a genealogy of Confederate/Southern heritage *and* I reject *their* Confederate/white nationalist ideologies and actively work against consciously perpetuating white supremacist historical narratives.

Much of my argument is based on the tenets of commonplace witnessing and that, as Vivian argues, we are the history to which we bear witness. Vivian posits that society uses

[120] D. Soyini Madison, *Critical Ethnography: Methods, Ethics, and Performance*, (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2005), 88-89.

common tropes of commemoration to bolster a sense of public memory.[121] Commemorative acts such as gunfire salutes, wreath laying, and presenting and honoring symbols like the Confederate battle flag are performative tropes of bearing witness. For Vivian, commonplace witnessing is a way for participants to claim ownership of historical atrocities despite not being actively present during the specific historical moment. For those who attended the Confederate Memorial Day celebration at Beauvoir, the historical atrocity claimed was a perceived cultural war that led to the waning of Confederate popularity and the misrepresentation of its ideologies. Of course, this subjective, perceived atrocity does not apply to dominant society. Most Americans accept the outcome of the Civil War. Thus, I am expanding upon Vivian's work by including *perceived atrocities*. Additionally, I argue that the historical atrocity *we* were claiming was the present state of society and the failure of *the South to rise again!* Commonplace witnessing, or bearing witness to a narrativized version of history, demonstrates which versions of history groups of people choose to honor and, thus, reveals their values and shared beliefs in the present. I offer my analysis of co-performatively witnessing a propaganda event and a cultural commemoration alongside participants who identify as Confederate Americans. I co-performed the commemoration of a history that did not occur as memorialized but is nonetheless celebrated by *us* in the here and now.

Vivian claims that witnessing, or commonplace practices of commemorating historical atrocities, is important because of how these practices shape public memory. Vivian writes, "The present culture of remembrance—expressed in memoirs, speeches, memorials, mass media, and public art—consists, to a significant degree, in a culture of witnessing."[122] Vivian goes on to

[121] Bradford Vivian, *Commonplace Witnessing: Rhetorical Invention, Historical Remembrance, and Public Culture,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2017.
[122] Vivian, 3.

define “witnessing according to its commonplace usage in modern and late modern public culture: as an adaptable rhetorical practice, consisting of customary persuasive forms and techniques, disseminated through diverse mediums of communication in order to advance a variety of civic and humanitarian goals.”[123] Politicians and public figures often use commonplace witnessing to bolster support for agendas. The speakers and performers at the Confederate Memorial Day celebration operate along these frameworks of manipulation via the parameters of witnessing.

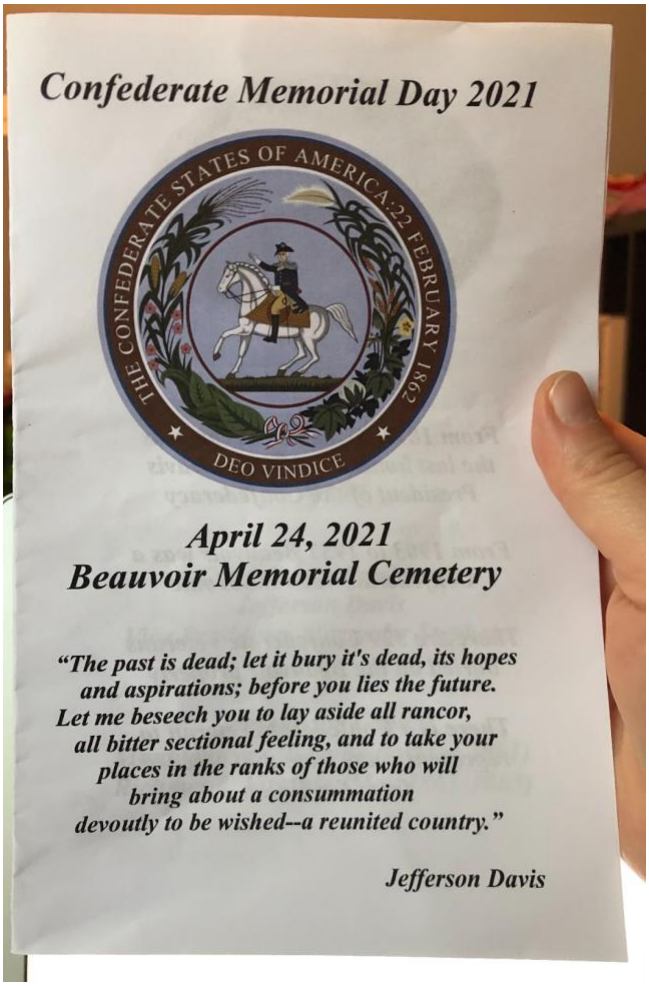

Figure 3 The program from Confederate Memorial Day at Beauvoir, the ceremony is normally held in the Beauvoir Cemetery, but was moved indoors due to rainy weather, author’s photo.

[123] Vivian, 9.

Confederate Memorial Day Festivities at Beauvoir

Now that I have reviewed types of overt and covert forms of racial bias, and the methodologies I will employ to study them, I want to move now to describing the ceremony event itself. When I arrived at Beauvoir around 1:30 PM on April 24, 2021, I looked around the exterior of the property before entering the building. There are cannons placed around the property and a smaller home that sits closer to the highway. The actual house is not a grand mansion but a modest summer cottage where Jefferson Davis lived out his remaining years. The house once belonged to a wealthy Southern family whose matriarch left it to Davis in her will, the house was primarily used as a hospital and rest home for Confederate veterans.

Beauvoir sits across a busy highway from Mississippi's Gulf Coast; it was especially hot and muggy this day. Tourists walked up and down the sidewalks lining the busy highway separating the house and sandy beaches. The historic home's neighbors are casinos and hotels, and trees covered in Spanish moss and the sound of lapping waves echo across the property. The Beauvoir Memorial Cemetery is adjacent to the west side of the buildings. It costs twelve dollars to tour the historic house, and though I did not tour the house nor the library, I did purchase a video about Beauvoir from the gift shop entitled *Beauvoir: Memorial to the Lost Cause*; the film cost ten dollars and was produced by Charles Sullivan, Professor Emeritus at Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College (MGCCC).[124] The actual ceremony was free and open to the public; I

[124] The film presents Beauvoir as an unlikely place for Jefferson Davis's Presidential Library because Davis spent very little time in Beauvoir. The film documents Jefferson's later years and death and tells the history of Beauvoir as an heirloom of the Confederacy. Professor Charles is the college's first professor emeritus and taught history until 2006. He also created and oversaw the MGCCC's archives until 2020. *Beauvoir: Memorial to the Lost Cause,* Director Charles Sullivan, (Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College, 1991), Film, 00:29:00.
"Preserving Our Past," Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College, September 4, 2020, accessed June 7, 2022.
https://mgccc.edu/2020/09/preserving-our-past/

discovered a Facebook invite as well as information from Beauvoir's website which, again, is operated and updated by the SCV. The event lasted approximately two hours. It was well organized and highly structured. Below is an annotated transcript of the Confederate Memorial Day 2021 program handed out at the commemoration event:

Cover:

Confederate Memorial Day 2021 (with a picture of the Confederate States of America seal)

April 24, 2021 Beauvoir Memorial Cemetery

"The past is dead; let it bury it's (sic) dead, its hopes and aspirations; before you lies the future. Let me beseech you to lay aside all rancor, all bitter sectional feelings, and to take your places about a consummation devoutly to be wished—a reunited country." – Jefferson Davis

Page One:

"From 1877 to 1889 Beauvoir was the last home of Jefferson Davis President of the Confederacy

From 1903 to 1957 Beauvoir was a Confederate Veterans Home

There are 529 Confederate Veterans buried on the Beauvoir property

There is a Confederate Veteran to represent every state that seceded from the Union"

Page Two:

Confederate States

South Carolina / Mississippi / Florida / Alabama / Georgia / Louisiana / Texas / Virginia / Arkansas / Tennessee / North Carolina / Kentucky / Missouri

Confederacy President Jefferson Davis

Vice President: Alexander Stephens

Confederate Capital

Montgomery, Alabama (to May 1861)

Richmond, VA (May 1861 – 1865)

Confederacy President Jefferson Davis

Vice President: Alexander Stephens

Confederate Capital – Montgomery, Alabama (to May 1861) [and] Richmond, Virginia (May 1861-1854)

Page 3:

Confederate Memorial Day 2021

1. Sentinel March by Michael Redmond
    a. Performers dressed in Confederate soldiers' uniforms enter the venue mimicking a military-style march.
2. Cannon and Musket Salute
3. Post Colors by Don Green
    a. Performers present the Confederate flag and the Confederate battle flag
4. Invocation by Beetle Bailey
5. Welcome by Dylan Mears, Executive Director of Beauvoir
6. Guest Speakers:
    a. Conor Bond, Mississippi Division Commander SCV
    b. Lynda McKinney, Mississippi Division President UDC
    c. Joy Potts Redwine, Mississippi Division President OCR

Page 4:

Confederate Memorial Day 2021

7. [Keynote Speaker], Susan Lee from Richmond, VA
    a. The description of Lee from the program states: "War Between the States enthusiast, was raised to honor and respect her Southern Heritage. She is the Great-Great Granddaughter of five Confederate Veterans, all of whom served from and for Virginia."[125]
8. Roll Call of Honor
    a. Five men in Confederate uniforms stand in a row to the left of the dais as Dylan Mears reads the names of four deceased Confederate soldiers. As Mears reads a name, a man from the row steps forward and says, "Here in spirit, Sir." The deceased Confederate soldiers honored at this ceremony were:

[125] From the program of *Confederate Memorial Day 2021*, Beauvoir House and Jefferson Davis Presidential Library, Biloxi, MI, 26 April 2021.

1. Samuel Hankins, Company E, 2nd Mississippi Infantry Regiment
2. Patrick McLaughlin, Company F, 1st Louisiana Infantry
3. H.A. Fuller, Company A, 36th Mississippi Infantry Regiment
4. William Tartley Hester, Company A, 15th Confederate Calvary
5. The unknown soldier who represents the unknown soldiers in the Beauvoir cemetery as well as those who fell in battle in Biloxi, MS.

9. Libation Ceremony
    a. Performers ceremoniously drink water from a canteen.
10. Volley Fire
    a. Performers fire cannon three times.
11. TAPS by Jim Hancock[126]
12. Benediction by Beetle Bailey
13. Closing "Susan Lee will lead us in the singing of Dixie"
    a. The audience, performers, speakers, and other participants are encouraged to sing *Dixie* together. The caption from the program reads, "Susan Lee will lead us in the singing of *Dixie.*
14. "Thank you all for our (*sic)* attending our Confederate Memorial Day Ceremony

Page 5:

1874 – The first official celebration as a public holiday occurred in 1874, following a proclamation by the Georgia legislature. By 1916, ten states celebrated it, on June 3, the birthday of CSA President Jefferson Davis.

Why do we celebrate Confederate Memorial Day?
Confederate Memorial Day (called Confederate Heroes Day in Texas and Florida, and Confederate Decoration Day in Tennessee) is a cultural holiday observed in several Southern U.S. states on various dates since the end of the Civil War to remember the estimated 258,000 Confederate soldiers who died in military service.

Where is the Confederate memorial?
The Confederate Memorial is a memorial in Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington County, Virginia, in the United States, that commemorates members of the armed forces of the Confederate States of America who died during the American Civil War

Which states celebrate Confederate Memorial Day?
Confederate Memorial Day is a state holiday in Alabama, Florida, Georgia on the fourth Monday in April. In South Carolina and North Carolina is fall on May 10

[126] Taps is a song traditionally performed on the bugle during military memorial ceremonies.

Page 6:
Up-coming Events 2021
Meet the Spirits – May 15, 2021
Jefferson Davis Birthday – June 5, 2021
Coastfest & Meet the Spirits – September 18, 2021
Emerald Coast Medieval Festival – September 18-19, 2021
Christmas in Camp – December 11, 2021

Page 7:
Special thanks to all who made this event possible

Sons of Confederate Veterans / United Daughters of the Confederacy / Order of the Confederate Rose / Black Roses / Shieldsboro Rifles / Members of the 5th Brigade / Beauvoir's Staff / Our many dedicated Volunteers / Jim and Sam Hancock

(an image of Jefferson Davis's portrait with the Confederate Battle Flag behind it)

"Let men not ask what the law requires, but give whatever freedom demands." – Jefferson Davis

The Confederate Day Memorial Day event program added a layer of authenticity to the event that accentuated the serious tone of this heritage celebration. As I will discuss in the following pages, authenticity is an important component of commonplace witnessing.

My general impression of the event was curious and suspenseful, I felt almost as if I was about to witness a haunted house; I suppose I was. The energy of the Confederacy's sacred dead filled the room. The organization of the event was formal. I could sense that this was a serious event and that the people in attendance were serious about their heritage. I was positioned adjacent to the motorcycle club and their intimidating outfits and symbols affected my senses. I felt curiously afraid, like in the moments before stepping into a haunted house attraction.

The Audience and My Role in the Audience

Understanding the structure of the Confederate Memorial Day celebration helps me to further explain the audience and my role in the audience. The event was held indoors due to rain; the commemoration normally occurs at the Beauvoir Memorial Cemetery, which is also located on the Beauvoir estate. There were nearly one hundred people in attendance, including speakers,

performers, tourists, journalists, Sarah Morgan (my research photographer), and myself. Various styles of clothing were on display. Men wore traditional gray and blue Confederate uniforms, red and white uniforms styled after those provided by Jefferson Davis to his soldiers during the Mexican War, suits, motorcycle club vests, Confederate heritage themed t-shirts, and pedestrian clothing. Women dressed in traditional antebellum dresses, Confederate mourning attire, contemporary dresses, Confederate themed t-shirts, and pedestrian clothing. One young girl, approximately ten years old, wore antebellum mourning attire. I wore blue and purple patchwork style pants, a solid light blue t-shirt, and a faded-purple Colorado Rockies baseball cap.

Members of what appeared to be an SCV motorcycle club, dressed in matching vests with Confederate symbols, filled two rows of audience seating. As I watched them pull into the event on dozens of motorcycles, their presence ignited fear and worry within me that I may be discovered doing research not aligned with their principles. The patches on the backs of the motorcycle club members' vests read, "Mechanized Calvary." The Mechanized Calvary is a special interest group emanating from the SCV for the purpose of activism. The organization's website states, "We are a Heritage group. We are not a motorcycle club. We follow a set of standing orders necessary to uphold the ethics and values of our organization."[127] The Mechanized Calvary members in attendance were dressed in their matching outfits and seemed prepared to protect their way of life and culture; several of them carried guns on belted holsters. As I remember them now, I recall the threat I perceived from their intimidating presence and costume.

Children and their parents were also in attendance. One family stood out because of their matching red hair and Confederate heritage themed t-shirts. Other children were in attendance,

[127] "About Us," *Sons of Confederate Veterans Mechanized Calvary*, accessed 28 June 2022. http://www.csascvmc.org/about-us.html

but it was difficult to determine the level of their participation; the red-haired family wore special Confederate Memorial Day t-shirts, so I assume they were in attendance to celebrate their heritage. Of the pedestrianly-clothed attendees, besides myself, Sarah Morgan, and the non-white journalist standing next to us, I could not easily determine who was there for heritage causes or attending for other reasons like general tourism, and I am unsure if anyone else was present in an investigative or indifferent manner. I attended with the purpose of co-performatively witnessing the celebration for this dissertation; the journalist was there for work; and my research photographer filmed the event and took photographs. I assume that some visitors were overflow from the historical attraction of Beauvoir, but I did not sense or observe something specific that would lead me to believe that others attended the event as protest, research, or in contradiction to the Confederate heritage beliefs—I perceived them to be Confederate Americans.

I attended the event as a graduate student conducting research for a performance studies dissertation, and I also attended the event as a queer, White woman who was raised to hold Confederate heritage beliefs in high regard. The nostalgic feelings I have regarding Confederate culture are rationally dismantled by my education as a graduate student, but the residue of nostalgia irrationally leaves traces behind that are not so easily lifted away by logic and historical data. The Confederate Memorial Day celebration ended with an audience sing-a-long of *Dixie.* I was shocked by the stirrings I experienced singing this song with the other participants at Beauvoir. My irrational self experienced a swell of pride and patriotism as I sang *Dixie* in a group comprised largely of white supremacists. My queer self felt ashamed that I was so easily swept up by the pomp and circumstance. I co-performed the song and experienced the Confederate patriotism engendered from the ceremony, and I experienced these feelings alongside my own disgust for having them.

Positionality

My paternal grandmother (1927-2007) was raised in a rural town in Indiana, and my father spent most of his childhood in southern Florida. As I stated in the introduction, I grew up in Clayton County, Georgia, a metropolitan county south of Atlanta famous for producing some of Atlanta's finest (and most iconic) artists, such as Big Boi and Andre 3000 of Outkast. As a teenager, my grandmother warned me about Black men and advised me to avoid them because she perceived them to be rapists and animals. Both of my paternal grandparents regularly referred to Black people as "n------" despite my attempts to ask them to stop using that word. When I was sixteen, I was punished for allowing my Black friend into our house; my father was paranoid and fearful that she used the toilet during her visit. I was lectured and grounded for two weeks. I stopped making friends with Black girls after this experience, and I never had a Black person over to my parents' house again. My father and paternal grandparents attempted to inculcate me with their white supremacist ideologies. The profound effect of this situated knowledge is incalculable and personal, yet nonetheless I include it in this dissertation as an example of how legacy racism is passed through generations. I also aim to demonstrate how self-reflection (spiritual-reflection, perhaps) and situated knowledge problematize nostalgia.

I have experienced embodied racist knowledge, and I have also resisted and worked against this embodied knowledge. This dissertation is written between the memories of a girl raised in white power and the machinations of a woman working to rectify the perversions of American history and cultural identity. Family torches are passed. As we will see, gender roles are part of the construct of white supremacy, and they are passed down with misconstrued stories about the Confederacy. I do not reject my family; I love my family. I do not reject the

Confederate Americans researched in this chapter because I relate to their nostalgia, but I am compelled to rectify their grave manipulation of history parading as spiritual warfare.

The Embodied Fantastical Memory of Confederate Americans

I have offered a clear understanding of the audience, my role in the audience, and my positionality so that I may endeavor a conception of the Confederate American identity. A Confederate American identity is predicated upon fantastical memories of the Civil War and validated by legacy groups such as UDC and SCV. These groups have been performing a myth of American history as memory since Reconstruction. How is it possible that in 2022 these ideas are perpetuated as historical facts? I argue that Confederate Americans rely on the tenets of white supremacy to sustain and perpetuate racialized American cultural identities. In "History as Cultural Memory," Marek Tamm argues that mnemohistory, a post-structuralist, holistic approach to historiography, is detrimental precisely because it circumvents and decenters the linear trajectory of events for a rhizomic web of knowing. Mnemohistory has been a useful idea within history and memory studies because it recalibrates expectations of what can be interpreted from a Western mode of thinking that privileges chronology and historical dates as well as gleaning knowledge from historical texts, instead of, for example, performing rituals and attending cultural commemorations. Writing about Estonian culture, Tamm argues that Estonians have created cultural identities based on fictious narratives that play an important role in historicizing the past. He writes, "In this process of memory work the narrative plays a crucial role, every community, including the nation, is based on 'stories we live by,' on narrative templates which give coherence to a community's past."[128] Lost Cause mythology seems to fit

[128] Marek Tamm. "History as Cultural Memory: Mnemohistory and Construction of the Estonian Nation," *Journal of Baltic Studies*, Vol 39, no. 4, (December 2008): 499-516, 510-511.

well within this idea of creating memories from a concocted historical narrative, what I refer to as *fantastical memory*.

Mechtild Widrich writes about how audiences sometimes become the subject of the public artwork.[129] This is true for the commemoration at Beauvoir as the audience mostly consisted of people who were also reenactors and performing in the ceremony as such. Reenactors performing at the Confederate Memorial Day festivities perform twice, once as reenactors and again as Confederate sympathizers and/or ancestors. The first is a historical performance, and the second is a cultural performance. Reenactment is living history, an embodied practice of historical events and actions from a repertoire. Diana Taylor distinguishes between an archive comprised of texts, bones, and anything that is not ephemeral in nature, and a repertoire comprised of embodied acts which offer a way of learning through performance. Taylor writes, "Embodied memory, because it is live, exceeds the archive's ability to capture it. But that does not mean that performance—as a ritualized, formalized, or reiterative behavior—disappears."[130] The repertoire, then, becomes a space where, "Embodied and performed acts generate, record, and transmit knowledge."[131] Co-performing alongside the audience at the Confederate Memorial Day celebration offered a unique positionality to witness reenactment as well as present-day commemoration in one event.

Commemoration rituals borrow from the repertoire and the archive. The Confederate Memorial Day celebration at Beauvoir reproduces performances, such as singing *Dixie*, with tangible artifacts, represented by Beauvoir and its collection of Confederate material culture.

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[129] Mechtild Widrich, *Performative Monuments: The Rematerialisation of Public Art*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 88.
[130] Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 20.
[131] Taylor, 21.

Commemoration bonds performance and material culture in a way that reenforces cultural memory and historical narrative. So, what can be made of analyzing Confederate heritage celebrations and the memorial rituals used to consecrate the fantastical memory of the Lost Cause? Widrich argues that legacies can be memorialized and commemorated through performative monuments that evoke action from their visitors and work as instruments of collective memory that bind factions together. Monuments to the Lost Cause can be interpreted through analyzing how the documents, audiences, and sites activate these *performative monuments*.[132] For Widrich, a performance photograph "holds bodily presence in suspension between an event in the past and a monument constituted in the act of remembering."[133] The photographs included in this chapter occupy the space between the Confederate Memorial Day proceedings of April 21, 2021, and my memory of that day's commemoration; I engage with co-performative witnessing/critical ethnography to interpret and analyze this "monument constituted in the act of remembering."

Confederate Americans are necessarily white nationalist because they identify with and promote white nationalist causes such as a perceived attack on White heritage and a compulsion to perpetuate fantastical memory, Confederate Stewardship (the perception of a divinely ordered racial hierarchy and husbandry-as-duty), and a Confederate gaze (a constructed point of view with which to see the world). These identities are bifurcated between masculine and feminine because there isn't a gender spectrum within Confederate heritage groups. Thus, Confederate organizations are divided between women's groups and men's groups. These groups have a long history of working together, but these organizations have rarely endeavored to integrate. In *Sisters in Hate: American Women and White Extremism*, Seyward Darby uses her prowess as a

[132] Widrich dedicates chapters to "Documents," "Audiences," "Sites," in *Performative Monuments.*
[133] Widrich, 16.

journalist to conduct three interviews with women who espouse alt-right ideologies. She defines the alt-right as "a motely movement of racist pseudointellectuals, nihilistic internet trolls, conspiracy theorists, new-Nazis, and other extremists."[134] What is notable about Darby's work is that her focus is squarely on the agency of White women, a point of view largely excluded from discussions of white supremacist groups.[135]

Those with Confederate American cultural identities ascribe to white chivalry, the philosophy that White men protect White women and White children, and, thus, are protectors of society. These specific gendered stereotypes and gendered power dynamics emanate from religious dogma and continue to proliferate not only within Confederate cultural enclaves, but throughout mainstream society. Much scholarly work on white supremacist groups focuses on male-driven, male-organized, male-dominated hobbies such as paramilitary training and battle reenactments.[136] Women have also been integral to white supremacy causes and have been supportive and active alongside their male counterparts throughout the genealogy of white supremacy as an institution. However, perhaps due to the close alignment of white supremacy and evangelical Christianity, men are often considered the leaders and authority figures while women are expected to assume passive, submissive roles.

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[134] Darby, *Sisters in Hate*, 7.
[135] Kathleen Belew *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018).
Ian Haney López, *Dog Whistle Politics: How Coded Racial Appeals Have Reinvented Racism and Wrecked the Middle Class*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).
Ron Eyerman, *The Making of White American Identity*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022).
[136] Belew, *Bring the War Home.*
Haney López, *Dog Whistle Politics.*
Ron Eyerman, *The Making of White American Identity*.

The Confederate Male Fantasy: Confederate Military Men

As previously mentioned, gender within Confederate heritage groups leans more traditional: the organizations are bifurcated into male and female. Male cultural identities are structured within a quasi-military hierarchy using qualifiers like "Commander" and "Lieutenant," while female Confederate organizations use titles such as "President," "Vice-President," "Treasurer," "Secretary." The men I witnessed and spoke with at the Confederate Memorial Day celebration identified within the same hierarchy used to assign duties to reenactors. However, unlike reenactors, the men I witnessed did not use alter-egos instead opting to use their real names. I was introduced to a man who introduced himself as the Second Lieutenant of the Mississippi Division. He talked about his desire to ensure Confederate history for future generations and lamented how mainstream culture had adopted a pessimistic opinion about the Lost Cause. The overlap between a Confederate reenactor and a Confederate cultural identity creates issues with teasing out reality from fantasy. For reenactors, the fantasy ends after the battle reenactment performance, but for some, like the Second Lieutenant, the fantasy continues off the field.

Mitchell Strauss writes about identity construction within Confederate reenactment groups, surmising that Confederate reenactors share a love of Civil War history. However, historical accuracy and historical interpretation often vary between groups.[137] Strauss spent three years visiting reenactments around the country and participated as a Confederate infantryman from the Army of Tennessee. He discovered that Confederate reenactors enjoy the hobby out of

[137] Mitchell D. Strauss, "Identity Construction Among Confederate Civil War Reenactors: A Study of Dress, Stage Props, and Discourse." *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 21, no. 4 (September 2003): 149–61.

an affinity for the historical, but that many Confederate reenactors also enjoy the hobby as a pushback against their perceived attack on white hegemony.

Figure 4 Confederate soldier reenactors are also celebrating their Confederate heritage at Beauvoir. Photo credit: Sarah Morgan, used with permission.

Widrich writes about VALIE EXPORT's concept of audience-as-subject and notes EXPORT's body, and others' experiences with her body, are the material for much of EXPORT's pieces, particularly *Tap and Touch Cinema*. *Tap and Touch Cinema* is among EXPORT's most iconic works performed in 1968; it has been re-performed *ad nauseum* and exists today, in part, as a *precession of simulacra* on YouTube.[138] The video and photo-

[138] It is important to note that VALIE EXPORT purposely capitalizes her name as an intentional political act. Her *Tap and Touch Cinema* has been reproduced many times as demonstrated by the links below:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X8RQSXwELJ0&t=36s (reenactment)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-6FlSBwHo9M&t=80s (reenactment)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8dvTBaUw2qc (clip from museum screening EXPORT's film)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YrM8SUEvhsg (3D reenactment)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nOjQbrV8YPs (Lenka Vrablikova's reiteration)

documentation of EXPORT's *Tap and Touch Cinema* reveal that the audience is necessary for the art-making process. Widrich notes that we, too, become part of the art-making process when we review the video and photo-documentation. *Figure 3* reveals a room filled with people honoring their cultural legacy and ancestry as well as the rest of us there to document the event as cultural ritual. How do these photographs work for you, the reader? What monument of memory are you building in your mind when you view these photographs for the first time?

When I examine the photographs in this work and recall memories from this event, the monument engendered in my mind is a fantastical history predicated on the values of white supremacy. I see a crowded room of men and women dressed in costumes and performing make believe to a dismantled historical narrative. I can feel their passion and sense their conviction—their senses of morality and nobility are almost palpable. My *memory-monument* of this event is complicated with layers of nostalgia, overt symbols of white power, and covert racial bias. Strauss writes, "to avoid stigma, Confederate reenactor expressions of whiteness were embedded within the pageantry of a widely accepted public pastime. In essence, Confederate reenactors were able to veil their protestations symbolically and keep them politically correct and publicly palatable."[139] This type of embedded racism is pronounced through Confederate symbols, and Strauss believes the uniforms are the epitome of this symbolism:

> The uniform was used to step into character and to drape history over the shoulders of the reenactor. Without the uniform, the stage upon which history was replayed evaporates, and without the reenactor's stage the projection of the white self in a publicly palatable manner becomes virtually impossible.[140]

[139] Strauss, "Identity Construction Among Confederate Civil War Reenactors," 158.
[140] Strauss, 158.

The uniform, the very costume of the soldier, is something that Kathleen Belew argues signals more than a passion for history. She argues that adopting military-style hierarchies and military dress are direct characteristics of the white power movement that sprang-up from the post-Vietnam War era.[141]

According to Belew, a new white power movement in the post-Vietnam era emanates from a re-masculinization of male cultural identities and is not simply a recycled version of the Klu Klux Klan.[142] Belew argues, "While white power featured a diversity of views and an array of competing leaders, all corners of the movement were inspired by feelings of defeat, emasculation, and betrayal. White power also qualifies as a social movement through its central features: the continuous activity of an inner circle of key figures over two decades, frequent public displays, and development of a wide-reaching social network."[143] In this respect, the SCV could be classified as a covert white power social movement, as I explained in the introduction.

Confederate reenactors often convey a romantic ideal of the Confederacy, this is also true of those whose cultural identities are aligned with Confederate culture and policy. Several of the participants I spoke with at the Confederate Memorial Day event enthusiastically shared how proud they were to wear the original red and white uniforms that Jefferson Davis obtained for Mississippi's First Volunteers during the Mexican-American War. The costumes worn by the male Confederate Memorial Day performers were mixed between formal attire, the red and white uniforms of Mississippi's First Volunteers, and the gray and blue uniforms generally associated with the Confederate Army. The different uniforms on display at the Confederate Memorial Day celebrations point to the varying perspectives about Confederate reenactments and celebrations

[141] Belew, 7.
[142] Belew, 8.
[143] Belew, 10.

as legacy demonstrations. The varying perspectives of Confederate symbolism hinge on one's interpretation of Lost Cause mythology.

Lost Cause mythology plays an enduring role in constructing a Confederate reenactor's character, or *impressions*, as reenactors often refer to their Confederate personas. For some reenactors, their impressions seep into their identities and deciphering where the impression ends and the person begins can be difficult. Paul Connerton writes, "…if the ceremonies are to work for their participants, if they are to be persuasive to them, then those participants must be not simply cognitively competent to execute the performance; they must be habituated to those performances."[144] The mix of performers at the Confederate Memorial Day celebration ranged from (Confederate) historical society collectives to reenactors affiliated with the SCV, whose website states, "The SCV rejects any group whose actions tarnish or distort the image of the Confederate soldier or his reasons for fighting."[145] It seems that the performers at the Confederate Memorial Day celebration were not performing impressions but were bringing forth their Confederate American cultural identities.

Michael Michocki argues that battle reenactments are akin to live-action-role playing, or LARP meetups. LARPing, as the name suggests, looks like a group of people in large, (often) public spaces, performing loosely scripted scenes/scenarios. Each LARPer plays a unique character and makes a unique contribution to the scene. The scenes are generally set in make-believe, fantasy worlds predetermined by the participants. Michocki writes, "[Historical reenactments, LARPing, and table-top-role-playing games] rely on fandom-like community culture driven by collective enthusiasm. They differ in their specific modes of representation of

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[144] Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 71.
[145] "Membership Info," *Mississippi Division of Sons of Confederate Veteran*, accessed February 18, 2021. https://www.mississippiscv.org/member-info

the historical material, and in forms of interaction with simulated environments."[146] Civil War battle reenactments carry many similar LARPing traits; however, the LARPer is not necessarily ancestrally linked to their character, an existential variable unlike the Confederate American who also performs Confederate reenactment. For the Confederate American, Civil War battle reenactment is not a game, it is a hallmark of cultural identity.

In *The Invention of Tradition,* Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger argue that collective memories and cultural identities can be created through repetition.[147] Gestures like waving resurrected symbols (i.e., the Confederate battle flag) or singing hymns like *Dixie* become part of a ritual that perpetuates cultural heritage. Our conceptual understanding of the past is reflected in and reproduced by ritual performances—commemorations exemplify how people suture themselves to the past. Connerton writes, "Performative memory is bodily…. [Bodily social memory] is an aspect of social memory which has been greatly neglected but is absolutely essential."[148] Performance studies is rooted in the analysis of rituals and ritual-making. The emphasis on ritual practices is where performance studies and cultural heritage studies overlap, emanating from the work of anthropologist Victor Turner (among others), whose writings on ritual practices helped shape both disciplines.

Turner argues that witnessing ritualistic performances creates a transcultural communicative synthesis from which to examine culture in its purest form. He further argues that every ritual exists along a fault line that engenders tense feelings. [149] The Confederate

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[146] Michael Michocki, *Role-play as a Heritage Practice: Historical Larp, Tabletop RPG, and Reenactment,* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 1.
[147] Robert Bevan, *The Destruction of Memory: Architecture at War,* London: Reaktion Books, 2006. 23-24.
[148] Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 71.
[149] Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre,* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982), 40-43.
Victor Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance*, (New York: PAJ Publications, 1987), 81-84.

Memorial Day celebration at Beauvoir utilized several tactics to foster these tense feelings through rhetoric and symbols. The *Roll Call of Honor* demonstrates this with costumed reenactors standing in as place holders for fallen Confederate soldiers. During this portion of the ceremony, the emcee said the name of a Confederate soldier and a performer would step forward and say, "Present in spirit, Sir!" and then stepped back into the line-up with other reenactors. In this way, bodies in the present haunt the material of the past.

In *Performance Remains*, Rebecca Schneider speaks specifically to Civil War reenactors as haunting the past:

> This body, given to performance, is here engaged with disappearance chiasmically—not only disappearing but resiliently eruptive, remaining through performance like so many ghosts at the door marked "disappeared." In this sense performance itself becomes messy and eruptive re-appearance. It challenges, via the performative trace, any neat antimony between appearance and disappearance, or presence and absence through the basic repetitions that mark performance as indiscreet, non-original, relentlessly citational, and remaining.[150]

For Schneider, reenactments are sedimented, performative acts that haunt historical material while demonstrating that performance is not a medium of disappearance. Schneider argues that reenactments become a re-appearance or a means to "refigure 'history' onto bodies for the affective transmissions of showing and telling."[151] This showing and telling is evident in the ritual nature of this annual event and the performative gestures of wreath laying, gunfire salutes, and the performance of Taps at the end of the celebration. Performance remains in Confederate

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[150] Rebecca Schneider, *Performance Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment*, (New York: Routledge, 2011), 101-102.
[151] Schneider, 104.

legacies, I extend Schneider's discussion to demonstrate how Confederate performances remain in Confederate acts of memory.

The Confederate Female Fantasy: Legacy Southern Belle Advocates

The United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) is the foremost organization responsible for creating and perpetuating Lost Cause mythology. Despite its waning popularity, the UDC's efforts remain similar to efforts made by the organization a century ago. To understand how Confederate heritage groups operate, it is important to first understand how the UDC became the most influential of all Confederate heritage groups. The UDC created a school curriculum that framed the Confederate loss as noble and gallant. The UDC created colleges and funded scholarships for White women so they could learn the UDC's pedagogical principles and then, by extension, educate generations of children about Lost Cause myths (e.g., the noble cause, grateful slave, gentle master, State's rights, etc.).

From 1895 to 1917, the UDC was one of the most fashionable social clubs in America, and women often devised creative Confederate affiliations to join with the *Daughters.*[152] Karen L. Cox argues that the UDC played a significant role in perpetuating Confederate culture through its six prime objectives: "celebration, memorial, historical, benevolent, educational, and social."[153] These tenets were employed by the UDC to create and sustain an idealized version of history, or what the UDC perceived as *correct history.*[154] Cox identifies the UDC's primary goal

[152] Karen L. Cox, *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida Press, 2003. 31-33. "Daughters" is a common nickname for members of the United Daughters of the Confederacy.
[153] Cox, 19.
[154] Correct history refers to the educational endeavors Daughters pursued to create textbooks as well as train teachers to perpetuate their version of history in public schools. This history is still being taught in schools across the American South today, as evidenced by the four thousand students who attend field trips to events like the Battle of Aiken Reenactment in Aiken, SC, subsequently established in 1995. Cox, "Confederate Motherhood," in *Dixie's Daughters,* 118-140.

as one of vindication and proliferation, and she demonstrates that UDC members were regarded as powerful equals amongst their male counterparts. In fact, Cox convincingly demonstrates that the *Daughters* were more effective than their male counterparts at perpetuating Confederate mythology as historical fact. Their monument-building campaigns proved the *Daughters* wielded enormous political and financial influence Their monuments continue to stretch from Atlanta to New York and as far reaching as California and as north as Montana. Interestingly, the Sons of Confederate Veterans (SCV) has eclipsed the UDC in membership and influence since the Vietnam War and furthermore through the White Power Movement. The SCV has been more popular in membership and participation. Especially with the rise of popularity in battle reenactments in the 1970s, with a resurgence in the late 1990s and early 2000s that has remained active until today. The rise in popularity amongst male Confederate heritage groups coincides with the rise of white power and new-Confederate ideologies voiced within the organizations, as I will explain further in the chapter.

Cox's historiographical research into how and why the *Daughters* were able to mythologize and lionize a false narrative of the Confederacy rests of the idea that Confederate women were powerful and influential. She regards the *Daughters* as unassuming feminists of their day.[155] Cox describes the UDC as a fashionable, trendy social club, with a powerful agenda and the political connections to execute massive endeavors unheard of for ladies' clubs of their era. Several of the female, costumed participants at the Confederate Memorial at Beauvoir wore black mourning dresses emblematic of the couture worn by Confederate widows, daughters, and sisters—the black mourning hoop-skirt dresses were typical of *Daughters* and served as symbols

[155] Cox points to the contradictions of the UDC members promulgating conservative gender roles as they use progressive, feminist ideas to spread their messages; contradictory ideas like women speaking publicly, attending political meetings, exercising political power, and working outside the home.
[155] Cox, 13-20.

of the group's relentless pursuit to keep the Confederacy in dominant culture and to evoke *The Glorious South*, another way of propping up Lost Cause mythology. Although the *Daughters* historically wore black mourning dresses, thusly, grieving their *lost cause*, the customary color for commemorating Confederate Memorial Day was/is white. Of the three female speakers, two wore white dresses (one contemporary and one antebellum) and the other female speaker dressed in casual contemporary clothing; the three male speakers wore suits.

The political activism that Confederate heritage women engage in when they wear antebellum attire and make speeches during legacy events is not unlike the acts of activism displayed by the *Madres, Abuelas, and H.I.J.O.S.* of Argentina's Dirty War in which five hundred children were stolen and adopted out due to the *disappearance* (murder) of their parents by the Argentinian government from 1976 to 1982.[156] Diana Taylor writes about how the Madres, Abuelas, and the children of the disappeared use trauma to activate political activism. Taylor writes, "They have contributed to human rights efforts by successfully transmitting traumatic memory from one generation to another and from the Argentine political context to an international public that did not live the violence firsthand. Those acts of transfer prove vital to an understanding of cultural agency."[157]

The radical performance of Confederate heritage women offers a deeper understanding of how histories become transmitted through their performances. Below is a picture of four of the participants in the Confederate Memorial Day festivities: three women, one girl, spanning three generations. Three of them are dressed in Confederate mourning dresses and the last is dressed in what would be considered pedestrian, or every day, clothes. All of them are conservatively

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[156] Mathew Willis. "The Stolen Children of Argentina," *JSOR Daily*, August 22, 2018. https://daily.jstor.org/stolen-children-of-argentina/

[157] Diana Taylor. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 165.

dressed, covering their ankles and elbows. It was Confederate custom that if a man saw a woman's elbows or ankles, but especially the ankles, then the man would have to marry the woman or face the wrath of the White woman's father. These kinds of cultural legacies, especially about the purity of White womanhood, are often passed down through sartorial expression. The female participation at the Confederate Memorial Day event is radical in its ability to transfer Confederate legacies onward despite, or maybe because of, the fact Confederate legacies overlap with many tenets of white supremacy.

Figure 5 Many women wore traditional Confederate mourning attire to the event, including one young girl. It is customary for Confederate women to hide their wrists and ankles from a male's purview. Photo credit: Sarah Morgan, used with permission.

The purity and protection of White women is a long-standing tradition within white supremacist ideologies. This idealized White womanhood is a fantasy concocted during antebellum era and it casts White women as virginal objects and Black men as violent and insatiable rapists unable to control their animal lusts. The women pictured in the photograph above are performing/reenacting and/or commemorating radical conservative gender and familial

roles by posing with their wrists covered. These women would surely have known not to expose their wrists and ankles, per Confederate custom, and are reenacting embodied examples of White-woman purity. This is one way the Confederate gaze creates and sustains Lost Cause mythologies in the real world—the Confederate gaze operates online in much more explicit forms.

The Confederate Gaze: Co-performing White Nationalist Gender, Race, and Sexuality

I pause my analysis of the Confederate Memorial Day celebration so that I may provide a deeper understanding of how white nationalist ideas regarding gender, race, and sexuality operate online. This section is intended to establish a more integrative appreciation for how racial bias re-performs and how it effects white supremacist narratives of the past in the present. The Confederate gaze privileges White, Heterosexual, Christian, Cis-gendered, Non-disabled, Neurotypical men's (WHCCNNm) preferences and opinions. Ergo, the WHCCNNm group's expressions of and opinions about masculinity and femininity are pivotal to shaping and maintaining the Confederate gaze in perpetuity. I pause my analysis of the Confederate Memorial Day celebration at Beauvoir so that I may establish a more holistic and total analysis of legacy performances of white supremacy as they relate to gender and sexuality. I have described modes and methods of perpetuating or extending white supremacist ideologies about gender and histories in real life; now I will examine examples of mediated reproductions of white nationalist gender and sexuality norms online. I discovered the following digital representations of the Confederate gaze while posing as a member of the WHCCNNm group so that I could gain access to white nationalist social media sites.

Explicit examples of the Confederate gaze are readily available on white supremacist social media forums like Stormfront, Patriot Front, and Patriot.Online. I posed as a thirty-five-

year-old WHCCNNm named *Tim Reagan* from Tennessee to co-perform legacies of white supremacy online. Admittedly, I did not post content, but I did submit *Tim's opinions* about America to obtain clearance to join these sites—in the case of Patriot Front I was required to create an "Xmail" email address to obtain member access.[158] Also, in efforts to protect my identity, I purchased a used Chromebook for fifty dollars and I used a VPN encryption plugin so that my IP address would be hidden from the websites' administrators; I set my location to Nashville, TN.

Racial bias and conservative gender norms are crucial to the construction of white nationalist cultural identities in America. Understanding how the Confederate gaze operates explicitly on white nationalist online forums demonstrates this importance. The examples below exemplify how legacy performances of white supremacy operate in digital spaces. Demonstrations of white supremacist ideologies and attitudes are unabashedly displayed in online message boards and on white power web sites that claim to be about patriotism. Stormfront is America's oldest white nationalist online social forum and has amassed the largest online following of white nationalists in part because Don Black debuted his brainchild in 1995.[159] Stormfront is organized like Reddit with threads on various topics comprised of experts' and ley people's comments. [160] I visited the women's discussion board labeled: "The Women's Forum: Sugar, Spice, and Everything Nice." This title is a snippet from the famous nursery

[158] Information required to join Patriot Front (Patriot.Online)—*Tim's* answers are included: 1. Political Beliefs? Conservative; 2. Issues with drugs? No; 3. Religious beliefs? Christian; 4. Why do you want to join? My country needs me; 5. What skills can you offer? Web development and SEO strategy; 6. Have you read the manifesto? Yes

[159] Paul Behrens, *Holocaust and Genocide Denial: A Contextual Perspective*, (Milton Park, UK: Taylor & Francis, 2017), 51.

[160] Stormfront.org, "Stormfront: Every Month is White History Month," accessed February 18, 2023. https://www.stormfront.org/forum/

rhyme "What are Little Boys Made of?"[161] The seemingly innocuous nursery rhyme perpetuates an idea that females are the bastions of purity, grace, poise, beauty, and niceness for the WHCCNNm group. This idea about femininity resounds fervently in opinions and discussion topics on the women's forum. These topics/threads range from "Ladies, What Have You Done to Contribute to the White Race?," "What Would Attract More Women to WN (white nationalism)?," "Heightened awareness of our purpose in life: Motherhood," "Afraid of black people," and "Stares of envy from black women." Below is the transcription of the first four posts on a thread entitled "Black Men Scare Me!:"

> *Jessicaleipzig*: I don't know why, but black men scare me, every time I'm around them I just freeze, does anyone know why this is happening to me? (December 6, 2018)
>
> *DevotedWife:* White women are constantly sexually harassed by the over sexed lesser races, no one blames you felling that way. Consider carrying a knife on your person, find out what's a legal size to carry in your area. Even a box cutter could come in handy in a tough situation. (December 19, 2018)
>
> *Cosmicgirl:* I agree, carry a legal knife if you can, with certain features…. Also, if you are walking somewhere, and they mumble some harassment or another at you, such as 'eey shaw-tee', look them in the face, but not the eye, turn them down with a flat 'No" and never break stride, and with any luck, you will breeze right past them. (also, don't inhale, you will probably regret catching a snootful of their stench, if they don't take to masking it with a double dose of cologne.) (February 12, 2019)

[161] Anonymous [sometimes attributed to Robert Southey (1774-1843)], What are Little Boys Made Of?," *Roud Folk Song Index:* 821, (Early Nineteenth Century).

TheTradWife: I'm the same way, I always feel like I must be ready to run or fight when I'm around men from other races. I think it's because of the aggressive manner in which they approach us, I recently had a Muslim man grab my hand and start pulling me asking me where my husband was and why I was out by myself etc. You should be afraid, but you should stay alert. According to US government violent crime statistics black men rape and attack white women at a much higher rate.

*Figure 6 First four posts of Stormfront thread "Black men scare me!," a*ccessed 12/12/2022 Stormfront.org/forum/t12653525

I would like to note that these posts are not the most salacious posts; they are merely the first four posts of the thread. I selected this sample to demonstrate how white nationalist women project the Confederate gaze. Each post contributes to sustaining and perpetuating a Confederate gaze onto Othered bodies by reproducing and reperforming projections like "Black men rape and attack White women at a higher rate," Black people have a "stench," "White women are constantly sexually harassed by the over sexed races," and "Black men scare [White women]." The most enduring and prolific white nationalist and anti-Black stereotypes mentioned above

invokes a perceived need to protect the White female body from the Black male body as well as an interpellated anti-Black human nature: "no one blames you for feeling this way." The former supports white chivalry/white anxieties and the latter espouses Confederate Stewardship, the perception of a divinely ordered racial hierarchy.

Stormfront is very clear that the ultimate goal of white nationalism is to stop a perceived genocide on White people by creating more White children. In the example below, a Stormfront member posts about his inability to find a white nationalist woman; another user advises the former to lie about his white nationalism. *Absentminded* writes, "Well, just find a White woman to produce white Children with and don't make the White Nationalist thing an issue, the important thing is to create more white Children, you can instill your ideals into your children regardless of whether you find the "perfect woman" or not, just find a White one."[162]

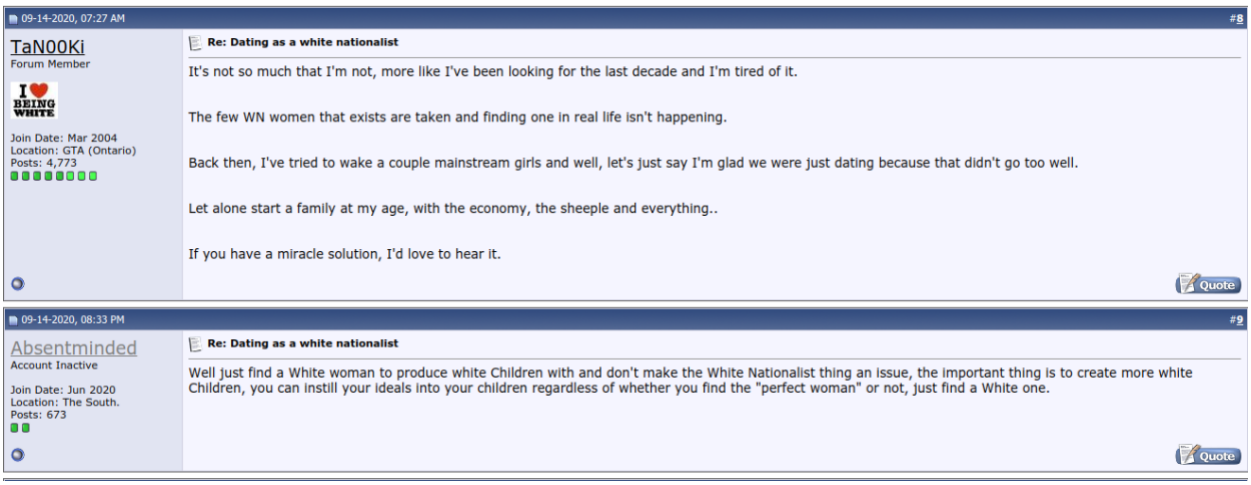

Figure 7 *Man advises other man to find any white woman to procreate with and to not disclose that he is a white nationalist because the most important thing, for the movement, is to produce white children. Accessed 12 September 2022.* [*https://www.stormfront.org/forum/t1318278/*](https://www.stormfront.org/forum/t1318278/)

Absentminded's messaging here is that procreation is more important than connection, or that, as White men, the need to procreate with White women supersedes the relationship with those

[162] Stormfront.org, "Dating a White Nationalist," accessed September 13, 2022. http://www.stormfront.org/forus/t1318278/

White women. Male superiority within white nationalism results in the objectification of women as well as the importance of male opinions about femininity and womanhood, what I have described as the Confederate gaze.

A white nationalist homosexual is a contradiction in terms for the White Power Movement. An avid white nationalist and homosexual posted about his fealty to the white nationalist cause and lamented that he could not help create new generations of White babies. He was hoping to participate in Stormfront's discussion threads; his post prompted a site administrator to reply with the organization's official stance on homosexuals. I have transcribed the digital encounter below:

Figure 8 Gay Stormfront.org user confronted by Stormfront.org official on their policy regarding homosexuality. https://www.stormfront.org/forus/t968576-26/#post15284808 Transcribed below:

"WhiteManMI: So, I found out about this group. I am a white Christian man, but I have one underlying issue—gay. My spouse and I are both conservatives, and we cannot stand to socialize with other gay people in our community because they are so leftist and clueless. They are slaves to the Democratic Party, and they don't

> even realize that they are simply playing the stereotypical assigned role that has been assigned to them—the weak, effeminate, swishy, non-threatening type. Just because you turned out gay doesn't mean you have to act like a woman or be weak. Their blind allegiance to the left is sickening and I cannot stand to be around their nauseating behavior. However, it is extremely tough for me to find link-minded people. The left hates me because I refuse to take part in the destruction of my country and culture. Usually, the right doesn't really like me because I don't fit into their religious checklist because of my situation. I find myself very much aligned with this type of moment and looking for like-minded people. I am not asking you to accept my gay orientation, and I personally find it a non-issue. I'm also not trying to "convert" anyone or anything like that. However, I feel like I need to disclose it upfront before it is later discovered...

What I find most interesting about *WhiteManMI's* post is how he projects and resists the Confederate gaze simultaneously. When *WhiteManMI* argues he isn't trying to "convert anyone," he is projecting a white nationalist belief that homosexuals want to convert heterosexuals to homosexuality while rejecting the very same stereotype. He challenges this stereotype with his lived experience ("I personally find it a non-issue").

The response to "WhiteManMI's" post is from a Stormfront administrator, *Robbinsville*. I have included the original emphasis from the reply:

> This is Stormfront's **OFFICIAL** position on homosexuality:
>
> There have been some questions as to whether or not Homosexuals can have a place in White Nationalism. As Homosexuals produce no White offspring they are the antithesis to countermining White genocide. In addition to this,

> homosexuality brings with it other degenerate sexual practices that are detrimental to a healthy society. So then, is Homosexuality on Stormfront OK?
>
> **NO.**
>
> Homosexuality is not welcome on Stormfront, and no arguments in favor of homosexuality will change that. We've heard it all, and the Stormfront Administrators have made the official Stormfront stance on this issue clear. All threads advocating Homosexuals will be deleted, and any attempt to further any homosexual agenda on Stormfront will not be tolerated. Thank you, Moderation.[163]

White nationalism is very clear about its stance on race, homosexuality, and traditional gender norms. I experience these posts as a co-performance that produces within me complicated feelings of disgust, nostalgia, memories of my grandmother, and a knee jerk reaction to proclaim, "No, I'm not like them! I'm not a part of this group!" Robin DiAngelo writes about White people's unwillingness to self-identify as racist, or racially biased. DiAngelo maintains that White people should accept that White people are racist and that being *a racist* does not necessarily equate to being a *bad person*.[164] She further argues that White people must confront their own racial biases and then work to undo them.[165] White people cannot help but perform racial bias because white supremacy is fundamental to America's early success as well as is fundamental to one's conception of an American cultural identity. Racial bias is, therefore, an intergenerational response conditioned in the American White body and expressed as a

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[163] Stormfront.org, "Re: Part1: An Introduction to Stormfront and the Pro-White Movement," accessed September 12, 2022. https://www.stormfront.org/forum/t968576-26/#post15284808

[164] Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It's so Hard for White People to Talk about Racism*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018), 33, 57-58.

[165] DiAngelo, *White Fragility*, 87.

performance remain of white supremacy. Furthermore, each White American carries a responsibility to assess, and often re-assess and keep re-assessing, their own embodied acts or performances of racial bias and white supremacy.

The Confederate Spiritual War and Its Living Memorials

Now that I have established a fuller evaluation and analysis of white nationalism and the Confederate gaze, I wish to return to the Confederate Memorial Day proceedings at Beauvoir. The keynote speaker of the Confederate Memorial Day celebration at Beauvoir was Susan Lee from Richmond, Virginia. Lee's biography from the program previously transcribed reads, "War Between the States enthusiast, was raised to honor and respect her Southern heritage. She is the Great-Great Granddaughter of five Confederate Veterans all of whom served from and for Virginia." Lee dressed in a contemporary white dress and white shoes, and the audience clapped and cheered as she made her way past the Confederate battle flag and the memorial wreaths. The room was quite hot by then and many of us were fanning ourselves with the Confederate Memorial Day programs handed to us as we first entered the event space. Lee greeted the audience and began describing her Confederate lineage while reminding us of the bravery and courageousness of the Confederacy.

Susan Lee is an animated and enthusiastic public speaker, and she addressed the audience and the participants with zeal stating that the crowd gathered at Beauvoir to *celebrate our* Confederate heritage because *their ancestors* were morally correct.[166] According to Lee, their ancestral moral correctness was, and is, indefatigable and those who identify as Confederate Americans are currently fighting a spiritual war to restore the honor of Confederate legacies. One

[166] I would like to note the slippage here—the use of *our* refers to my identification with Confederate and/or Southern heritage and the use of *their* distinguishes my separation from and rejection of Confederate ideologies. I *both* identify with Confederate and Southern heritage *and* I reject (to the best of my ability) the ideologies that reenforce and perpetuate white supremacy.

may interpret this *spiritual war* as a harkening back to Confederate beliefs that White people were ordained by God as masters over other races, which allowed them to own non-white people and to take their lands, but to also believe that a White person's superiority was a divine right.

As I mentioned in the dissertation introduction, the tenets of white supremacy include fantastical memory (fabricated or imagined productions of history), Confederate Stewardship (a perverted concept of Christian Stewardship), and a Confederate gaze. Lee evokes all three during her speech:

> You hear people say this, and I know they mean well, but you hear people say "Oh, we need to honor them because they fought for a cause they thought was right." That's like fingernails on a chalkboard to me! They did not fight for a cause they thought was right. They fought for a cause that was *absolutely* right! It was right in 1776. It was right in 1861. And it is right in 2021! And that's one of the main reasons we still do what we do. We know the truth, and we gather. ...And this is how we're raised. It's part of who we are. We are taught that it is our duty. Capital D-U-T-Y![167]

Lee was inviting the audience and the participants to join the cause to save and perpetuate Confederate heritage on the grounds that it is morally correct and a shared duty with those who identify as Confederate. She argues that "the cause," referring to the *Lost Cause*, was and is historically and morally right in 1776, 1861, and in 2021—she invites us to remember a past based largely on a concept conceived of and promulgated by the UDC, *a fantastical memory*. And she asks us to perform Confederate Stewardship by reminding *us* of "our duty—Capital D-U-T-Y!" These are instances of coded language that reflects the legacies of White women who

[167] Transcribed from the proceedings of *Confederate Memorial Day 2021*, Beauvoir House and Jefferson Davis Presidential Library, Biloxi, MI, 26 April 2021.

ingrained the Confederate fantasy in school children since the 1890s and persists today through school fieldtrips and varying ideas about American history.

The invitation to stand behind "a cause" that was morally (and historically) correct reverberated through Lee's speech. Kerr Houston writes about the rhetoric of invitation in "Thin Generosity: Contemporary Social Practice Art and the Rhetoric of Invitation," arguing that contemporary artworks are often imbued with the rhetoric of invitation and that a call to action is an aesthetic of social practice art.[168] Following the work of Sonja K. Foss and Cindy L. Griffin, Kerr writes, "Invitational rhetoric constitutes an invitation to the audience to enter the rhetor's world and to see it as the rhetor does. In presenting a particular perspective, the invitational rhetor does not judge or denigrate others' perspectives, even if they differ dramatically from the rhetor's own."[169] This concept of inclusivity does not account for social practice artworks that attempt to persuade others to commemorate white-washed versions of history and bolster systems of white supremacy. Lee assumes everyone in attendance is there to honor the Confederacy. She uses persuasive language to perpetuate Lost Cause mythology by reminding the audience of their ancestors' noble pursuits and then lamenting the harsh reality that dominant culture has fractured their mythology and exposed the Confederate fantasy. Houston's idea that social practice art does not "denigrate others' perspectives" is thrown into question with Lee's condemnation of hegemonic cultural warfare:

> You hear a lot today about the purpose of our monuments. The purpose of our organizations by people who want to twist it into something it's not just to get rid of

[168] As stated in the introduction, social practice art are artworks and performances that engage with or confront political and social issues by using bodies as the medium or material for the artwork.
[169] Kerr Houston, "Thin Generosity: Contemporary Social Practice Art and the Rhetoric of Invitation," in *Social Practice Art in Turbulent Times*, edited by Eric J. Schruers and Kristina Olson, New York: Routledge, 2020, 14. See also Sonja K. Foss and Cindy L. Griffin, "Beyond Persuasion: A Proposal for an Invitational Rhetoric," *Communication Monographs* 62, no. 1 (March 1995), 2-18: 5-6.

> it. Probably most people in this room already realize that. But their intent was very obvious…. And our great grandmothers made sure to put it in stone what those monuments were for and what we're doing. And, folks, it had nothing to do with all the things they want to say and everything to do with making sure nobody forgot about our ancestors. And that's why we're here. Many things have changed since that first ceremony shortly after the War Between the States ended, but one thing has not. Our duty and responsibility is to continue the work that they began.... I don't know about y'all, but there've been days that my heart was just broke in two. Monuments coming down. School names changed. The things they are doing to hurt us, they are doing. And we can feel it. And it hurts.[170]

Her language in this passage is vague yet menacing—her fearmongering view of other perspectives are examples of covert racism. Lee employs coded and vague language like "And folks, it had nothing to do with all the things they want to say" and "The things they are doing to hurt us" to distinguish between a collective *us* and a foreign *them.* The language Lee uses in this passage points to the *Heritage Not Hate* rhetoric that has become a central theme in bolstering support for Confederate legacies.

Heritage Not Hate purports that Confederate monuments and other various forms of Confederate memorials function only to honor the memory of Confederate veterans. This is a simplistic perception that absolves those who identify as Confederates, or people who celebrate their Confederate heritage, of anything other than innocently memorializing their ancestors. Lee is creating an authenticity about Confederate cultural heritage that does not align with dominant culture's historical interpretation of Confederate heritage as a legacy of white supremacy.

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[170] Transcribed from the proceedings of *Confederate Memorial Day 2021,* Beauvoir House and Jefferson Davis Presidential Library, Biloxi, MI, 26 April 2021.

Vivian argues that perceived authenticity is another component of commonplace witnessing and how we perceive authenticity changes according to social or political necessity. For Vivian, "Authenticity depends upon changeable factors of situational context, norms of address, audience perceptions, and shifting groups of historical, moral, or political judgment."[171] Lee speaks of people who celebrate their Confederate heritage as victims of cultural erasure, and she decries attacks on Confederate culture in *Us-vs-Them* rhetoric that disregards any alternative interpretation of Confederate culture that does not align with her own beliefs. The *Heritage Not Hate*, and its more radical white nationalist incarnation, *Conquered not Stolen* campaigns fit within what Vivian describes as authenticity, or witnessing a historical narrative, that may have been manipulated or contrived for ulterior motives such as political gain or social influence. Authenticity is performed and ever evolving with contemporary social mores. An example is the waning support for Confederate culture since the early 2000s.

Authenticity is often performed and assimilated into popular culture. In the 1910s and 1920s, Confederate commemorations were the highlight of social seasons, and tens of thousands of people attended these events from Atlanta to Washington DC. The Confederacy was the height of sophistication and stood as an authentic representation of a glorious past. Vivian states, "One bears witness so that one's person, as well as one's story will be affirmed—so that oneself will be legible as a model of conduct."[172] Confederate culture has sustained itself on a Southern gentility, a divine morality, and the ability to authenticate a false narrative about the Civil War. Authenticity can be manufactured through the common tropes of witnessing. Performing authenticity is evident in the rhetoric used by the speakers of the celebration, especially in the

[171] Vivian, *Commonplace Witnessing*, 49.
[172] Vivian, 48.

welcoming address performed by the Executive Director of Beauvoir, Dylan Mears, who describes the audience/participants as *the living monuments* to a glorious Confederate past:

> We are the living stones. The living memorials. The living monuments to our Confederate ancestors. We are here today to honor their sacrifice for a cause that, although some people say is lost, is not. I personally cannot stand the term *the Lost Cause* because the day that the cause of liberty, freedom, independence, and self-determination are truly dead in this country is a day that this country no longer exists. I hope that you all, when we leave today, that we all have a renewed spirit, a renewed zeal to defend our heritage and to reclaim the narrative, the truth about the Confederate soldier and his cause.[173]

The audience/participants at the Confederate Memorial Day became authenticated as performative monuments by Mears, constituted by the audience that, as Widrich argues, is the subject of public performance artwork and is reconstituted in the act of remembering the commemoration.[174] Widrich maintains, "I think the indeterminacy of the audience, which is in a strong sense the *subject* addressed, makes this form of [performative] monument ambiguous." Widrich, speaking specifically about VALIE EXPORT's oueruve, continues, "The body as part of cultural history becomes 'writing,' a document that can bring to a reading audience an *image* of the 'environmental body,' not the *actual* environment body, *sociography* rather than society with all its visible bodies and invisible valuations."[175] *We*, as the gatherers assembled at Beauvoir and as the *living monuments* to the Lost Cause, were receiving a call to action to renew *our* commitment "to defend our heritage and to reclaim the narrative, the truth about the Confederate

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[173] Transcribed from the proceedings of *Confederate Memorial Day 2021*, Beauvoir House and Jefferson Davis Presidential Library, Biloxi, MI, 26 April 2021.
[174] Widrich, *Performative Monuments*, 5, 88.
[175] Widrich, 88.

soldier and his cause." I accepted Mears's invitation to co-perform Lost Cause mythologies that April day by committing myself to research the obfuscated history of the Confederacy and to document and interpret legacy performances of white supremacy and/or white nationalism. I would like to think that this dissertation honors this call by demonstrating how legacy performances perpetuate fantastical memories of the Lost Cause, principles of Confederate Stewardship, and a Confederate gaze that continues to shape myths and projections about Blackness and Whiteness in America.

The invitation to co-perform fantastical memories of the Lost Cause is activated again by you, the reader, who enters the commemoration as a re-performance, a reproduction of the event made from your interaction with the performance documents in this essay. Widrich contends, "Because of its centrality to the historical reception of live art, the document resurfaces in all of these settings—and with it the question of whether it is self-contained or discursive in its effects, and to what extent it can be said to have an audience of its own."[176] In this way, we are co-performing the Confederate Memorial Day celebration by encountering Susan Lee and Dylan Mears as *hyper-historians*, "witness[es] presenting testimony for the spectators," linking us to a performed history of the American South.[177]

Freddie Rokem writes, "Collective identities, whether they are cultural/ethnic, national, or even transnational, grow from a sense of the past; the theatre very forcefully participates in the ongoing representations and debates about these pasts, sometimes contesting the hegemonic understanding about the historical heritage on the basis of which these identities have been constructed, sometimes reinforcing them."[178] Rokem contends that metaphysical energies

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[176] Widrich, 17.
[177] Freddie Rokem, *Performing History; Theatrical Representations of the Past in Contemporary Theatre*, (Iowa City, University of Iowa Press, 2000), 192.
[178] Rokem, 3.

engendered between text, actor, spectacle, and audience transform stage actors performing historical plays into hyper-historians, and, by bearing witness to a perception of history, the actors link the audience directly to the past. He writes, "the actors serve as a connecting link between the historical past and the 'fictional' performed *here* and *now* of the theatrical event; they become a kind of historian, what I call a 'hyper-historian…' Performing history means to reenact certain conditions or characteristic traits inherent in such historical events, presenting them to the spectators through the performance, but it can never become these events or the historical figures themselves." Lee and Mears are not historical figures themselves—they are, instead, the living ancestors—biological links to the Confederacy—they provide not only a conceptual connection to the past, but also a biological one in their ancestral (or DNA) link to the Confederacy. And, in doing so, they teeter a line between history as it actually occurred and memories of a constructed past.

Both Lee and Mears conjured regret during their speeches: Lee as she laments the renaming of schools and the felling of monuments, and Mears as he describes his sadness when he hears others refer to the Confederacy's legacy as *lost.* Regret is often an effective rhetorical invention used in heritage rituals to exact and persuade memories and feelings about past atrocities. Vivian describes George W. Bush's 2003 trip to Goree Island and his subsequent speech about the evils of slavery to demonstrate how regret rhetoric works to maintain and perpetuate existing power structures.[179] Lee activates regret rhetoric in her speech about the destruction of Confederate culture as a test of morality and speaks to the intentional destruction of Confederate culture as disastrous to the moral fabric of society. Robert Brevan argues that intentional destruction of architectural landmarks (e.g., buildings and monuments) is tantamount

[179] Vivian, *Commonplace Witnessing*, 119.

to genocide because it destroys the indexical traces of historical groups of people. For Brevan, the intentional destruction of cultural property is an active component of genocide because it assists with the destruction and annihilation of a particular group of people.[180] In this way, Lee's argument is applicable to the social and political mores of contemporary American efforts that are attempting to revamp Confederate history and its heritage. This is evident in the felling of Confederate monuments and in the renaming of schools/landmarks named in honor of Confederate heroes.

Figure 9 The youngest performer in the Confederate Memorial Day celebration prepares to lay her wreath as an offering to the Confederacy and its glorious dead. Photo credit: Sarah Morgan, used with permission.

[180] Bevan, *The Destruction of Memory*, 18.

The ritual of laying wreaths and honoring the Confederate dead is perhaps the most fundamental and re-performed ritual of Confederate Memorial Day since its inception in 1874.[181] Vivian argues that State-sponsored rituals of regret over historical atrocities shape our ideas and beliefs about historical events in the present. This can be a manipulation to sustain and perpetuate power or political goals. A part of this manipulation is to "convey lessons of historical atrocity to future generations of humankind when those lessons continue to go unheeded by large sections of present-day humanity."[182] These expressions of regret, such as wreath-laying and lamenting a Lost Cause, are critical in manipulating historical narratives for the purpose of maintaining and perpetuating systems of power. In this case, white supremacy is the system of power that Confederate Americans need to uphold. For those who identify as Confederate American, *their* heritage is predicated upon fantasies of the Confederacy as well as ancestral links to a past that perpetuate a Confederate gaze in the present.

Although Confederate heritage is currently undergoing a national makeover, Confederate reenactments remain popular in the American South and Midwest. One of my favorite childhood memories is attending the Battle of Jonesboro and rooting for the Rebel army to somehow finally win the battle that historically the Confederate army lost. Leigh Clemmons argues that reenactments' primary goal is one of commemoration and the feelings evoked by commemorating reinforces heritage and folklore. In other words, reenacted battles have lasting effects in the real world because they promote and enforce stereotypes and myths disguised as

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[181] Georgia, through the endeavors of the Ladies' Memorial Association, was the first state to legislate Confederate Memorial Day as a state holiday in 1874.
"Confederate Memorial Day in Georgia," *GeorgiaInfo: an online Georgia Almanac*, University of Georgia, archived from the original. accessed October 14, 2021.
https://web.archive.org/web/20190122195602/https://georgiainfo.galileo.usg.edu/topics/history/article/civil-war-reconstruction-1861-1877/confederate-memorial-day-in-georgia

[182] Vivian, *Commonplace Witnessing*, 121.

legacy.[183] The Confederate fantasy hinges on the successful proliferation of Lost Cause mythology, or the seemingly innocuous memorialization of Confederate monuments, the honorable and noble reputation of Confederate soldiers, the unfounded notion of a workforce of grateful slaves, and the idea that Confederate heritage is under attack by an ill-informed and ignorant popular culture hell-bent on destroying not only their Confederate heritage, but their *Christian Confederate* heritage. These specific features of Lost Cause mythology are saturated within Confederate reenactment battles as well as during the Confederate Memorial Day. Lee's speech was especially rife with fantastical ideas about the Confederacy.

Lee closed her speech with an emphatic plea to connect to the spiritual warfare that threatens not only our bodies but our souls. She invokes regret rhetoric by assuming war on *our* spiritual identities and then puts the onus for the perpetuation of Confederate cultural memory directly on the audiences' shoulders.

> This is spiritual warfare. This is not about Confederacy. This is not about a war. This is about wanting to take people who are still spiritual, Christian, Judeo-Christian people and make them sit down and be quiet. And the first thing they could come after was our Confederate heritage. And, folks, guess what? We know how this ends because we've read *The Book,* and we read it to the end. [184] And we win. So the third reason we should be here is because we know we're going to win in the end, and this is what it's all about. What the world says, think about this. You want to know how big our responsibility is? A hundred years from now, what the

[183] Leigh Clemons, "Present Enacting the Past: The Functions of Battle Reenacting in Historical Representation," in *Enacting History,* Eds. Scott Magelssen and Rhona Justice-Mall Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2011): 1-25.
[184] Lee is referencing *The Bible* to demonstrate that the Confederacy's ideologies are emblematic of divine morality.

> world says about the Confederate soldier is going to depend on what you and I do tomorrow. Think about that. Are we going to let these—I'm not going to name them, I'm not going to call them names—people decide how my great, great grandfathers are interpreted, or are we going to get off our bottoms and do what we need to do so that the world hears the truth? That's where it is.[185]

Lee's reference to *The Bible* ("*The Book"*) as well as her hinting at Judgement Day ("…we read it to the end, and we know how it ends. And we win.") makes clear her belief that the Confederacy will be judged as a morally righteous identity and/or cause. My co-performance of this event produced feelings of disagreement and worry. I disagree with Lee: I believe her opinions are wrong. I judge her as wrong, not evil, but dangerous because Lee engages with rhetoric that sustains white supremacy. My co-performance with this rhetoric inspired feelings of confusion and anger. I am baffled that White people openly engage in a historical narrative that has been demystified by popular culture and angered by *their* unwillingness to accept or engage with *our* dismantled history. The facts regarding the origin and proliferation of Lost Cause mythology do not align with the rhetoric performed by the speakers at the Beauvoir estate that day—this contradiction leaves behind feelings of nostalgia tainted by white nationalist sentiments intended to further sustain white supremacy.

Lee is encouraging the audience to get to work commemorating a fantastical history. She recalls *fantastical memories* and employs them to encourage others to commit to and perpetuate the fantasy. This is the moment during the proceedings when the magic of witnessing occurs, or what Vivian refers to as the *compossibility of witnessing*. For Vivian, "We are all witnesses;

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[185] Transcribed from the proceedings of *Confederate Memorial Day 2021*, Beauvoir House and Jefferson Davis Presidential Library, Biloxi, MI, 26 April 2021.

none of us are witnesses."[186] In other words, this type of witnessing requires a suspension of logic or make-believe for it to be effective—a person bears witness to a past atrocity of which they were not present. In this example, Lee's words help the audience make personalized cultural memories of the Confederacy that are baked into their cultural identities as White Americans. And—though this sounds contradictory and, perhaps oxymoronic—these cultural identities are best described as Confederate American. When Susan Lee evokes a cause that she claims to be morally correct in 1776, 1865, and 2021 she links Confederate values to patriotism and a fight for independence and, ironically, freedom. Cox writes, "In many ways the Confederate celebration in the 1890s was a celebration of white supremacy being expressed nationally."[187] I would argue that the Confederate celebration of 2021 was also a celebration of white supremacy performed through and evocative of a historicity that aligns Confederate culture to Revolutionary culture.

The people who gathered to celebrate Confederate Memorial Day at Beauvoir were mostly middle-aged adults and retirees; however, there were also children in attendance. In fact, one of the commemorative wreaths was dedicated by a young girl dressed in mourning attire. I was mystified by a child participant in the ceremony—I remember feeling nostalgically triggered by her presence and then later journaling about my own experiences as a child growing-up in Jonesboro, GA— the town that inspired Margaret Mitchell's vision of "Tara" in *Gone with the Wind.* Seeing the children at Beauvoir was a stark reminder that I, too, was once a little girl who dreamed of wearing antebellum style dresses. That I, too, was once a little girl who believed in a noble Confederacy and its Lost Cause. I watched the White little girl proudly lay her wreath

[186] Vivian, *Commonplace Witnessing,* 163.
[187] Cox, *Dixie's Daughters*, 14.

thereby re-performing a Confederate ritual that precedes her by over a hundred years, and I realized in that moment that she embodies present hopes for the future of Confederate Americans and white nationalism in America.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined audiences and my role in the audience of the Confederate Memorial Day celebration and commemoration at Beauvoir Historic House and Jefferson Davis Presidential Library. I reemphasized descriptions of overt and covert racial bias and I explained how co-performative witnessing and commonplace witnessing work as critical ethnographic methods for researching cultures that are not always relatable (or accessible). I analyzed two representations of the Confederate American cultural identity at Beauvoir: Confederate Military Men and Legacy Southern Belle Advocates. I also included examples of how the Confederate gaze operates and projects gender, race, and sexuality on white nationalist social media websites. Additionally, I described and analyzed the Confederate American spiritual war and how it expresses themes of authenticity and regret, and I explained how Confederate Americans become *living memorials* through the lens of Mechtild Widrich's work on performative monuments. This chapter has argued that Confederate Americans are also white nationalist in their use of invitational rhetoric to reproduce and reperform the tenets of white supremacy which include fantastical memory, Confederate Stewardship, and the Confederate gaze. I also contend that white nationalist conceptions of gender, race, and sexuality are influential factors in cultivating and perpetuating interpretations and manifestations of whiteness in the post-Civil War United States.

Chapter 2: Performing Subversions of White Supremacy at the Centennial Commemoration of the Tulsa Race Massacre

Introduction

This chapter examines the Centennial Commemoration of the Tulsa Race Massacre as a social practice that subverts white supremacy. Specifically, I analyze three events during the weeklong commemoration to explore themes like erasure, silencing, and social justice. In this chapter, I argue that the Centennial Tulsa Race Massacre Commemoration subverts white supremacy by commemorating history as it happened and not the fantastical memory of the Tulsa Race Riots and, in doing so, the commemoration reproduces identities that white supremacy omits or denies altogether. The Tulsa Race Massacre, sometimes referred to as the Tulsa Race Riot or the Black Wall Street Massacre, was largely ignored or misinterpreted nationally until its centennial commemoration in 2021, which reinvigorated national interest in the story.[188] A sizable event that had been years in the making was scheduled. The commemoration was supposed to be a week-long celebration culminating in a star-studded main event promoted as "Rise and Remember." The concert was to be held at the OneOK Stadium, home to the Tulsa Drillers baseball team. Public art shows, a candlelight vigil, and a prayer-wall dedication were also scheduled. Celebrities like John Legend and civil leaders like Stacey

[188] The popularity of HBO's 2019 "Watchmen" garnered a respectable following and can be understood as contributing to the national attention that the Tulsa Race Massacre received in 2021.

Abrams were scheduled to attend. It was rumored that perhaps the Obamas would join via satellite and Oprah Winfrey would also make an appearance. The tickets to "Remember and Rise" sold in a matter of minutes, and people traveled from across America and beyond to attend the commemoration's star-studded event.

In *Between Remembrance and Repair,* Claire Whitlinger offers a guide to the effective commemoration of racial violence. Whitlinger writes, "I suggest that commemorating racial violence is most effective when certain conditions are met: the commemoration organizers collaborate on a common goal; the status of racial groups is equal within the commemorative planning process; the project has the support of relevant political and cultural authorities; and the commemoration planning process provides opportunities for informal interactions that enable participants to challenge preexisting stereotypes and develop new understandings of their own experiences and the experiences of others."[189] A collaboration resembling this worked to organize the "Remember and Rise" event, however, a massive breakdown would upend all of the planning.

"Remember and Rise" was canceled two days before the concert was scheduled, leaving commemoration-goers confused and upset by the sudden cancelation. The event was hampered by last minute production changes, inclement weather, and disagreements between event organizers. An important issue arose when the lawyers representing the survivors asked for additional compensation days before the event. Deon J. Hampton reported:

> Legal representatives for the three living survivors approached the Tulsa Race Massacre Centennial Commission about including them in the "Remember and Rise" occasion in return for $100,000 each and a $2 million seed gift to a

[189] Claire Whitlinger, *Between Remembrance and Repair: Commemorating Racial Violence in Philadelphia, Mississippi,* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020). 173.

> reparations coalition fund, state Sen. Kevin Matthews, chairman of the commission, said in a Friday press conference. The parties agreed to those terms, he said. At the last minute, the lawyers representing the survivors moved to change the agreement, requesting $1 million for each and $50 million for the fund, said Matthews, who did not take questions.
>
> 'We could not respond to those demands,' he said. 'I absolutely want the survivors, the descendants and others that were affected to be financially and emotionally supported, however this is not the way, no matter how hard we try.'
>
> Lawyers representing the survivors and descendants did not return requests for comment.[190]

The unraveling of the "Remember and Rise" event by the Tulsa Race Massacre Centennial Commission demonstrates a failure to exercise the first three tenets of Whitlinger's suggestions to effectively commemorate racialized violence because, as *The New York Times* reports, the committee was unwilling or unable to meet and/or privilege the survivors' inputs.[191] The committee failed to collaborate with the survivors towards a common goal of reparations and, in doing so, the committee did not treat the survivors with equal status in the commemorative

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[190] Deon J. Hampton, "Tulsa 'Remember and Rise' event canceled days before centennial of race massacre after dispute over payment to survivors," *NBC News*, May 28, 2021, accessed June 2, 2022. https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/tulsa-remember-rise-event-canceled-days-centennial-race-massacre-n1269028

[191] Campbell Robinson and Audra D. S. Burch, "Race Massacre Unraveled Over Reparations: A centennial commission that raised $30 million for a history exhibit center said the government should be responsible for repaying survivors and their descendants," *The New York Times*, May 28, 2021, accessed June 2, 2022. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/28/us/tulsa-race-massacre-commission.html

planning process. Additionally, without the support of the survivors' "the project [did not] have relevant political and cultural authorities."[192]

The committee's undoing is reportedly due to issues regarding how to best divide the money raised for reparations and for the Greenwood District. The *New York Times* published an exposé claiming that, "[i]n 2017, Kevin Matthews, a Black state senator, founded the centennial commission, which is dedicated to commemorating the event and "telling Greenwood's story in a major way." [193] The mostly Black commission was comprised of elected officials, philanthropy and education representatives, and community members. It raised $30 million, of which most was earmarked for a history exhibit center called Greenwood Rising, with the remaining dedicated to establishing a cultural center and art projects in Greenwood. The survivors claim they were initially offered substantially more money and that the commission had disrespected them and did not value their input regarding many contested issues. Most recently, a judge ruled that the case for reparations, under the public nuisance law, may move forward and time is of the essence because the three remaining survivors are 108, 107, and 102.[194]

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[192] Claire Whitlinger, *Between Remembrance and Repair*, 173.
Campbell Robinson and Audra D. S. Burch, "Race Massacre Unraveled Over Reparations: A centennial commission that raised $30 million for a history exhibit center said the government should be responsible for repaying survivors and their descendants," *The New York Times*, May 28, 2021, accessed June 2, 2022.
https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/28/us/tulsa-race-massacre-commission.html

[193] Campbell Robinson and Audra D. S. Burch, "Race Massacre Unraveled Over Reparations: A centennial commission that raised $30 million for a history exhibit center said the government should be responsible for repaying survivors and their descendants," *The New York Times*, May 28, 2021, accessed June 2, 2022.
https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/28/us/tulsa-race-massacre-commission.html

[194] Ken Miller, "Judge lets Tulsa Race Massacre reparations lawsuit proceed," *Associated Press*, May 3, 2022, accessed October 23, 2022.
https://apnews.com/article/lawsuits-race-and-ethnicity-tulsa-oklahoma-massacres-cba8eb3e1d613afa080b0bbbaaa7f526
Ken Miller, "Judge: Tulsa Race Massacre victims' descendants can't sue," *Associated Press*, August 4, 2022, accessed October 23, 2022.

The Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921

To understand the centennial commemoration, it is important to understand the history of events and the context of what we were gathered to commemorate. The Tulsa Race Massacre began when a White teenager accused a Black teenager of sexual harassment, ultimately leading to the deputization of White citizens and their subsequent burning and looting of the Greenville District over two days, May 31 and June 1, 1921. The Greenville District was/is also referred to as Black Wall Street due to the significant concentration of Black wealth in 1920s America. At that time, Black Wall Street was the largest concentration of Black wealth in the nation, and its citizens were comprised of artists, teachers, doctors, lawyers, and entrepreneurs. Newly deputized White citizens destroyed thirty-five square blocks of Black owned businesses and homes, killing an unknown number of Black citizens, and displacing the entire community. The incident has largely been silenced in national history; however, the centennial commemoration of the event reinvigorated cultural interest in understanding what happened in Tulsa.

The first acts of violence occurred as a White man tried to forcibly disarm a Black man who was part of the group protecting a Black teenager from a White mob. Dick Rowland, a nineteen-year-old shoe-shiner, was accused of touching Sarah Page, a seventeen-year-old elevator operator. Fearing a White mob would lynch Rowland, a group of Greenwood citizens organized at the sheriff's office to ensure he would receive due process. Just past 10:30 PM, a White man was shot as he attempted to disarm one of the Black Greenwood citizens. The violence that followed claimed a reported thirty-two lives and would eventually claim an

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https://apnews.com/article/lawsuits-race-and-ethnicity-tulsa-oklahoma-massacres-61e4a271a584c40483e1ba0709699159

estimated 300 lives and thirty-five square blocks of established Black-owned businesses, churches, and homes.

Below are two versions of the events: one written by a historian in 1974 and the other from a news article published just hours after the incident between the two teenagers. R. Halliburton Jr. describes the racialized hostilities that segregated Tulsa in 1921, citing white society's description of the Greenwood District as "Little Africa." [195] He includes a summary of the events that precipitated the massacre:

> These malodorous conditions prevailed on Monday morning of May 30, 1921, when nineteen-year-old Dick Rowland, a Negro bootblack, entered the Drexel Building in downtown Tulsa to deliver a package. Upon entering the elevator to leave the building, Rowland apparently stumbled, brushed against and stepped on the foot of the white operator, Sarah Page. Mrs. Page, a young divorcee, screamed for help, causing Rowland to flee as a department store clerk ran to her assistance. Mrs. Page informed the rapidly growing crowd that the Negro had attempted to criminally assault her. The police were summoned and immediately began a routine investigation. Early Tuesday morning, two Negro police officers, Henry C. Pack and Henry Carmichael, arrested Rowland in the Negro section of town and placed him in the city jail. Mrs. Page subsequently identified Rowland as her assailant. Rowland, however, maintained his innocence by claiming that he stumbled and accidentally stepped on Mrs. Page's foot. He explained that when Mrs. Page screamed, he became frightened and ran.

[195] R. Halliburton, Jr. "The Tulsa Race War of 1921." *Journal of Black Studies* 2, no. 3 (1972): 333–57, 334.

Nab Negro for Attacking Girl In an Elevator

A negro delivery boy who gave his name to the police as "Diamond Dick" but who has been identified as Dick Rowland, was arrested on South Greenwood avenue this morning by Officers Carmichael and Pack, charged with attempting to assault the 17-year-old white elevator girl in the Drexel building early yesterday.

He will be tried in municipal court this afternoon on a state charge.

The girl said she noticed the negro a few minutes before the attempted assault looking up and down the hallway on the third floor of the Drexel building as if to see if there was anyone in sight but thought nothing of it at the time.

A few minutes later he entered the elevator she claimed, and attacked her, scratching her hands and face and tearing her clothes. Her screams brought a clerk from Renberg's store to her assistance and the negro fled. He was captured and identified this morning both by the girl and clerk, police say.

Rowland denied that he tried to harm the girl, but admitted he put his hand on her arm in the elevator when she was alone.

Tenants of the Drexel building said the girl is an orphan who works as an elevator operator to pay her way through business college.

Figure 10 Tulsa Tribune Article May 31, 1921, Library of Congress.

The Tulsa Tribute article, pictured above, reads:

Nab Negro for Attacking Girl In an Elevator

A negro delivery boy who gave his name to the public as 'Diamond Dick' but who has been identified as Dick Rowland, was arrested on South Greenwood Avenue this morning by Officers Carmichael and Pack, charged with attempting to assault the 17-year-old white elevator girl in the Drexel building early yesterday. He will be tried in municipal court this afternoon on a state charge.

> The girl said she noticed the negro a few minutes before the attempted assault looking up and down the hallway on the third floor of the Drexel building as if to see if there was anyone in sight but thought nothing of it at the time.
>
> A few minutes later he entered the elevator she claimed, and attacked her, scratching her hands and face and tearing her clothes. Her screams brought a clerk from Renberg's store to her assistance and the negro fled. He was captured and identified this morning both by the girl and clerk, police say.
>
> Rowland denied that he tried to harm the girl, but admitted he
> put his hand on her arm in the elevator when she was alone.
> Tenants of the Drexel building said the girl is an orphan who works as an elevator operator to pay her way through business college.

The perspectives of these two narratives differ immensely and document how historical narratives shift and change over time and based on perspective. Halliburton's analysis as a historian writing in the early 1970's and the *Tulsa Tribune* article which hit newsstands hours after the alleged assault demonstrate how drastically memory can shift over time. Halliburton describes the event as an accidental incident in which the White teenager screamed because she was startled by Rowland accidentally stepping on her foot. The *Tulsa Tribune* article suggests that Dick Rowland was intentionally attacking the White teenager, who was working as an elevator operator to pay for college. The news article presents events from the White teenager's perspective and portrays her as a hard-working person trying to better herself through education The article privileges the White teenager's narrative as it affirms her wholesomeness. The mediated representation of the White teenager by the newspaper demonstrates a key component of white supremacy: the protection of white womanhood.

Chris Messer writes that the article pictured above encouraged White people to descend upon Greenwood, burning it to the ground:

> A front-page news article sensationalized the story and led to thousands of white citizens gathering at the local courthouse. In addition, rumors of lynching the inmate permeated the city. Following the arrest, a group of armed African Americans arrived on the scene to protect the prisoner, and, after a heated confrontation with the white crowd, a shot was fired. Preliminary skirmishes ensued and African Americans retreated back to their district of Greenwood. Angry whites followed, brandishing guns and ammunition that they had stolen from local stores along the way. Guns were also provided by local law enforcement officials. A full-fledged riot ensued, with local police officers and national guardsmen siding with whites in a battle against African American residents. The entire thirty-five city block community of Greenwood, including homes and businesses, was burned to the ground. The of deaths resulting from the riot remains unknown.[196]

In this chapter, I argue that the Centennial Tulsa Race Massacre Commemoration subverts white supremacy by commemorating history as it happened and not the fantastical memory of the Tulsa Race Riots and, in doing so, the commemoration reproduces identities that white supremacy omits or denies altogether. The events I will discuss in this chapter include a prayer wall dedication, a performative monument experience, and a candlelight vigil. These events took place Monday, May 31 and Tuesday, June 1, 2021 in the Greenwood District of Tulsa, OK. The dedication of the prayer wall began in the morning at 10:00AM at the Vernon African Methodist Episcopal Church, or AME Church. The church's basement wall is the only

[196] Chris M. Messer, "The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921: Toward an Integrative Theory of Collective Violence," *Journal of Social History* 44, no. 4 (2011): 1217–32, 1217-1218.

structure to survive the fires and destruction of the two nights of terrorism in 1921. The Vernon AME Church also hosted a performative monument installation entitled *Society's Cage*; the cage invites participants to film themselves holding their breath as long as possible while walking through the exhibit. The candlelight vigil began at 10:00 PM, Monday, May 31st, corresponding to and commemorating the recognized beginning of the events that led to the massacre and destruction a century earlier.

This chapter highlights themes of erasure, Black cultural identity in relation to the memory of slavery, and ghostly connections to ancestral pasts. I assess the capabilities and limits of my White body commemorating racialized atrocities in a co-performance and co-presence with Black bodies. The Vernon AME prayer wall dedication, the performative monument experience, and the candlelight vigil demonstrate how themes of erasure and/or silencing are historically negotiated and subverted through acts of commemoration. As I will show, the candlelight vigil ritual activated my own connection to segregationist ancestors and provided a means to explore reconciling my white supremacist ancestry with my White American cultural identity in the present. I explore how American Whiteness can be realized in a supporting role of allyship especially during the commemoration of a racialized atrocity. I contend that the experience of Blackness in America can be shared but not truly realized in my White body. I can, however, tap into the energies of White ghosts who wish to repair race relations and atone for past evils.

Memory Work

As I explained in the dissertation's introduction, memory work can be confusing because of the nuances and overlap between various forms of memory. At its simplest, memory exists on two planes: collective and personal. Collective memories are those shared by a group of people,

and personal memories are privately held and personally experienced. Collective memories may be heroic, or they can be traumatic.[197] Collective memories shared by the dominant culture often become public memory or the official historical narrative. Collective memories shared by marginalized cultures often become counter memory, the unofficial narrative of historical events.

Layering the planes of collective memory and personal memory engenders cultural identities. Thus, cultural identities are "the psychological connection between an individual and a culture."[198] Cultural identities commemorate their collective memories and, in doing so, perpetuate collective memories and cultural identities regardless of the authenticity of their historical narratives. Slippages between fact and fantasy are revealed over time.[199] This is why public memories and attitudes about historical events shift over time, as with the Tulsa Race Massacre.

Cultural memories unify groups of people and can last for several generations. Jan Assmann distinguishes between two types of collective memory: communicative memories "that are based exclusively on everyday communications" and cultural memory "characterized by its distance from the everyday."[200] According to Jan Assmann, communicative memory exists in a group but has a shorter lifespan then cultural memory lasting just three generation cycles. Collective memory is a sociological phenomenon, whereas cultural identity is a psychological attachment constructed for political purposes.[201]

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[197] Aleida Assmann, *Shadows of Trauma: Memory and the Politics of Postwar Identity*, trans. Sarah Clift (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016).
[198] C. Wan and P.Y. Chew, "Components of Cultural Identity," *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, no. 16.4 (December 2013): 247-259.
[199] Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997). 24-25.
[200] Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka. "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity." *New German Critique*, no. 65 (1995): 125–33. 126, 129.
[201] C. Wan and P.Y. Chew, "Components of Cultural Identity," 247-259.

Expounding upon Frederick Nietzsche's theories about "wirkliche Historie," Michel Foucault distinguishes between traditional and effective history. Foucault says, "Effective history… shortens its vision to those things nearest to it—the body, the nervous system, nutrition, digestion, and energies" perhaps anticipating embodied research and "energies" associated with human to human contact.[202] Foucault hints at co-performative ethnography through his style of criticism: he is credited with inventing the idea of "counter memory" in 1977, and, since then, has influenced scholars to examine power through constructions of history and memory.

The production and reproduction of historical narratives largely depends on power, or, as Michel-Rolph Trouillot says, "the uneven contribution of competing groups and individuals who have unequal access to the means for such production."[203] For Trouillot, "History is the fruit of power, but power itself is never so transparent that its analysis becomes superfluous. The ultimate mark of power may be its invisibility; the ultimate challenge, the exposition of its roots."[204] As I will demonstrate, public memory of the Tulsa Race Massacre has been transformed from counter memory to public memory, erasing the formerly held public memory and graduating its counter memory to cultural memory status. The centennial commemoration realigned America's collective memory of the 1921 race massacre as it happened and not the white-washed version that downplayed the role of white supremacy. In doing so, Black cultural identities denied or omitted, like those of Black doctors, Black politicians, and Black entrepreneurs, have been re-formulated in the national memory of America's past. This re-formation was achieved through the resiliency of the survivors and their descendants, who

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[202] Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *Language Counter-Memory Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, (Ithaca N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1977): 139-164.155.
[203] Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, xviii.
[204] Trouillot, xviii.

guarded the memory of the Tulsa Race Massacre and protected it from degradation and mutilation. The Vernon AME Church, specifically, and the residents of the Greenwood District, have kept the fire that raged through their town alive in the collective consciousness of their collective memory.

Commemoration as Social Practice

I have explained how collective memory and cultural identity are formed and how they shape cultural memories so that I can demonstrate how commemorations operate as a social practice. The reformation of the memory of the Tulsa Race Massacre relied upon social movements and the resiliency of Black collective identities. The relationship between traumatic pasts and social movements has been established by scholars like Dwight Conquergood, D. Soyini Madison, and Ron Eyerman, who writes, "As a cultural process, trauma is mediated through various forms of representation and linked to the reformation of collective identity and the reworking of collective memory."[205] Eyerman continues, "Institutions like the black church and cultural artifacts like blues music may have embodied and passed on collective memories from generation to generation, but it was through social movements that even these diverse collective memories attain a more united focus, linking individuals and collectives into a unified subject, with a common future as well as a common past."[206] Cultural artifacts and institutions, such as the Black church, were instrumental to the social movements that transformed the counter memory of Tulsa into public memory.

Claire Whitlinger argues that institutions like the Black church are the "guardians" of counter memories. She writes:

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[205] Ron Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2001). 1.
[206] Eyerman, 21.

> After the civil rights movement, African American churches … served as memory centers, where community leaders could tend to the memories of civil rights-era violence, keeping them alive during long periods of repression. The stewardship of these counter memories was a necessary component of the subsequent silence breaking, for if neglected, the memory of past racial violence would fade into oblivion.[207]

Black churches, like the Vernon AME Church, play a vital role in protecting and perpetuating collective memories from traumatic pasts, and they activate social movements into perpetuity.

Memory work and social movements are intrinsically linked, which allows commemoration to function as an agent of social change. Ron Eyerman and Sandra L. Richards agree on the importance of social movements' impacts on cultural identities. Ron Eyerman explains, "Social movements reconnect individuals by and through collective representation; they present the collective and represent the individual in a double sense, forging individual into collective memory and representing the individual as part of a collective."[208] And Sandra L. Richards writes, "Not only is memory operating as imagination, but in this instance of collective trauma, it is also functioning as the desire to reverse history."[209] The desire to reverse history links itself to activism and social movements. Claire Whitlinger also expounds upon the importance of memory and social movements as the driving components to elicit social change. She writes: "...social movements rely on memory to provide legitimacy, identity, and continuity. It is the memory of movements that generates the repertoires in which activists find inspirations

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[207] Whitlinger, *Between Remembrance and Repair,* 170-171.
[208] Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma,* 10.
[209] Sandra L. Richards, "Who Is This Ancestor?: Performing Memory in Ghana's Slave Castle-Dungeons (A Multimedia Performance Meditation)," in *The Sage Handbook of Performance Studies,* Eds. D. Soyini Madison and Judith Hamera, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2006): 489-507, 490.

for songs, slogans, and tactics."[210] Social movements and activism are important in perpetuating collective memories and their corresponding cultural identities.

The social practice of memory manifests through public rituals like commemorations and requires a collective identity as a cultural referent. Sandra L. Richards uses "Thanksgiving Day pageants" as an example of how collective memories become attached to cultural rituals. Richards says:

> As a social practice, memory insists upon a collective identity in which we posit ourselves as descendants in a genealogy to which we may have no actual blood relationship; we see ourselves as the inheritors of a legacy transmitted by those who preceded us and enact various rituals, like elementary school Thanksgiving Day pageants, in order to deposit into the body and naturalize construction of collective identity.[211]

The reperformance of commemoration rituals, like Thanksgiving pageants, demonstrate how easily historical narratives are naturalized within dominant culture and how other historical narratives are erased or silenced. These collective memories typically fall within a binary of heroic and traumatic memories.

Erasure, Silencing, and Social Justice

It is important to understand how collective memories become attached to cultural rituals so that we can better understand how some collective memories, and by extension—cultural identities—are silenced. The erasure of or silencing of memory is a consequence of a white supremacist desire to assimilate Others into mainstream American culture. The consequence of assimilation is erasure, silencing, or denying Others' cultural, collective, and personal memories.

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[210] Whitlinger, *Between Remembrance and Repair*, 8.
[211] Richards, "Who Is This Ancestor?," 490.

Erasure is a form of covert racism. Sandra L. Richards writes, "Given the denigration of blackness that connects the transatlantic slave trade to present day aggression of Africa-descended people, very often the gesture of erasure happens quickly and goes unnoticed."[212] Michel-Rolph Trouillot identifies four ways in which silencing enters the process of history production: (1) The moment of fact creation (the making of *sources*); (2) The moment of fact assembly (the making of *archives*); (3) The moment of fact retrieval (the making of narratives); and (4) The moment of retrospective significance (the making of *history* in the final instance).[213] The erasure of memory occurs during the process of history production and through a cultural process of constructing or reconstructing identity.

Cultural identity and collective memory rely upon mediated clues and representations. Ron Eyerman writes, "As a cultural process, trauma is mediated through various forms of representation and linked to the reformation of collective identity and the reworking of collective memory."[214] Eyerman argues further that the development of "African American" as a cultural identity is due to the reformation of public opinion regarding slavery. During Reconstruction, the dominant culture's opinion of slavery was overhauled due to reintegrating White Confederates back into American society; this is the impetus for Lost Cause mythology. As Whites rekindled patriotic bonds and as Northern attitudes about slavery began to morph, the national perception of the Confederate South became more and more favorable amongst White Americans. White Southerners were recast as brothers to Northern White men, and Black Americans were considered mentally and morally inferior. This idea of racial superiority and inferiority would become the basis for white supremacy.

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[212] Richards, "Who Is This Ancestor?," 491.
[213] Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 26.
[214] Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma*, 1.

As I addressed earlier, Black churches and institutions continue to be imperative to the perpetuation of Black collective memory, particularly as it pertains to traumatic and/or silenced pasts. Claire Whitlinger distinguishes between difficult pasts and silenced pasts and argues that the latter is more difficult to commemorate. She writes, "commemorations of silent pasts generally embody conflicts over the very existence of a past experience. … Memory movements that are engaged in battles over existence thus constitute a form of consciousness-raising, drawing attention to memories that have been suppressed or publicly silenced."[215] Commemorations of silenced histories are often controversial because they push back against popular memory, and activate cultural identities that white supremacy denies such as those that align with Black excellence and/or white monstrosity.

Power controls public memory and, subsequently, erases or silences counter memories. Whitlinger argues, "collective memory is constructed and maintained by asymmetrical social relations. Those who occupy powerful social positions are specially equipped to advance an 'official' version of the past that is advantageous to their interests. … those in positions of power have disproportionate influence on public representations of the past."[216] Claire Whitlinger, Ron Eyerman, and Michel-Rolph Trouillot caution us to consider how collective memory is constructed and perpetuated. Trouillot demonstrates how we are the contemporaries of those who come before us. He writes, "The collective subjects who supposedly remember did not exist as such at the time of the events they claim to remember. Rather, their constitution as subjects goes hand in hand with the continuous creation of the past. As such, they do not succeed in such a past: they are its contemporaries."[217] And Saidiya Hartman adds, "To believe as I do, that the

[215] Whitlinger, *Between Remembrance and Repair,* 38-39.
[216] Whitlinger, 39
[217] Trouillot, *Silencing the Past,* 16.

enslaved are our contemporaries is to understand that we share their aspirations and defeats, which isn't to say that we are owed what they were due but rather to acknowledge that they accompany our every effort to fight against domination, to abolish the color line, and to imagine a free territory, a new commons. It is to hear their knowledge and freedom. The enslaved knew that freedom had to be taken; it was not the kind of thing that could ever be given to you."[218] The enslaved person's experience of freedom resounds and is reproduced by asserting counter memory back into dominant culture and by subverting the tenets of white supremacy. For Saidiya Harman:

> [Freedom] is won and lost, again and again. It is a glimpse of possibility, an opening, a solicitation without any guarantee of duration before it flickers and then is extinguished.
>
> The demands of the slave in the present have everything to do with making good the promise of abolition, which entails much more than the end of property in slaves. It requires the reconstruction of society, which is the only way to honor our debt to the dead. This is the intimacy of our age with theirs—an unfinished struggle.[219]

The fantasies of white supremacy are subverted when "the struggle" is activated and appreciated within dominant culture. Commemorating counter memories and traumatic racialized events in American popular culture exemplify how freedom is exercised on behalf of our ancestors.

Claire Whitlinger describes the subversive side of commemoration and argues that commemoration is part of "the struggle." She suggests "that commemorations do

[218] Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*, 169.
[219] Hartman, 170.

both: they hold the possibility of transforming their social surroundings and cultivating more inclusive communities, while also constituting the fodder for future contestations over the meaning of the past."[220] Commemorating traumatic pasts, especially silenced pasts and erased memories activate "the struggle." This chapter explores how "the struggle" appeared in commemoration rituals at the centennial commemoration of the Tulsa Race Massacre. I agree with Whitlinger's findings that "commemoration itself is a part of that very struggle."[221]

Black American Cultural Identity and the Memory of Slavery

Understanding how collective identities and cultural histories become erased and/or silenced creates a better understanding of Black American cultural identity in relation to the memory of slavery. As I previously mentioned in the dissertation's introduction, American cultural identity is shaped in relation to and experience with white supremacy. Ron Eyerman points to slavery as the locus of "African American" identity arguing, "Through various media forms or representation black artists and writers reconstituted slavery as the primal scene of black identity. In this emergent identity, slavery, not as an institution of experience but as a point of origins in a common past, would ground the formation of a black community… In the trauma of rejections, slavery was remembered as its memory re-membered a group."[222] The concept of slavery and subjugation became an identity marker for Black Americans, a mantle woven together by White Americans in need of reconciliation just after a civil war. White Americans bonded over the subjugation of Black Americans as well as the white supremacist beliefs that cast these roles.

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[220] Whitlinger, *Between Remembrance and Repair,* 181
[221] Whitlinger, 184.
[222] Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma,* 16.

Ron Eyerman argues that the distinction of "African American" demonstrates America's failure to incorporate the millions of emancipated enslaved people into American dominant culture. He elaborates, "'African American' is not itself a natural category, but a historically formed collective identity which first of all required articulation and the acceptance on the part of those it was meant to incorporate. It was here, in this identity-formation, that the memory of slavery would be central, not so much as an individual experience, but as collective memory."[223] Whiteness and Blackness developed alongside and in relation to each other, albeit with inverse relations to power.

Whiteness was engendered by the collective forgetting of slavery as an evil institution. Eyerman argues, "Slavery as a touchstone for identity was the 'self-imposed' categorization, as opposed to, and meant to counter, those of the dominant white society. In this sense, the memory of slavery by African Americans was what Foucault would call a "counter-memory."[224] During the era of Reconstruction, White northerners and White southerners had to come to terms with slavery. Eyerman points to this moment as the originating factor to American cultural identity. He writes, "This clearly marks a difference between black and white in social and historical understanding. It was in the context of re-narrativizing the meaning of the civil war that 'whites' and 'blacks' were articulated as distinctive social groups. With a complex yet common history… While some whites might have condemned slavery as an evil institution and bemoaned its effects on the body politic of American society, blacks viewed slavery as a social condition, a lived experience, producing a distinctive way of life, a culture, a community, and thus an identity."[225]

[223] Eyerman, 16.
[224] Eyerman, 17.
[225] Eyerman, 17.

From this moment, the Reconstruction era created notions of whiteness and Blackness that would pave the way for heroic (white) or traumatic (Black) collective memories.

Monuments and commemorations reconstruct whiteness and Blackness. Black Americans lacked the financial backing, political power to erect monuments, and the advantage of generational white privilege. Eyerman writes, "Without the means to influence public memory, blacks were left to form and maintain their collective memory, with slavery as an ever-shifting, reconstructed reference point. Slavery has meant different things for different generations of black Americans, but it was always there as a referent. It was not until the 1950s, even the 1960s, that slavery moved outside group memory to challenge the borders, the rituals, and sites of public memory."[226] Eyerman credits the Civil Rights Movement for course-correcting the national memory of slavery and argues that social movements are invaluable to developing and perpetuating collective memory.

The tenets of white supremacy and the memory of slavery continue to shape and limit, to produce and reproduce, American cultural identities. Saidiya Hartman argues that the memory of slavery is not a memory but a way of life for Black Americans. She writes:

> If slavery persists as an issue in the political life of black America, it is not because of an antiquarian obsession with bygone days or the burden of a too-long memory, but because black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago. This is the afterlife of slavery—skewed life changes, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment. I, too, am the afterlife of slavery.[227]

[226] Eyerman, 18.
[227] Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, 6.

The memory of slavery continues to impact Black and White cultural identities in America. The afterlife of slavery experienced by Hartman creates an inverse in which I, as a White woman, am also the afterlife of slavery—perhaps a more precise term would be *the afterlife of the Confederacy*. White Americans experience the inverse Hartman's afterlife of slavery: excellent access to health and education, a longer lifespan, low incarceration percentages, helpful police officers, and middle-class financial privilege which often includes access to generational wealth. Am I, too, the afterlife of a fantastical Confederacy? Yes. I am the child of white power descended from ancestors who benefitted from the memory of slavery.

Co-performance and Assembly in Tulsa, OK

Co-performing commemoration offers a radical perspective from which to study and appreciate culture. My perspective acknowledges a dependence on White-centric knowledge and circumnavigates some of the pitfalls of academic-text-based epistemes for embodied learning and an invitation to make oneself vulnerable by invitation—to be invited to listen and co-perform rituals with people whose culture and experiences vary from mine as a White woman. As Diana Taylor argues, "Performances may not, as [Victor] Turner had hoped, give us access and insight into another culture, but they certainly tell us a great deal about our desire for access, and reflect the politics of our interpretations."[228] Taylor is describing how performance has a broad use of meanings in varying contexts but, as a concept, has gone largely untranslatable. This inability to be pinned down signifies performance studies' inchoate state as a discipline and its unwillingness to be defined. To practice performance studies is to interpret cultural energies using one's body as the instrument for analysis. It is a methodology that requires its researcher's physical, emotional, and spiritual participation.

[228] Diana Taylor. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 6.

As in the previous chapter, I rely on the tenets of co-performance and commonplace witnessing to interpret my bodily experiences of commemorative events. The commemorative celebrations I attend are open to the public and encourage the cultivation of cultural memories and political ideologies. Performance studies practitioners are also activists; performance studies and critical theory are what I use to interpret the data from my body's experience. Dwight Conquergood, D. Soyini Madison, and Diana Taylor argue that performance studies practitioners are especially responsible for taking the bodily experience to knowledge, achieving this through activism/citizenship.[229] Madison writes, "As critical ethnographers, we are compelled to act morally; in other words, we feel the responsibility to make *a difference in the world*—to contribute to the quality of life and to the enlivening possibilities of those we study."[230] I make my body vulnerable by accepting invitations to commemorate alongside varying cultural identities.

Judith Butler claims that states of precarity elide with personal ethics to inspire groups to assemble. In *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly*, Butler uses performativity and precarity as method and subject for understanding why marginalized groups assemble and the power dynamics of performing the right to assemble as a cultural expression of dissent, unity, rage, resilience, and/or identity, usually to create better opportunities in the future for said cultural identity. They write, "when bodies assemble on the street, in the square, or other forms of public space (including virtual ones) they are exercising a plural and performative right to

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[229] Dwight Conquergood, *Cultural Struggles: Performance, Ethnography, Praxis*, Edited by E. Patrick Johnson. (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2016).
D. Soyini Madison, *Acts of Activism: Human Rights as Radical Performance*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
Diana Taylor, *¡Presente!: The Politics of Presence*, (Durham: Duke University Press), 2020.
[230] D. Soyini Madison, *Critical Ethnography: Methods, Ethics, and Performance*, (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2005), 83.

appear, one that asserts and instates the body in the midst of the political field, and which, in its expressive and signifying function, delivers a bodily demand for a more livable set of economic, social, and political conditions no longer afflicted by induced form of precarity."[231] For Butler, our individual state of precarity inspires us to seek out others with similar states of precarity so that we can join forces/energies/bodies in an assembly to protest the precarity and, in doing so, make the world a better place for the next generation of those embodying the same precarity. This is also the function of co-performance and performance-centered ethnography, and especially for Butler, taking-up space by asserting oneself in public spaces is a necessary function of performing assembly. They write, "Showing up, standing, breathing, moving, standing still, speech, and silence are all aspects of a sudden assembly, an unforeseen form of political performativity that puts livable life at the forefront of politics."[232] I am using the invitation of assembly and co-performance to explain how the Tulsa Race Massacre Centennial Commemoration subverts white supremacy and bolsters efforts to transform the counter memory of the tragedy in Tulsa in 1921 into public memory that is more aligned with history as it actually occurred.

[231] Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performativity Theory of Assembly*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 11.
[232] Butler, 18.

Vernon AME Prayer Wall Dedication

Figure 11 Plaque Reads: Vernon AME Prayer Wall, May 31, 2021, author's photo.

On the morning of Monday, May 31 (coincidentally Memorial Day), I attended the Vernon AME's dedication of the international prayer wall. The brick wall of the basement is the only structure to remain unharmed by the violence of the race massacre, and it was to be dedicated as an all-faiths prayer wall for the centennial commemoration. I arrived at the church grounds around 9:45 AM. A band was playing as people entered the church yard and as news media set up their cameras. This event lasted approximately two hours and included blessings from leaders of Tulsa's varying religious institutions. Leaders from the Muslim, Buddhist, Jewish, Catholic, and Episcopal faiths performed individual blessings for the prayer wall, which is meant to host anyone from any religion. Rev. Robert R.A. Turner, Ph.D., the pastor of the Vernon AME church, gave the keynote address and several other prominent Black religious

leaders also spoke including the Reverends Jesse Jackson and William Barber. Aleida Assmann argues, "Whether or not the group experience of victimization takes on the form of a collective and cultural memory also depends upon whether the group affected succeeds in organizing itself as a collective and whether it develops commemorative forms that can span generations."[233] The addition of the prayer wall is a performative monument that will surely bolster Tulsa's ability to commemorate the massacre into the future. I argue that the prayer wall commemorates the past while it reinvigorates subversions of white supremacy. As Bishop Barber attests, "the blood is still speaking," the prayer wall calls us to keep fighting, to keep subverting white supremacy.[234]

As I described in the dissertation's introduction, a performative monument is a public artwork or monument that invites its audiences to engage with it. The engagement between commemorative object and spectator bolsters community and collective memory by performing remembrance, thereby transforming monuments from outdated modes of commemoration to productive vehicles for bonding within a traumatized community.[235] The prayer wall acts as a performative monument and adds to the commemoration of the Tulsa Race Massacre because it encourages visitors to worship alongside it. In doing so, visitors are reminded of the resiliency of the victims as well as the physical structure, which is a Black church—a site of resistance and resiliency. The act of praying, or sitting with the wall in reflection, evokes resiliency, strength, and perseverance. Additionally, the wall invites visitors to perform a common and collective goal of anti-racism in America. One cannot help tapping into the *flow* of the building, its placement, its symbolism. The energy exchange between the wall and the person praying

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[233] Assmann, *Shadows of Trauma,* 57.
[234] "Vernon AME Prayer Wall Dedication," May 31, 2021, recorded audio, Rebecca Jackson's archives.
[235] Mechtild Widrich, *Performative Monuments: The Rematerialisation of Public Art*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014.

activates subversions of white supremacy by transforming the cultural memory—turning it away from the white supremacist narrative of "race riots."

The term "race riots" assumes that racial bias and racialized violence were apparent on both sides; however, this is a white supremacist half-truth. As I explained in the dissertation's introduction, code words and/or dog-whistle terms are tools used to obfuscate cultural memory and to equivocate historical narratives. The Tulsa Race Massacre could be considered a "race riot," but only White and Black people were the subjects of this event, and primarily White people burned Black people's homes, destroyed property, and murdered Black civilians. White supremacy relies on equivocation to perpetuate its fantasies and political campaigns.[236]

Praying and various other gestures of spirituality were collectively performed by the audience. The Buddhist leader asked us to sing-chant, the Jewish leader sang along with his Canter, and Catholic and Episcopal leaders offered scripture. Bishop William Barber II, the pastor at Greenleaf Christian Church in Goldsboro, NC, and media personality, invoked the blood of those murdered:

> If you listen real carefully and real solemnly in your spirit, you will hear what the Bible said before we got out of the first chapter of the book [undistinguishable from recording]. The blood is still speaking [crowd speaks back, "Yes!" and "Amen!"]. The blood of Abel cried out, "You can kill the people, but you cannot kill the voice of the blood!" And the blood cannot rest until reparations come! [crowd cheers]. The blood can't rest… you cannot cover over the blood by trying to make a tourist event out of a

[236] Ian Haney López, *Dog Whistle Politics: How Coded Racial Appeals Have Reinvented Racism and Wrecked the Middle Class*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

> tragedy. You cannot cover over the blood and talk about reconciliation when there's been no conciliation.[237]

Tourism is a goal of the Tulsa Centennial Commission, the organization responsible for producing Greenwood Rising, the cultural center and museum foremost responsible for the Tulsa Race Massacre's legacy. However, I argue that the goal of engendering this genre of tourism is aimed at subverting white supremacist historical narratives by confronting and course correcting the cultural memory of the Tulsa Race Massacre. This is achieved through community building performances, events, and cultural centers such as Greenwood Rising.

The prayer wall and the prayer wall dedication invite us to commemorate the event as it actually happened—touching the prayer wall triggered thoughts within me about the racialized violence that led to the massacre of the estimated hundreds of people and destruction of tens of millions of dollars. Performances with the wall also affirm the resiliency of the Black church and the people of Tulsa, OK as well as validates the struggle Black Americans endure because of white supremacy. Saidiya Hartman argues, "To believe as I do, that the enslaved are our contemporaries is to understand that we share their aspirations and defeats, which isn't to say that we are owed what they were due but rather to acknowledge that they accompany our every effort to fight against domination, to abolish the color line, and to imagine a free territory, a new commons."[238] In accepting the wall's invitation, visitors become the contemporaries of the victims of the massacre by affirming "the struggle" together.

"The struggle" is also activated throughout dominant culture via the major American media outlets as well as global media. Local, national, and international media organizations were represented in the audience of the prayer wall dedication. This attention helped convert the

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[237] Rebecca Jackson, "Vernon AME Prayer Wall Dedication," recorded May 31, 2021, recorded audio.
[238] Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, 169.

cultural memory of the event as a riot into a revitalized and more informed memory of the Tulsa Race Massacre. The struggle activated through commemoration reflects Claire Whitlinger's argument that commemoration of racialized trauma is subversive in and of itself. Whitlinger says, "commemorating the violent struggle against racial inequality has both peril and possibility. Its revelation is that commemoration is a part of that very struggle."[239] Commemoration makes people of the past contemporaries with people in the present due to the activation of "the struggle" and the acknowledgement that the memory of slavery is a social condition in the present, the afterlife of slavery.[240]

Society's Cage: A Performative Monument

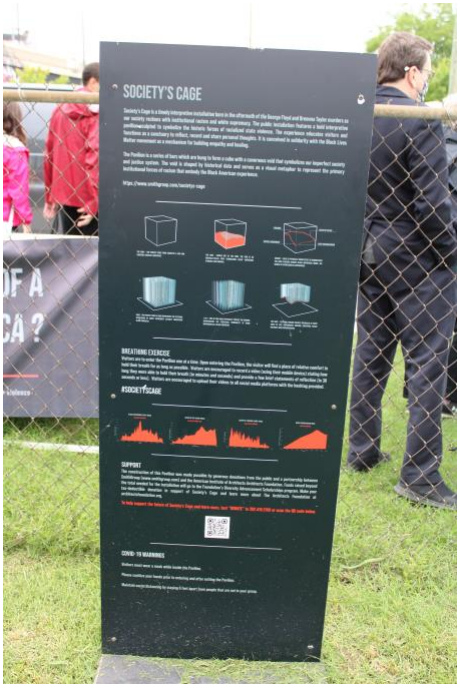

Figure 12 Signage for Society's Cage May 31, 2021, author's photo.

[239] Whitlinger, *Between Remembrance and Repair*, 184.
[240] Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, 6.

Signage for *Society's Cage* reads:

> Society's Cage is a timely interpretive installation born in the aftermath of the George Floyd and Breonna Taylor murders as our society reckons with institutional racism and white supremacy. The public installation features a bold interpretive pavilion sculpted to symbolize the historic forces of racialized state violence. The experience educates visitors and functions as a sanctuary to reflect, record and share personal thoughts. It is conceived in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement as a mechanism for building empathy and healing.
>
> The Pavilion is a series of bars which are hung to form a cube with a cavernous void that symbolizes our imperfect society and justice system. The void is shaped by historical data and serves as a visual metaphor to represent the primary institutional forces of racism that embody the Black American Experience.
>
> BREATHING EXERCISE
>
> Visitors are to enter the Pavilion one at a time. Upon entering the Pavilion, the visitor will find a place of relative comfort to hold their breath for as long as possible. Visitors are encouraged to record a video (using their mobile device) stating how long they were able to hold their breath (in minutes and seconds) and provide a few brief statements of reflection (in 30 seconds or less). Visitors are encouraged to upload their videos to all social media platforms with the hashtag provided. #SOCIETYSCAGE

A performative monument interprets the interaction between monument and visitor as a speech-act. The performance between monument and visitor elicits a performative utterance of

cultural memory, specifically in *Society's Cage*, it is a performative suffocation that activates the cultural memory of white supremacy. According to Mechtild Widrich, this kind of performance utterance binds monument and visitor in a collaboration towards social movement.[241] I first noticed the enormous cage structure installed on the side yard of the Vernon AME Church when I attended the prayer wall dedication the prior day. I came back the following day so that I could experience *Society's Cage* with less fanfare and commotion (the prayer wall dedication was a crowded event).

The cage structure, which looks like a cage filled with steel poles, was impossible not to notice during the prayer wall dedication. Its steel poles hung from the ceiling in a pattern that reminded me of the kind of impression a knee would make if it were pushed into a pin-impression toy. The structure of the performative monument is evocative of Derek Chauvin's knee on George Floyd's neck. The work invites participants to hold their breath in the cage as long as possible, evoking the memory of victims of police brutality. The artwork is called *Society's Cage* and was created by Dayton Schroeter, Vice President and Design Director at Smith Group, an integrative design firm throughout the U.S. and China. The artwork is also a performative monument because it asks its patrons to film themselves holding their breaths; my video is about ninety seconds long and documents the affectation upon my face as I begin to experience the pangs of suffocation.

My experience began confidently; I assumed I could hold my breath for at least a minute or more. At the start of the exercise, I looked around the steel cage and noticed the looming steel poles above my head. Martyrs like George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmed Arbury permeated my thoughts. I thought about Tamir Rice, especially. As I began feeling the unease

[241] Widrich, *Performative Monuments.*

that accompanies breathlessness, I was embarrassed—I felt ashamed. Embarrassed at my inability to fully empathize with the work. I knew that George Floyd's murder couldn't have happened to me because of my White skin. I felt a separation that did not pervade the experience I had in Biloxi with the Confederate Americans, quite the opposite. In Biloxi, I was overcome with ambivalent feelings of nostalgic belonging, but in *Society's Cage,* I felt embarrassed for assuming that I could somatically reflect upon police brutality in a body that would never have to negotiate it as a reality.

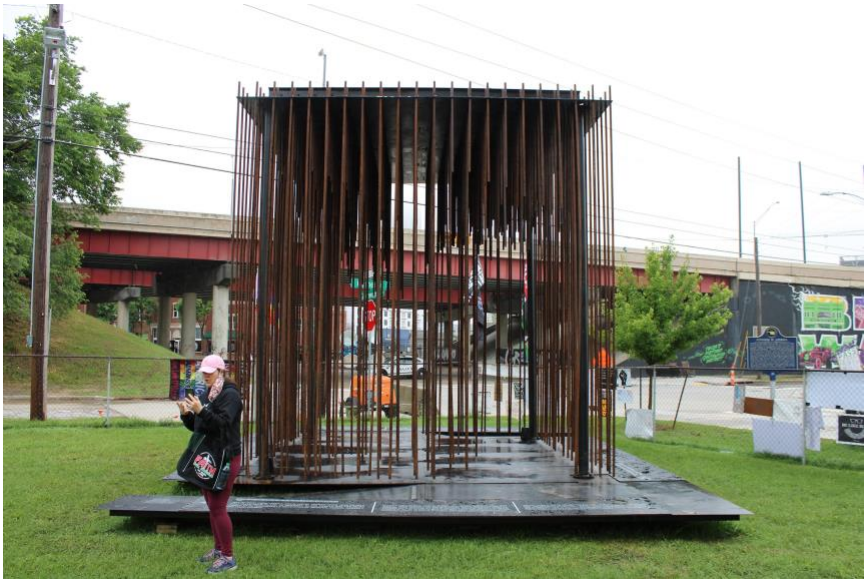

Figure 13 Rebecca Jackson films her response to Society's Cage as per its instructions. June 1, 2021, Photo credit: Sarah Morgan, used with permission.

I felt embarrassed by the solidarity that is possible. I wondered what kind of *communitas* is available for Americans? I felt embarrassed that the breath I mustered was so pitifully short; it did not seem worthy of performing at all. Thirty seconds into holding my breath and I had to snap my mind back into focus because I was beginning to run out of breath; I assumed I had more time. As I was thinking of George Floyd dying, I became consumed trying to claim one more second without air. I was struggling but striving to go one more second, second-by-second, as my timer ticked by the forty seconds marker. I fixated on existing without breath, how many

seconds can I do this? Forty-three… Forty-four… I gasped. My lungs filled with air simultaneously as my eyes filled with tears. I sucked in as much air as I could before I began panting, doubling-over, wiping my tears, and gathering my composure in a timely manner so the next participant could experience the performative monument. I left the monument embarrassed and spiritually fractured knowing that solidarity between White and Black Americans is limited at best.

In *Utopia in Performance*, Jill Dolan "investigates the potential of different kinds of performance to inspire moments in which audiences feel themselves allied with each other, and with a broader, more capacious sense of a public, in which social discourse articulates the possible, rather than the insurmountable obstacles to human potential."[242] Dolan uses the idea of a "utopian performative" to explain how theatrical experiences engage audiences in "a utopia always in process, always only potentially grasped, as it disappears before us around the corners of narrative and social experience."[243] Dolan is speaking specifically to theatrical experiences as a mode of cultural production that presents "what utopia would feel like rather than how it would be organized."[244] My experience of *Society's Cage* contradicts Dolan's utopian performative, instead of experiencing "the doing" of a utopian performative, I experienced a desire for allyship and belonging alongside the realization of separation, not belonging.

I experienced the performative monument in a White body, and in this White body I understand that police brutality and murder is less probable for me. I experienced the impossibility, or the limits, of commiseration, and the desire to cross this barrier. I acknowledge and experienced a separation because I performed *Society's Cage* in a White body, and, thus, I

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[242] Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theatre*, (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 2.
[243] Dolan, 6.
[244] Dolan, 39

knew that the violence/pain we were invited to explore with the performative monument is less a reality for me. This impossibility to fully experience the cultural trauma of American Blackness engenders feelings of guilt and shame. Guilt that White Americans treated Black Americans so heinously, shame for not being able to reach solidarity, and a responsibility (D. Soyini Madison would say "response-ability") to ameliorate this breach to the best of my ability.

Figure 14 Society's Cage is a performative monument installation constructed of steel poles with the Vernon AME Church in the background. May 31, 2021. Photo credit: Sarah Morgan, used with permission.

Figure 15 A person times themselves holding their breath and performing Society's Cage. May 31, 2021. Photo credit: Sarah Morgan, used with permission.

Candlelight Vigil

The candlelight vigil occurred Monday, May 31, 2021, in the Greenwood District of Tulsa at the corner of East Archer St and North Greenwood Ave., which is also the location of Greenwood Rising: The Black Wall St. History Center. The event was scheduled to begin at 10:30 PM to commemorate the moments of violence that precipitated the massacre. I estimate there were approximately 200-400 people in attendance at the vigil, and it rained during most of the event. Volunteers passed around candles, which were difficult to keep lit. Rev. Robert R.A. Turner, Ph.D., the pastor of the Vernon AME church was present. Dr. Turner is a national celebrity and was recognized by most in attendance. He was also protected by bodyguards and

attended the event with an entourage of community and church leaders. I documented his presence at the event as I began recording using the voice memo function on my phone.

The mood of the vigil was melancholic and people were mostly quiet. We gathered in silence waiting to 10:30 PM. Photojournalists snapped shots of the wet and somber scene; a local news team reported from the intersection around ten o'clock. I arrived at the vigil around 9:45 PM to see the news crew setting up their cameras and people gathering in larger and larger numbers. Many people were wearing masks, but most were unmasked. We huddled together as candles were passed out and as people began lighting their candles and spreading the lights, a woman began praising Jesus and leading the crowd in song:

> Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Lord…
>
> Hallelujah, praise the Lord…
>
> Lord, we praise you…[245]

Standing shoulder-to-shoulder, some huddled under umbrellas, we sang choruses as other women sang in the spaces of our silence. I remember two Black women specifically trying to engage the crowd to sing louder and louder. One of the Black women sang:

> It doesn't matter who you were, shout hallelujah, the spirits of your ancestors are here. Hallelujah, I don't hear ya![246]

I realized she was calling out to Black ancestors, but I stood mystified thinking about whose ancestors could also be knocking.

I interpreted her conjuring of the ancestors so that they could be remembered and reconfigured onto the Black bodies in attendance. Black bodies who stand-in as the descendants

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[245] "Centennial Commemoration Candlelight Vigil," May 31, 2021, audio recording, Rebecca Jackson's archives.

[246] "Centennial Commemoration Candlelight Vigil," May 31, 2021, audio recording, Rebecca Jackson's archives.

of those whom we gathered to remember and the White bodies who do not *stand-in* but *stand next-to* in a commitment to anti-racism. The spirit, energy, and vibe, in that moment was a togetherness, a co-presence. It was the feeling of being in flow with other humans, commemorating a tragedy, and rebuking the evil that caused it and continues to inflict violence in the name of white supremacy. We were a commemorative choir assembled at the corner of Greenwood Ave. and Archer St., equipped with memorial candles, our bodies, our voices, the ancestors re-performed/rematerialized by Black bodies, and our commitment to anti-racism.

Sandra L. Richards writes specifically about how "the dead keep returning to challenge us to 'remember otherwise.'"[247] Expounding upon Marianne Hirsh's analysis of Julia Kristeva's heteropathic memory, Richards highlights the contradiction of an empathetic perception in which the subject, imagining the feelings of another, recognizes that person's tragedy could have happened to them, but didn't: "it could have been me; it was me, also' and *at the same time,* 'but it was not me."[248] I echo the inverse of Richards sentiments. Richards is identifying an empathetic response in which the subject recognizes their own potential for tragedy within a traumatic event and self-identifies with the victimized group. My queer, White body is conflicted knowing that a White body could not be traumatized by the afterlife of slavery, and *at the same time* I was there in solidarity, as an *ally,* as someone who experiences fettered access to American freedoms because I exist outside the White, Heterosexual, Christian, Cis-gendered, Non-Disabled, Neurotypical male (WHCCNNm) group. Yet, when the woman singing at the candlelight vigil called upon the ancestors, my empathy was disrupted by the knowledge that it couldn't have been me because of my White body; it's not me, but it is me *at the same time.*

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[247] Sandra L. Richards. "Remembering the Maafa," *Assaph: Studies in Theatre*, no. 21 (2007): 171-195. 172.
[248] Richards 188.

The woman conjuring ancestors encouraged me to assess the ethical limitations of my co-performance. The woman invoking *the ancestors* is recalling Black ancestors. In this way, the Black attendees become akin to the African American tourists Sandra L. Richards examines in "What is to be Remembered?" She maintains, "Tourists fill a violent absence with the materiality of their own bodies; they imagine themselves standing in, as artifacts, for those whose names can no longer be recalled. Analogous memories of dispossession enable them to step into the role of surrogates but pose the danger that present-day actors will suture the aching disappearance of the forever-lost ancestor with their own subjectivity."[249] When the woman invokes our ancestors, whose are showing up? The White ones who want to repent and atone for racialized monstrosities? Or the ones who feel divinely entitled to become race-monsters, *the white devil*? The ancestors whose progeny prohibit histories like the Tulsa Race Massacre in their history books? In Tulsa, am I the ally even if my ancestors were not? Could my racist ancestors become allies in the present? Can I be repentant for them? Am I performing atonement and/or repentance in place of them? Saidiya Hartman suggests that "the struggle" and the subsequent goals/experiences it produces activates the enslaved making them her contemporaries, united in a common struggle and a common goal. In this sense the ghosts of silenced histories are reactivated in a collective identity.

As I explained in the dissertation's introduction, American Whiteness can be understood on a spectrum binary of patriotism and allyship in which patriots believe that the U.S. Constitution is fully realized by the American government. They also believe America has one founding history and one race: *the American race*. Allies attest to and promote counter memories of American history and believe the rights guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution are not yet been

[249] Sandra L. Richards, "What is to be Remembered?: Tourism to Ghana's Slave Castle-Dungeons," *Theatre Journal* 57, no. 4 (2005): 617-37, 626.

fully realized. The defining difference between *patriots* and *allies* stems from a personal relationship to *the struggle,* or the ability to process the cultural trauma of the transatlantic slave trade and its lingering myriad oppressions which manifest as the afterlife of slavery. I offer this reemphasis about whiteness in America so that I may describe the ethical component of my research: my co-performance as a White American immersed in a cultural scenario in which Blackness was the dominant audience and Whiteness was cast in a supporting role of allyship.

I co-performed this resurrection in a supporting role, as ally, but as I stood in the rain (holding my memorial candle and trying to keep it lit), I realized that my ancestors, too, had come knocking. I had to reconcile within myself the both/and of *both* being descended from segregationist/racist ancestors *and* my rejection of their legacies.[250] My White body, standing in concert with and in allyship for, other Black bodies and processing the cultural trauma of slavery can only ever perform in a supportive role. Yet, as Jill Dolan contends differences are an important factor of togetherness—these differences do not limit my access to the *flow*.[251] Therefore, co-performance, like Dolan's concept of a utopian performative, "gives us a mode of thinking and seeing…because it relies on the magic of performance practice, on our belief in social justice and a better future…and on love for human commonality despite the vagaries of difference."[252] Love, in its various forms, is conclusively the best method for co-performing allyship as well as processing the issues that arise from confronting racist ancestors.

There was a lot of singing during the vigil; it came in waves throughout the somber event. I could hear other voices singing in the crowd. Listening to a man's voice behind me, and singing along with him, I felt co-present with the other voices singing. We were gathered, invited

[250] Richards, "What is to be Remembered?" and "Who Is This Ancestor?
[251] Dolan, *Utopia in Performance,* 170-171.
[252] Dolan, 171.

by the city, to memorialize the Tulsa Race Massacre with rituals of commemoration. We were in the flow of cultural memory. We were what Diana Taylor would call ¡presente¡ with each other. Taylor writes, "For me, that means going to meet people in their own spaces, on their own terms, not to study or observe them but to listen and learn from their actions, words, and epistemic systems. This is a stretch for me intellectually and physically, but also affectively, ethically, and politically."[253] I was in the sticky part of *live performance* in which I becomes "we." And "We" were co-performing commemoration, performing subversions of white supremacy, being/singing ¡presente!: "Hallelujah... Thank you, Jesus… Lord, we praise you…" Over and over again, the two aforementioned Black feminine voices encourage the crowd to sing louder, their words mixed over the sounds of a train whistling in the background. It felt like something holy, I felt like something holy. "We" kept singing… And then the lyrics morphed into…

Greenwood rising, Greenwood rising....

People stepped out onto their apartment balconies with candles and cell-phone-flashlights beaming. The rain was falling, and we were singing:

Greenwood rising, Greenwood rising....

Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Lord…

Hallelujah, praise the Lord…

Lord, we praise you…

We were co-present. We were raising Greenwood literally and figuratively by raising our voices and our energetic vibrations. We were commemorating the sprits of those lost in the traumatic event and emboldening our resolve to honor the memory of the race massacre.

[253] Diana Taylor, *¡Presente!*, 3.

Richards describes how heteropathic memory can be used as a form of Benjaminian *counsel* to negotiate how the rest of a story will unfold. She writes, "We have experienced a deep wound or trauma that has never been allowed to heal fully. Empathizing with historical victims whom we reconstruct as agents, we, like other marginalized peoples, sometimes imagine ourselves as surrogates standing in the place of departed ancestors."[254] Perhaps more so than the Confederate Memorial Day celebration at Beauvoir, I felt the bifurcation of me/not me and the awareness of my whiteness. I was an invited member of the group commemorating, and I was outside of the group commemorating. Richard writes, "Ghosts of a distant era who appear, conjured out of the beautiful, death-like orderliness or jumbled 'outbursts'… who are and are not memories of the past. Ghosts who come to challenge us to rethink who is community, to whom and for whom are we responsive and responsible. Ghosts who demand that we make sacrifice through our actions, …to journey with them,"[255] That night I imagined myself to be standing in the place of my White segregationist ancestors recasting their attitudes and beliefs through a co-performance of anti-racism and love. I take/took the place of my ancestors and I transform/ed their hate into love and a commitment to anti-racist endeavors. And, in doing so, I engage, embody, and enact a personalized reckoning with white supremacy. I reconcile the both/and of my ancestral past with my White American cultural identity present: I am *both* grateful for and appreciative of my ancestry *and* I reject the racist ideologies of this heritage—I can *both* love my heritage *and* resist its racist inculcation.

[254] Richards. "Remembering the Maafa," 177..
[255] Richards, 190.

Figure 16 Discarded candle from candlelight vigil, May 31, 2021. Photo credit: Sarah Morgan, used with permission.

Conclusion

I am indebted to scholars like Saidiya Hartman, Sandra L. Richards, Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Ron Eyerman, and Mechtild Widrich whose work regarding remembering, silencing, and collective identities inspire me to add my own contribution to the discipline of performance studies. Performative monuments invite participation; I have extended Widrich's idea about performative monuments to help us understand how to perform legacies and subversions of white supremacy. I aim to bring my positionality to the discussion about commemorating atrocities and reconnecting to the past through co-performative witnessing and assembly.

In this chapter, I have explored how memory work creates collective identities and how cultural memories are shaped in relation to them. I discussed how the Black church acts as the

guardian of Black collective memory by storing and embodying cultural artifacts and memories that are passed down to future generations. I discussed how collective memories attach themselves to cultural rituals thereby effectively amplifying dominant narratives and silencing marginalized ones. Understanding how historical narratives become silenced through the production of history helps identify and explain how and why Blackness became an oppressed cultural identity while Whiteness rose to the apex of a perpetuated racial hierarchy. I argued that commemorations of silenced histories are necessarily subversive because they often pushback against national memories—and I agree with Claire Whitlinger that commemoration is indeed part of the struggle to transform counter memories into national memories.

I also discussed how co-performing commemorations of racial atrocities opens the researcher up to existential reckonings and an atoning for the past atrocities of ancestors who perpetuated racialized violence. In doing so, I negotiated the capabilities of my White body in being co-present alongside and next to Black bodies and co-performing my supporting role of allyship. I realized during the candlelight vigil that my ancestors' racialized fears and notions of racial superiority were transformed by love and a commitment to work towards anti-racist goals. I contend that exercising love and a dedication to working against legacies of white supremacy are the most important tools for co-performing American commemorative events of racialized violence in the post-Civil War United States.

Chapter 3: Mediated Co-Performance and Subversive Satire

Introduction

Humor can expose injustices as it provides an outlet for grievances and grief; this is what makes comedy such an effective and enjoyable method to redress and synthesize cultural trauma. The humorists in this chapter effectively tease the color line, the liminal space between Blackness and Whiteness in America, by employing satire with redressive effects. Black American humor has its roots in freedom-seeking and rebellion, most notably in works like *Our Nig, The Escape,* and *The Conjure Woman*.[256] In many ways, the content creators in this chapter have adapted the humor employed by nineteenth (and early twentieth) century authors and playwrights, Harriet Williams, William Wells Brown, and Charles W. Chesnutt. This is reflected in their abilities to "use humor both as a distancing mechanism, making common racist stereotypes ironic or unfamiliar, and as the means of raising controversial and unpalatable aspects of slavery."[257] Nowadays, digital content is a substantial branch of popular culture, our virtual presence can be just as meaningful/impactful as our presence in real life. The architects of postcolonial digital worlds are creating the spaces where postcolonial cultural identities can

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[256] Harriet Wilson, *Our Nig; Or, Sketches from a Free Black, in a Two-Story White House, North*, (Boston: Geo. C. Rand & Avery, 1859).
William Wells Brown, *The Escape; Or, Leap for Freedom*, (Boston: R.F. Walcutt, 21 Cornhill, 1858).
Charles W. Chesnutt, *The Conjure Woman*, (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1899).
[257] Glenda R. Carpio, *Laughing Fit to Kill: Black Humor in the Fictions of Slavery*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 37.

flourish, not only by the codes written by web developers, but also in the content made by postcolonial digital humanities content creators, like those discussed in this chapter.

This chapter examines mediated invitations to co-perform subversions of white supremacy. The overarching themes of this chapter include invitations to co-produce performative monuments online, to understand how performance remains in the afterlife of slavery, the power of Civil War reenactment crashing as a subversive genre, and the usurpation of the Confederate gaze.[258] Firstly, I explore Black humor through the lens of shade and sass as a measure of redress and empowerment, and I discuss postcolonial digital content creation and the architects of postcolonial digital humanities. Then, I explore how performances of slavery remain as intergenerational trauma expressed in the seemingly quotidian experiences of Black Americans. Next, I examine Confederate reenactment crashing as a satirical method for usurping the Confederate gaze as well as challenging legacy performances of white supremacy. Finally, I examine *secretly woke* Southern masculinity as a space to unpack and invert the Confederate gaze as projected from White and Black male bodies. As I will discuss, satire champions subversive performances of white supremacy, especially in the online sphere of Black digital spaces and in other digital media content sites writ large. These mediated performances operate within the tradition of Black humor and satire.

Black American humor works in redressive measures and is a release valve for articulating grief and grievances. Robin D. G. Kelley argues that "freedom dreams" keep hope alive as Black people journey back and forth between grievance, the legacy of slavery experienced in the present, and grief, reflecting upon the past inspires hope for brighter

[258] As I described in the dissertation's introduction, the Confederate gaze is a performative discourse that both characterizes Southern culture and constructs a frame, or point of view, with which to see the world. The Confederate gaze privileges Lost Cause mythology and projects a historically racist concept of Blackness onto other bodies.

futures.[259] Black humor, as Carpio maintains, "has provided a balm, a release of anger and aggression, a way of coping with the painful consequences of racism."[260] Humor has long served as an articulation for Black rage and mourning as well as a performance of Black rebellion against white supremacy.

Black American humor, then, subverts white supremacy and challenges White American ignorance and its resistance to reconciliation. Carpio considers Black American humor as a "kind of epistemological response" to the terrors of slavery and the Jim Crow era. She notes that the move to redress slavery is not entirely possible. Carpio agrees with Saidiya Hartman that there is no feasible way to repair the trauma of slavery. Hartman writes, "Who could deny that the United States had been founded on slavery or disregard the wealth created by enslaved laborers? Or brush aside three centuries of legal subjection? Yet I remain agnostic about reparations. I fear that petitions for redress are forms of political appeal that have outlived their usefulness."[261] The idea that a form of reparations could ameliorate the social breach of the transatlantic slave trade and Jim Crow America is impossible due to the enormity of that breach.[262]

Satire is a naturally subversive method of entertainment and cultural reflection. Satire is a comedic genre, one which exaggerates and ridicules people's stupidity often to amplify and/or expose marginalized interpretations of political policies and current events. Lisa Guerrero writes, "[S]atire by black artists and performers has an investment in comic critique that is characteristically different than other possible examples because of how the structures of racialization play out within black satire, as well as how black satire serves to both critique

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[259] Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002).
[260] Carpio, *Laughing Fit to Kill*, 5.
[261] Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*, (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007), 166.
[262] Carpio, *Laughing Fit to Kill*, 9.

society *and* legitimate black rage in a society that systematically invalidates black rage."[263] The American hegemony has consistently tamped down Black rage, sometimes perceived as "black noise" and/or "Freedom Dreams," to obfuscate the validity of reparations and reconciliation.[264] In "#LaughingWhileBlack, Brandy Monk Payton writes, "These critiques of hegemony made through the use of ridicule, sarcasm, irony, and other comedic elements are rendered palatable in their absurdity for wide audience consumption in order to exact social and political change."[265] Satire, therefore, is an ideal method for amplifying imbalances of power and racialized hierarchies in America.

The case studies in this chapter include two Instagram videos and three YouTube videos, all of which have various iterations across social media platforms like TikTok, Facebook, and Twitter. The first video "Another Satisfying Racial Moment" creates moments of Black superiority for online content consumers. The second example, "Is it Problematic?" uses a gameshow format to highlight intergenerational trauma reverberating in pedestrian colloquialisms. The third case study analyzes a group of Black men crashing a Civil War reenactment in attempts to assert slavery into the battle reenactment genre. The final video explores the Confederate gaze of "secretly woke" Southern men. I contend that satire, in its various modes, creates a postcolonial digital record that resists the Confederate gaze. Taken together, these case studies invite audiences into safe places to explore content that subverts

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[263] Lisa Guerrero, "Can I Live?: Contemporary Black Satire and the State of Postmodern Double Consciousness," *Studies in American Humor* 2, no. 2 (2016): 266-279, 268.
[264] Stephen Best and Saidiya Hartman, "Fugitive Justice," *Representations* no. 92 (Fall 2005): 1-15, 1. Robin D. G. Kelly, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 110.
[265] Brandy Monk-Payton, "#LaughingWhileBlack: Gender and the Comedy of Social Media Blackness" in *Feminist Media Histories* Special Issue on "Gender and Comedy" 3.2 (Spring 2017), 15-35, 17.

white supremacy and resists the Confederate gaze, and, in doing so, audiences and content creators co-perform and co-produce postcolonial digital worlds.

Co-Performance and Postcolonial Digital Humanities

When we engage with online content, we also engage with performative monuments in a special kind of co-performance: the production of meaning-making that is activated between online content and audience-participant. This co-presence with mediated content activates audiences and engenders a meaning specific and uniquely constructed between mediated object and spectator. In this way, mediated content acts as a *performative monument* in which online content, content creators, and audiences meet on web*sites* such as YouTube and Instagram. I expand upon Mechtild Widrich's work on *sites* as performative monuments by considering internet domains as contributing to the reconfiguration of sites Widrich discusses. She writes, "This notion of site depends on time, because the performative moment can be rendered historical through the production of documents. Later audiences re-imagine original sites, fractions of which they encounter in documents; imagination is infused with its own particular circumstances, past and present."[266] The case studies in this chapter reimagine website specific performative monuments articulated as mediated invitations to co-perform in humorous modes of meaning making that also subvert the Confederate gaze and assist in one's construction of cultural identity.

Widrich argues that performativity "now stands for a whole range of aesthetic and political ideals. The term is often applied loosely to a new model of art production in which the audience is granted access to the art piece on ostensibly equal terms with the producer, if not

[266] Mechtild Widrich, *Performative Monuments: The Rematerialisation of Public Art*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 105.

indeed as co-producer."[267] This "co-production," or co-performance, between media object, content creator, and audience engenders an expanded notion of performativity in which content creators and audiences seemingly share the same access to the media object; in which the website specific content—as performative monument—encourages knowledge production and meaning-making methods that further assist one's cultivation of cultural identity. The content creator ostensibly shares an equal relationship with their audiences in regard to the reception, popularity, and proliferation of the mediated object. Thus, the audience activates the content through co-performance, and, subsequently, the audience co-performs the content along with its creator.

Stuart Hall describes the active audience participant as engaged in the cycle of encoding and decoding mass communication. Hall distinguishes between perceptions of dominant cultural messaging and *disruptions* or *misunderstandings* emanating from the margins of culture and contends that negotiating between the two engenders a symbiotic knowledge production. Hall writes, "Negotiated codes operate through what we might call particular or situated logics: and these logics are sustained by their differential and unequal relation to the discourses and logics of power."[268] For my study, an American's ability to read mediated content largely depends on their situated knowledge or instantiation within American cultural paradigms.

Audiences actively decode mediated messages when they absorb mediated content. The co-performance between media object and spectator assists in a sense of cultural identity. Ron Eyerman writes, "What is encoded must be decoded, and audiences always have a relative degree of autonomy, even if their viewpoints must necessarily be kept private."[269] A person may

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[267] Widrich, 200.
[268] Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During, (London: Routledge, 1991): 478-487, 486.
[269] Ron Eyerman, *The Making of White American Identity*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2022, 9.

experience closeted or private white supremacist sentiments but feel the need to keep their sentiments silent. As I demonstrated in chapter one with the white power online discussion boards, there are audiences whose white supremacist performances are amplified and validated by social media. This chapter, instead, focuses on media objects that subvert white supremacist invitations to perpetuate white power.

We can think of mediated images and videos as invitations to co-perform in knowledge-production and meaning-making because audiences are active participants in the meaning-making and knowledge-producing mores of American culture. This relies upon the tenets of co-performance and is informed by postcolonial digital humanities, a methodology that "emphasizes the possibilities of creating new worlds that resist inscriptions of colonialism in the digital culture record."[270] Roopika Risam argues that the digital cultural record has been reproducing white supremacist narratives that favor the Global North, she argues that postcolonial digital humanities in its particular brand of web development contributes to new possible digital worlds.[271]

Risam raises a call to arms to take back the digital cultural record. She writes, "The ability to create new knowledge is imbricated in a relationship between culture and power; just as cultural production has been marshalled in the service of oppression, so too can we take it back… Our work is needed to ensure that the digital cultural record is not the domain of dead white men who haunt our canons or the victors who wrote the history books." Risam proposes that postcolonial digital humanities scholarship engage in creating new worlds that resist the Confederate gaze. She writes, "Those who are equipped with digital humanities skills are

[270] Roopika Risam, *New Digital Worlds: Postcolonial Digital Humanities in Theory, Praxis, and Pedagogy*, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2019), 20.
[271] Risam, 3.

uniquely poised to contribute to th[e digital culture] record. They do this by thinking critically about digital methods for humanities research and by building the objects that populate the digital cultural record. They create new competing, overlapping, and contestatory digital worlds that jostle one another to tell the rich story of humanity."[272] The content creators I identify in the following pages do just that; the first example explores Black superiority through expressions of *sass* and *shade*, the second example considers re-performances of cultural trauma as performance artifacts performed from a repertoire consistent with the afterlife of the slavery, the next example explores the world of Confederate reenacting crashing as a genre that confronts and subverts the Confederate gaze, and my final case study examines masculinity from "Two Secretly Woke Southern Men." Taken together, these case studies reflect pathways to postcolonial digital world building (which resists the Confederate gaze) constituted in the co-performances among website specific performative monuments, content creators, and their audience members.

Mediated Invitations as Performative Monuments

Sass and Shade as Satirical Devices

Content creator @IamBigCam, Camron Smith, makes short videos that expose instances of white anxieties, white chivalry, and white power in the real world and then uploads the short clips to social media, enhanced with a catchy jingle: *Another satisfying racial moment*. In the example below, Smith invites us to enjoy a *satisfying racial moment* between a White man holding a Confederate battle flag and a Black man filming the exchange. The Black man asks, "So, why do you carry that flag?" and the White man answers him screaming, "Because this is my heritage. My family fought to save their farm under this flag!" The Black man, maintaining his composure in the wake of the White man's tirade, says, "Who was working that farm?"

[272] Risam, 5.

Smith then splices together images of the Black man laughing with his friends over the glazed stare of bewilderment on the White man's face and his inability to answer his question. The very next shot is a one-second portion of Dr. Dre's "The Next Episode" music video in which Dre says, just as the music drops from the track, "Hold up." The clip ends with an image of Smith superimposed across the footage of the Black men laughing. He is costumed in a black wig, clear framed glasses, and a gray suit, and he dances, swaying slowly side to side, lip-syncing his catchphrase: *Another satisfying racial moment.*

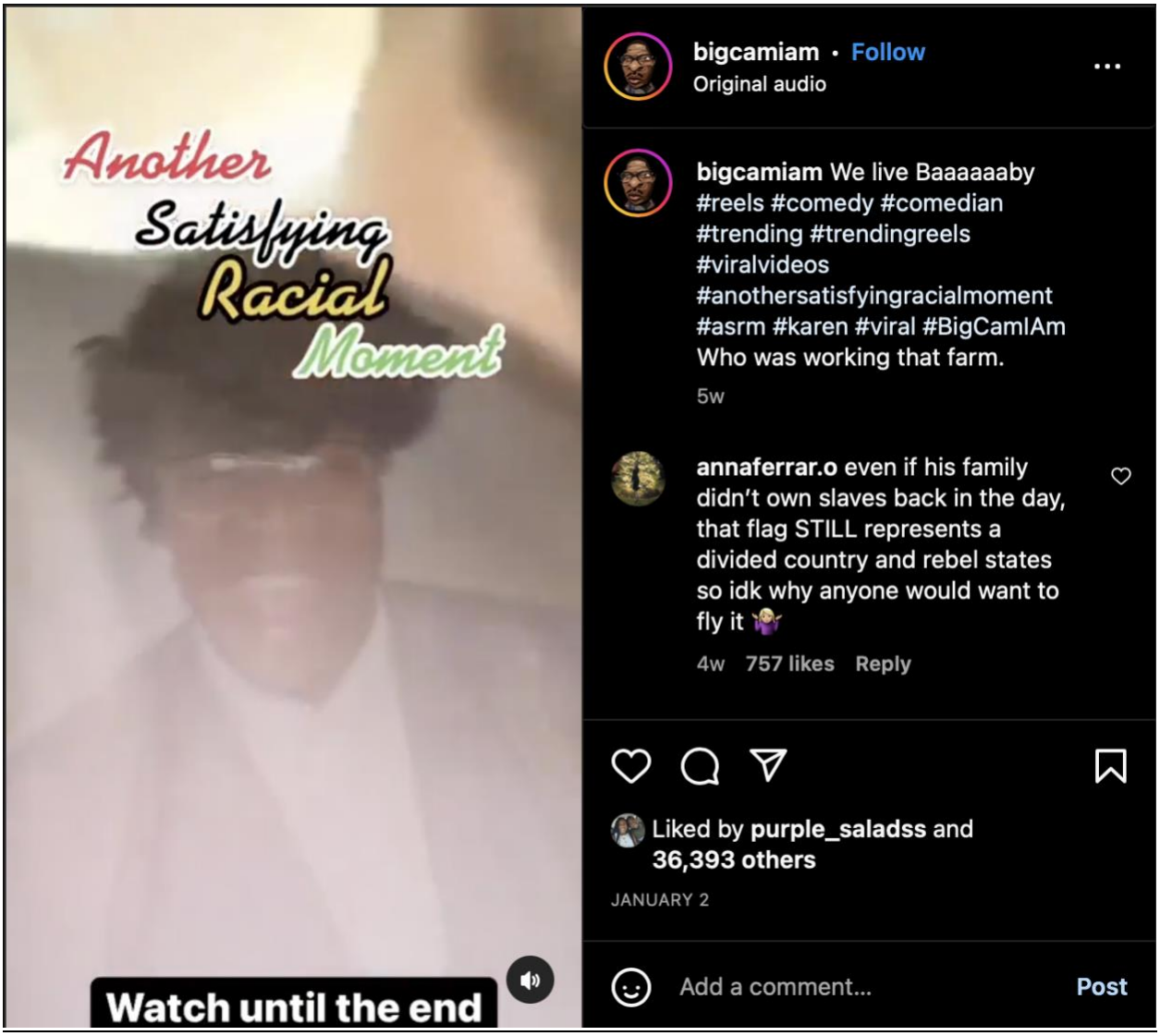

Figure 17 #BigCamIAm's Instagram post featuring Another Satisfying Racial Moment, Instagram, screengrab, accessed February 12, 2023. https://www.instagram.com/p/Cm7NDH6DH6I/

The screengrab above displays the Instagram iteration of the media object, the screen is bifurcated between image and comments. On the left is Smith's character—an irreverent Black man in a gray suit, wig, and glasses (I read Smith's look and gestures as a mix between a Black Preacher aesthetic and James Brown), and on the right side of the screengrab is Smith's written post with hashtags, or tags, that act as quasi algorithmic invitations for others connecting online interested in similar content. The list of tags include: "#reels #comedy #comedian #trending #trendingreels #viralvideos #anothersatisfyingracialmoment #asrm #karen #viral #BigCamIAm. Smith writes, "We live Baaaaaaaby" signaling the grief and resiliency of Black Americans over the cultural trauma of slavery while simultaneously pointing to the grievances that Black Americans experience in everyday life occurrences. The White man in the video appears to have been outsmarted by the Black man's question. Smith ridicules the White man's ignorance, but this is also a clever editing trick because the White man's retort to the question, "Who was working the farm?" is silenced and replaced by Dr. Dre's baritone voice saying, "Hold up."

Smith is employing shade, a type of reading that evolved from the New York drag ballroom scene of the 1980s and 1990s. During this era, drag ballroom performers would *read*, criticize through quick-witted jabs, another's drag performance to assert their superiority, wit, and shrewdness within a group dynamic. As Brandy Monk-Page maintains, "reading is an analytical act that involves a calculation for the most impact to the individual positioned at the end of the read. It is a mode of criticism that is playful yet biting."[273] Today, *throwing shade* is synonymous with *reading* and easily recognizable to fans of American drag performance art and drag ballroom performances; it is regularly used within mediated queer spaces like *RuPaul"s*

[273] Monk-Payton, "#LaughingWhileBlack, 18-19.

Drag and *Legendary.*[274] Shade is ridicule for ridicule's sake—*the shadier the better*. In other words, one *throws shade* by *reading* another's drag aesthetic thereby asserting their own wit and shrewdness within a group dynamic. What is unusual about Smith's *shade* is that he *reads* other online content instead of face-to-face confrontations, as drag queens typically do. Smith edits and stylizes the found material transforming the original content into moments of shade.

In this way, Smith acts as curator and emcee inviting me into a Black digital space to experience satisfying moments of Black superiority. In doing so he performs what is commonly regarded as the second major theory of humor: *the superiority method.* This theory is aligned with the concept of schadenfreude, or, that we laugh at other's misfortunes. Instead of relying on joke formulas, the superiority method "is mainly visual and depends on the verbal dexterity of the dozens, the toasts (long, metrically and rhythmically complex compositions), and the telling of 'lies,' or stories."[275] What is most interesting about this clip is Smith's use of language, both in the found footage of the racial confrontation online, but also in Smith's pacing and editing styles. Smith's aesthetic weaves digital, filmic, and comedic languages together to express Black superiority. By hosting and curating the clip, Smith acts as an emcee introducing the audience to an entertaining vignette and then closes the clip with his signature jingle-singing embodiment of Black superiority.

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[274] *RuPaul's Drag Race* is a televised drag performance art competition; it is currently in its fifteenth season.
"RuPaul's Drag Race: Season 15 Episodes, News, Videos and Cast," MTV, accessed March 8, 2023. http://www.mtv.com/shows/rupauls-drag-race/5f5sk/season-15
Legendary is a televised drag ballroom competition in which drag houses (comprised of drag family members/teammates) compete for *Top House*, thus earning their house a "legendary status."
"Legendary," IMDb, IMDb.com, May 27, 2020, accessed March 8, 2023. https://www.imdb.com/title/tt11048090/

[275] Carpio, *Laughing Fit To Kill,* 6.

Smith's critique and his editing choices cast the White, Heterosexual, Christian, Cis-gendered, Non-disabled, Neurotypical man (WHCCNNm) as a fool or dummy—the curated bewilderment expressed by the confrontation of the WHCCNNm's racist heritage is part of Smith's artistry. His aesthetic reflects sass and shade by presenting a Confederate descendant for Black (and non-Black) Americans to openly ridicule as an exercise of subversive satire. The (Instagram) comment below Smith's is from an online user who presents themselves as a White woman. She notes that the Confederate flag is a symbol of division, and she expresses curiosity for why anyone would want to fly it. In this way, the White woman is performing her allyship with Smith's content and point of view. Smith's humorous takes on *satisfying racial moments* perform the sass and shade that Brandy Monk-Payton contends "elucidate[s] what Blackness does online—the modes of its enunciation and its circulation—and reveals how a Black feminist and Black queer critical imagination of truth telling animates social media humor."[276] Monk-Payton speaks of *sipping tea* and satire as the predominant modes of Black comedy online and explores how *sass* and *shade* function in digital Black spaces. Black comedic content, according to Monk-Payton embraces and explores what Risam has classified as "disruptions" within colonial and neocolonial structures online.[277]

Disruptions are akin to the *disruptions* and *misunderstandings* that Stuart Hall infers from encoding/decoding mediated messages. Risam further clarifies these disruptions saying, "The move to recuperate disruption generates affective responses and connotes innovation and newness… At first glance, disruption conjures blows struck against hegemony, a feeling of 'out with the old and in with the new,' and hope for transformation. However, the very qualities that give disruption currency as an intellectual category have made it a buzzword for contemporary

[276] Monk-Payton, "#LaughingWhileBlack," 16.
[277] Risam, *New Digital Worlds*, 3.

globalization, attracting the fond gaze of global capitalism and neocolonialism."[278] For this reason, Risam argues that the digital sphere is a battle ground for meaning-making and course-correcting the distractions of colonialism rife with white supremacist messaging. In researching Smith's oeuvre, I found myself singing *another satisfying racial moment* over and over again for the rest of the afternoon and into the next day. Each time I sang the song, I replayed parts of the video again in my mind and laughed repeatedly; it's a delightful jingle that lingers. Media objects/artifacts like Smith's linger and reverberate across social media, and in doing so, they become part of the postcolonial architecture of digital worlds. New digital worlds that invite co-performance amongst digital content creators, web developers, and audiences are also spaces to subvert white supremacist messaging.

Performance Remains in the Afterlife of Slavery

In order to understand how mediated co-performances invite deeper understandings and subversions of white supremacy, it is helpful to understand the afterlife of slavery through the prism of performance. Rebecca Schneider considers performance as both disappearing and reappearing; she examines performance as a verb and a noun. Performance is, therefore, a theoretical concept and a performance artifact. Schneider famously analyzes battle reenactors as examples of performance remains *and* to demonstrate how performance remains in a repertoire of human expression. In reflecting upon witnessing a reenactor playing dead, Schneider writes:

> Does Hodge, lying prone and fake-bloating in the sun, attempt to offer index of– as well as reference to—both the material photograph and the photographed material of Civil War corpses? … within the growing "living history" and reenactment movement, Hodge's bloating body is, for many enthusiasts, evidence

[278] Risam, 14.

> of something that can *touch* the more distant historical record, if not evidence of something authentic itself. …Hodge's bloat is a kind of affective remain—itself, in its performative repetition, a queer kind of evidence. In the living corpse is a remain of history, it is certainly revisited across a body that cannot pass as the corpse it re-calls. ... When we approach performance not as that which disappears (as the archive expects), but as both the *act* of remaining and a means of re-appearance and "reparticipation" (though not a metaphysic of presence) we are almost immediately forced to admit that remains do not have to be isolated to the document, to the object, to bone versus flesh. Here the body—Hodge's bloated one—becomes a kind of archive and host to a collective memory.[279]

The body can perform remains, such as Hodge reperforms the materiality of Civil War photographs. And performance remains as in it lasts, it exists into perpetuity emanating from a repertoire of human experience. Thus, Schneider maintains, "Performance does not disappear when approached from this perspective, though its remains are the immaterial of live, embodied acts. Rather, performance plays the 'sedimented acts' and spectral meanings that haunt material in constant collective interaction, constellation, and transmutation."[280] Performance makes the body an archive/repertoire for collective memory. In this way, the repertoire of Black American experiences is, in part, constituted and reconstituted by the afterlife of slavery.

The American experience is indexically linked to and marred by one's experience with white supremacy and the *afterlife of slavery*. American cultural identities are disfigured or encoded/decoded within a colonial racial hierarchy in which light skin is the apex and dark skin

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[279] Rebecca Schneider. *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of the Theatrical Reenactment*. (New York: Routledge, 2011), 101.
[280] Schneider, 102.

is its nadir. Speaking of "the racial calculus" that exacts Black American experience, Saidiya Hartman says, "This is the afterlife of slavery—skewed life changes, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment. I, too, am the afterlife of slavery."[281] I agree that these listed conditions are also performance remains/artifacts left over from a colonial ideology that values light skin over dark skin. The indexical trace of white supremacy is the afterlife of slavery: higher incarceration rates than White Americans, poorer access to education and healthcare than White Americans, higher mortality rates than White Americans—these are the artifacts left behind from generations of White Americans performing racial superiority.

Hartman also demonstrates that performances of slavery remain and emanate from the Black American body triggered by a Confederate gaze and its projection of Blackness. Hartman contends, "I would never be able to imagine being the kind of person who had not been made and marked by slavery. I was black and a history of terror had produced that identity. Terror was 'captivity without the possibility of flight,' inescapable violence, precarious life. There was no going back to a time or a place before slavery, and going beyond it no doubt would entail nothing less momentous than yet another revolution."[282] Just as American cultural identities are shaped by white supremacy, they are equally shaped by the memory of the transatlantic slave trade and the subsequent Jim Crow era that followed. One's experience with the afterlife of slavery and white power (which houses ideas like white privilege, white fragility, white anxiety, and white chivalry) define Black and White American experiences, and, thus, the color line is the liminal space that divides American experience and renders reconciliation impossible. This is why comedians who employ satire to teeter, toy, and tease the color line are effectively

[281] Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, 6.
[282] Hartman, 40.

broadcasting redressive laughter to new generations in the present and into the future. The following example explores how performance remains as a re-performance and as an artifact of the afterlife of slavery.

Squad Team Force is a racially diverse group of American content makers that produce podcasts and social media content that examine legacies of slavery (among other topics). Content creator, Kayla Milton's brainchild, "Is it Problematic?," satirizes people's ignorance of the performance remains of critical memory. Milton admits she is ridiculing them in an effort to "cancel" (render a public persona or their notoriety null and void) her fellow squad members by revealing their ignorance as perpetuating legacies of white power in the use of pedestrian objects or expressions. The screengrab pictured below is from such a sketch; Milton is asking her squad member, BK, if she knows the origin story for the popular saying *a barrel full of laughs*. BK takes a few guesses but is unsuccessful at guessing the correct answer. When the host reveals that a barrel of laughs signifies how Black laughter was illegal on some plantations and punishable by physical violence, BK runs out of frame. Milton continues to explain how the enslaved would run away at an eruption of laughter or laugh into barrels to avoid being detected by White overseers. The host reveals that BK's display of laughing and running away is a performance remain of intergenerational trauma.

Figure 18 BK performs the afterlife of slavery by laughing and running away during "Is it Problematic?" hosted by Kayla Milton, Instagram, screengrab, accessed February 12, 2023. https://www.instagram.com/p/CoV56qCjsuI/

The screengrab pictured above displays the Instagram iteration of "Is it Problematic?" performed by Kayla Milton, BK, and the rest of the Squad Team Force crew. The content creators use hashtags like #problematic, #quiz, #gameshow, #languagestudy, #phrases, #sayings, #blackhistorymonth, #bhm, #blackheritagemonth to encourage Instagram's algorithm to connect their content with Instagram users interested in Squad Team Force's brand of online content. As the screengrab shows, on February 12, 2023, this Instagram post had been liked well over 100,000 times. The comments included in the screengrab above display laughing emoji's from an Instagram user named "blackkrystel" and another user, "blue.dabadee" says, "They way the

music changed when they started explaining." I am convinced that "blackkrystel," "blue,dabadee," and several tens of thousands of Instagram users enjoyed and were entertained by Milton's work and BK's spontaneous (as in not choreographed) reaction to Milton's gameshow spoof.[283]

Schneider encourages us to consider cultural performances as though "performance does remain, does leave 'residue.' Indeed the place of residue is arguably *flesh* in a network of body-to-body transmission of affect and enactment—evidence, across generations, of impact."[284] The compulsion to run away, or to hide Black bodies laughing, is a performance remain rooted in the origins of Black American humor. Glenda R. Carpio writes, "Black American humor began as a wrested freedom, the freedom to laugh at the which was unjust and cruel in order to create distance from what would otherwise obliterate a sense of self and community. Until well into the twentieth century, it had to be cloaked in secrecy lest it be read as transgressive and punished by violence."[285] BK's compulsion to run away is rooted in the performance remains of chattel slavery and a history of silencing Black bodies.

The sketch also reveals the third commonly accepted notion of humor, *the incongruity theory* of comedy as Carpio explains, "The humor of incongruity generally entails the playing of 'what if' games that suspend normativity…. At its best, the humor of incongruity allows us to see the world inverted, to consider transpositions of time and place and to get us, especially when the humor is hot enough to push our buttons, to question the habits of mind that we may fall into as we critique race….the humor of incongruity allows us to appreciate the fact that, far from

[283] "Is it Problematic" is a scripted reality series in which the host, Kayla Milton, creates scenarios and records her colleagues' reactions to them. These sketches are not rehearsed, and, so, BK's reaction is a spontaneous reaction to Milton's information.
[284] Schneider. *Performing Remains,* 100.
[285] Carpio, *Laughing Fit to Kill,* 4.

being *only* a coping mechanism, or a means of 'redress,' African American humor has been and continues to be both a bountiful source of creativity and pleasure and an energetic mode of social and political critique."[286] The juxtaposition of game-show-spoof and intergenerational-trauma creates an incongruity that the squad members find humorous, and that the squad members also hope their audiences find humorous. Content creators are engendering innovative ways to entertain and educate audiences in the digital sphere that combats legacies of colonial power. The act of laughing and then running away is also a clear example of how performances of intergenerational trauma remain in the body and are passed down from generation to generation.

Social and cultural performances stem from an embodied archive, or, more precisely, what Diana Taylor refers to as the repertoire. Taylor writes, "...we learn and transmit knowledge through embodied action, through cultural agency, and by making choices. Performance, for me, functions as an episteme, a way of knowing, not simply an object of analysis."[287] When BK laughs and runs away, she is performing from a repertoire, the residual performances of Black bodies laughing and running away remain and are perpetuated by performing this intergenerational trauma—an artifact and performance emanating from the afterlife of slavery. Taylor writes, "Embodied performance, then, makes visible an entire spectrum of attitudes and values. The multi-codedness of these practices transmits as many layers of meaning as there are spectators, participants, and witnesses."[288] The sketch reveals that, in America, even joyous moments of laughter are marred by the afterlife of slavery, yet they also indicate and reflect the resiliencies that arise from a Black American performance repertoire.

Crashing Confederate Reenactments

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[286] Carpio, 6-7.
[287] Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the* Americas, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), xvi.
[288] Taylor, 49.

A video of social media celebrities crashing a Civil War reenactment reveals how they re-perform roles that remain (in their Black bodies) but that are notoriously absent from the Civil War reenactment genre. Performances of Confederate reenactment *crashings* necessarily subvert the Confederate gaze by re-inserting slavery into Civil War narratives. In doing so, audiences are invited to co-perform the absurdities of slavery and the bewilderment expressed by White reenactors confronting glitches/anomalies within the Lost Cause rubric. In "We Got Kicked Out For This!," content creators subvert generic codes of Civil War reenactment by inviting a White reenactor to assume the role of "slave-master." This reassertion of slavery into the Civil War reenactment challenges the victimhood expressed by Confederate Americans in chapter one and subverts Lost Cause desires to portray the Confederacy as untainted by the evils of slavery. In mocking the Civil War reenactment genre, "We Got Kicked Out For This!" invites its audiences to re-imagine what Civil War reenactments would look like if they included Black bodies re-performing memories of chattel slavery.

Last October, social media celebrities and American Youtubers JiDion and Kanel Joseph crashed a Civil War reenactment in Kentucky. The eleven-minute video uploaded to JiDion's YouTube page is also spread throughout social media platforms like TikTok, Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. The video begins with JiDion and his friends going to Walmart and Party City to gather supplies like plastic chains and bags of cotton balls for the stunt; JiDion's group is escorted out of both stores for illegal filming. The interactions with the stores' security guards foreshadows JiDion's talent for schmoozing authority figures and effortlessly escaping more serious legal troubles. Finessing controversial and intimidating power figures is a prominent theme in JiDion's oeuvre, and his videos invite audiences to experience the racially dynamic and

socially awkward moments of confrontation pacified by JiDion's talent for walking W.E.B. DuBois's color line as if it were a tightrope fifty feet in the air.

JiDion's sketches employ satire as a means of confronting and subverting memories of enslavement attached to Lost Cause mythology. Monk-Payton explains, "Participants create viral content that embodies slices of Black life, or ways to get by, in such a precarious environment of racial antagonism."[289] JiDion's content invites us to co-perform by witnessing confrontations of perceived racial antagonisms and his talent for alluding serious danger. The next scene of the video shows Jidion, Kanel Joseph, et al… arriving at the Civil War reenactment in tattered t-shirts with comical, plastic chains wrapped around their necks. JiDion begins asking where they should go to be included in the show. Immediately they are confronted by reenactors who ask them not to interfere with the reenactment. JiDion claims he is there to watch the show and to participate as an enslaved person. A woman wearing a purple costume suggests, if they want to participate in the reenactment, that they do it "properly." The woman's suggestion signals that they are disrupting the genre of Civil War reenactment. Of course, Civil War reenactments that aggrandize the Confederacy rely upon Lost Cause mythologies as evidence of a *proper* way of participation. Typically, that means Black reenactors represent the Black soldiers that fought on behalf of the Confederacy. The Black bodies I have witnessed at Civil War reenactments present themselves as Southern Belles or Confederate soldiers—the slave architype is especially cast out of these kinds of reenactments. The embodiment of "the slave" avatar/caricature is a key element JiDion and Joseph use to satirize the Civil War reenactment in Kentucky.

[289] Monk-Payton, "#LaughingWhileBlack, 28-29.

Figure 19 "But lets do it properly," in "They Kicked Us Out For This!" by JiDion from his YouTube channel posted October 23,2022, YouTube, accessed October 28, 2023, the footage has since been censored. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ze5R4FEy-9I

JiDion and Kanel Joseph are both embodying the avatar of "the slave" and teasing/playing with the Confederate gaze, the projection of Blackness being projected onto them by the non-Black spectators. Harvey Young contends, "Like a stereotype, which must occur and continuously recur, blackness and the black body, its instantiation, requires enactment."[290] In enacting this projection, JiDion and Joseph employ Uri McMillian's argument that embodied avatars present a, "rescrambling [of] the dichotomy between objectified bodies or embodied subjects by reimagining objecthood as a performance-based method that disrupts presumptive knowledges of black subjectivity."[291] The embodied avatar harnesses "the black body as n-----" thereby inverting the projection of Blackness that Harvey Young identifies.[292] McMillian maintains that objecthood harnesses the power of performance to transform Black subjects into

[290] Young, *Embodying the Black Experience*, 8.
[291] Uri McMillian, *Embodied Avatars: Genealogies of Black Feminist Art and Performance.* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 9.
[292] Young, *Embodying the Black Experience*, 14.

art objects. *Performing objecthood* is the process by which Black performance artists create simulated beings or—*avatars*. These avatars empower Black performance artists by allowing them to sidestep the imposed limits of a racist public sphere, and by creating surprising spaces for staged art. Performing objecthood sutures performance and art in a way that challenges spectators to reify art objects by inferring flesh as the medium; this dubious theatricality, in turn, reflects the dubious relationship between subject and object.[293]

Figure 20 Picking cotton re-performance *in "They Kicked Us Out For This!" by JiDion from his YouTube channel posted October 23,2022, YouTube, accessed October 28, 2023, the footage has since been censored. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ze5R4FEy-9I*

JiDion and Joseph, lean into the *slave avatar* satirizing the history of chattel slavery when they open up bags of cotton balls, scattering them onto the ground, so they can begin "picking cotton," this is done so, they too, can join in the "good fun" of Confederate reenactment.[294] The

[293] McMillian, *Embodied Avatars,* 7-10.
[294] JiDion says that he believes Civil War reenactments are "good fun" for the participants involved.

re-performance of cotton picking by Black bodies creates *a disruption* within the hegemonic mores of Civil War reenactment and prompts the White reenactor to confront the intentions of the Black men. This is what is so interesting about JiDion's video. He *performs objecthood* (embodying the stereotype of the slave/"N Word") as he confronts the White reenactor's Confederate gaze, and, by doing so, he manipulates racially charged scenes to expose the socially-scripted scenarios that play out. The cotton-picking re-performance also subverts the erasure of slaves within the Civil War reenactment genre. As Cathy Stanton and Stephen Belaya contend, "[B]lack reenactors' presence or discourse brings questions of race and morality to the fore, they inevitably disturb a community that prefers to avoid such issues and interpretations."[295] Visible in the picture above (and the picture below) is what Rebecca Schneider would call "the political manipulation of disappearance."[296] When slaves are re-inserted into the Civil War reenactment genre, it cannot be argued that slavery was not an important injustice and that is was not part of the impetus for the South's secession from the United States.

Derek Bell argues that, in America, the permanence of racism is due to its adaptability, or, more precisely, the ability to adapt racism to perpetuate white power.[297] We can see how racism is adapted by watching the socially-scripted scene unfold. The scenario historically goes: 1) Black man disrupts hegemonic mores; 2) White man asserts dominance over Black Man (first on his own and then by calling the police/authority); 3. White woman evokes white chivalry (by directly or indirectly perceiving threats from the Black man); and 4) Black bodies are removed

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[295] Cathty Stanton and Stephen Belayea, "'Their Time Will Yet Come:' African American Presence in Civil War Reenactment," quoted in Rebecca Schneider. *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of the Theatrical Reenactment*. (New York: Routledge, 2011), 56.
[296] Schneider. *Performing Remains*, 105.
[297] Derrick Bell, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well,* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

from the White American's public space (the disappearing of Black bodies). The scenario is spontaneous yet scripted—it is an extended joke much like Brown's *The Escape* or Chesnutt's "The Passing of Grandison" in which "the stereotypes and conventions of plantation fiction are satirized in a comic mode that includes not only hyperbole but also the humor of what-if games and inversions. The premise of the story is in itself ridiculous."[298] The idea that a Civil War reenactment would also be a place to re-perform memories of slavery is in itself ridiculous, but it reveals the tragic layer of this tragicomedy—White Americans still do not know how to process the cruelties of chattel slavery. The memory of slavery is distorted by Lost Cause mythologies despite the intellectual work and effort gone in to debunking its myths over the past decades and especially since 2015 when the relevance of Confederate monuments resurfaced in the public sphere.

JiDion and Joseph, like Brown and Chesnutt, exploit the absurdity of stereotypes by fully satirizing these stereotypes with strait-faces. They act as though they are genuinely interested in contributing to the historical accuracy of the era and to the celebration of heritage. In doing so, "the story begins at a level of absurdity and then exaggerates that mode only to undermine it by subtly building another story underneath the surface, one that if far from absurd."[299] JiDion's curation of the racial confrontation at this Civil War reenactment reveals how White Americans who participate in Confederate heritage performances are unwilling to reinterpret Lost Cause mythologies.

[298] Carpio, *Laughing Fit to Kill*, 51.
[299] Carpio, 53.

Figure 21 "Now they're gettin' into real character huh?" in "They Kicked Us Out For This!" by JiDion from his YouTube channel posted October 23,2022, YouTube, accessed October 28, 2023, the footage has since been censored. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ze5R4FEy-9I

I have already revealed how JiDion and Joseph *disrupt the hegemonic mores* of Civil War reenactment; now I will write about the second stage of this social scenario: White man asserts dominance over Black Man (first on his own and then by calling the police/authority); When a White reenactor dressed in black begins uploading footage of them to Facebook Live, Joseph jokingly insists he cannot be on Facebook Live; the White reenactor dressed in black tells them it's too late. Joseph drops to his knees, sardonically begging not to be on Facebook Live. The White reenactor dressed in black responds, "Now they're getting into real character, huh?" This response signals an understanding that Black bodies are reenacting submission to White dominators/masters/saviors/caregivers/murderers. In this way, JiDion and Joseph are, "using [their] own bod[ies] as the means to make glaringly vivid the ideological fetishes embedded in stereotypes" and in so doing they use satire, "both as a distancing mechanism, making common racist stereotypes, ironic or unfamiliar, and as the means of raising controversial and unpalatable

aspects of slavery."[300] The Black bodies performing submission to a White master exemplifies the two-sidedness of Black humor via minstrelsy that seems at first non-threatening to White spectators but is in fact ridiculing and affronting those it pretends to appease. In this way, JiDion replicates early nineteenth century comedies that purposefully used minstrelsy as a subversive form of comedy.[301] For Black Americans, "humor has often functioned as a way of affirming their humanity in the face of its violent denial."[302] JiDion and Kanel exemplify and reperform the struggles of Black existence in a comedic and poignant way that excavates past injustices, like digging through the "sedimented acts," of the past in the present. JiDion isn't making this content for the White reenactors to consume, this content is for his audiences and his future audiences—his performance remains in the digital cultural record for the future.

Figure 22 "They were trying to get people to fight with them," in "They Kicked Us Out For This!" by JiDion from his YouTube channel posted October 23,2022, YouTube, accessed October 28, 2023, the footage has since been censored. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ze5R4FEy-9I

[300] Carpio, 76, 37.
[301] Carpio, 54.
[302] Carpio, 4-5.

The police are eventually summoned which triggers the third stage of this social scenario: White woman evokes white chivalry (by directly or indirectly perceiving threats from the Black man). The White woman reenactor dressed in purple tells the police that JiDion and his crew showed up wanting to start fights with other reenactors.[303] Obviously, this is not the case, as documented by JiDion's film crew, but the White woman is performing white supremacy by inferring JiDion's actions as violent, thus triggering white chivalry. The White woman has inferred violence from the Black bodies triggering the white anxieties that will force JiDion's and Joseph's removal.

Representations of slavery in living history performances are controversial and seemingly impossible to achieve without satire. Brandy Monk-Payton writes about Black cultural identities that stem from comedic practices of ridicule. She contends, "The network of Black cultural production online resonates through methods of ridicule that generate joy… The repertoire's strength lies in the collective 'noise' of the digital network in its transmission of sass and shade that is replicated and remixed within techno-culture."[304] The sass and shade JiDion and Joseph use mocks Civil War reenactment as a genre and creates joy in watching them manipulate reactions from the White reenactors. The fourth and final stage of the social scenario in which Black bodies are removed from the White American's public space (the disappearing of Black bodies) occurs as JiDion and Joseph are escorted off the private property. JiDion continues the crashing performance by referring to the White reenactor dressed in black as "Master," and the White reenactor dressed in black replies to JiDion and his crew that there is only one master and

[303] I am interpreting the woman's race based on her presentation in the video; I believe she presents as White.
[304] Monk-Payton, "#LaughingWhileBlack," 28-29.

that is God. JiDion quickly retorts, "And then you, that's how the hierarchy goes."[305] The acknowledgement of the racial hierarchy in America reminds those watching that while JiDion's crashing stunt is comedic, the tragedy underneath reminds the audience of the often life and death consequences Black bodies experience as they negotiate Black American existences within an American cultural standard of white habitus.

The comedy of "They Kicked Us Out For This!!!" evokes the first commonly accepted theory of humor which posits that we laugh as a way to release pent-up aggression. This is known as *the relief* theory and was popularized by Sigmund Freud to explain a method for humor that acts as a release valve for repressed pain and anger. [306] Carpio argues, "Much, but certainly not all, African American humor can be understood as a kind of relief-inducing humor."[307] The video ends with JiDion surmising that he does not perceive Civil War reenactments as racist. In fact, he qualifies them as "good fun." However, he rebuffs them for not including all of history. JiDion closes the video by saying, "I don't think it's racist to do this—this is just for good fun and everything like that. But, it's just like, if you're gonna talk about history, it's like—you know—talk about all history, you feel me?"[308] JiDion and his crew ride away in laughter and the satisfaction that they have exposed white anxieties and subverted Lost Cause mythologies for online viewers to co-perform and enjoy into the future.

Black comedians who risk their bodies to perform subversions of white supremacy alongside Confederate reenactors are putting their lives on the line to achieve humorous, thought-provoking effects that contribute to the digital cultural record through their own versions

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[305] JiDion, "They Kicked Us Out For This!," *YouTube*, (Oct. 23, 2022), 00:10:40. https://youtu.be/Ze5R4FEy-9I
[306] Carpio, *Laughing Fit to Kill*, 5.
[307] Carpio, 5.
[308] JiDion, "They Kicked Us Out For This!," *YouTube*, (Oct. 23, 2022). https://youtu.be/Ze5R4FEy-9I

of world making and knowledge production.[309] Performances of Confederate reenactment *crashing* ask us to also re-perform and reproduce the absurdities of slavery and the bewilderment of witnessing a usurpation of the Confederate gaze.

Usurping the Confederate Gaze in an Interracial Habitus

My next example also usurps the Confederate gaze through a rejection of the WHCCNNm mantle. My final comedic case study is made by a White content creator who spoofs performances of Southern culture. In "Two Secretly White Southern Men," @Shane_Hartline, Shane Hartline, points to the ridiculousness of anti-woke sentiments in Southern culture. These sentiments range from anti-Covid-vaccine hype, being openminded about sexuality, sharing joy over the new iteration of *The Little Mermaid*, and affirming Collin Kaepernick's activism by taking a knee during the national anthem. These videos present two White men, one dressed in a plaid shirt, the other dressed in a blue shirt, bonding over their love of anti-racist sentiments as well as their hardship in keeping their wokeness a secret. In a confessional manner, each explain how they are tired of keeping their wokeness a secret, and when passersby approach, the men snap back into the role/performance of Southern WHCCNNm[310] by screaming stereotypical talking points: "Guns!," "Truck!," "Football, baby!"

[309] Risam, *New Digital Worlds*, 32-34.
[310] White, Heterosexual, Christian, Cis-gendered, Non-disabled, Neurotypical men

Figure 23 "I'm woke too, man. I'm woke too," in "Two Secretly Woke Southern Men Reveal All to Each Other," posted on Shane Hartline's YouTube channel, YouTube, November 2022, screengrab, accessed January 7, 2023. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nhwZarz5Oe0&t=6s

Similarly to the game-show-spoof, "Is it Problematic," "Two Secretly Woke Southern Men Reveal All to Each Other" challenges what some Americans think we know about our ancestorial past and how that lineage is performed in the present. "Two Secretly Woke…" inverts the Confederate gaze by operating on the premise that WHCCNNm cannot openly share their pain at being perceived as unloving, unsympathetic, uncaring Americans who feel coerced to perpetuate American myths instead of working towards the struggle to process the cultural trauma of slavery and hypermasculinity. By doing so, they make whiteness weird. In effect, this sketch queers the projection of WHCCN masculinity by ridiculing its stereotypes. Ricahrd Dyer argues that White people need to make whiteness *strange* in efforts to destabilize its perceived and perpetuated supremacy.[311] "Two Secretly Woke…" do just that by embracing anti-racist and/or *woke* philosophies.

[311] Richard Dyer, *White*, Twentieth Anniversary edition, (New York: Routledge, 2017), 10-11.

"Two Secretly Woke…" invites us to co-perform subversive social performances of whiteness, and in doing so the audience is co-present in historicizing whiteness. Ron Eyerman writes, "To *historicize* means placing things in context, seeing them through time and place, while the idea of *social performance* calls attention to a communicative action, one that involves senders and receivers, those who produce artifacts to convey a message and those who receive and interpret it."[312] People enjoying this video are laughing at the ridiculousness of the Southern WCHNNm stereotype and the usurpation of the Confederate gaze. The audience co-performs the historicization of white supremacy by putting things into context; such as Collin Kaepernick's kneeling, the new Litter Mermaid, not being vaccinated, homophobic inclinations. This video performs a satirical historicization of contemporary whiteness in the American South.

The Confederate gaze is a performative discourse that not only characterizes Southern heritage but also constructs a frame, or point of view, with which to see the world. As I described in the dissertation's introduction, the idea of Blackness is a projection and the Confederate gaze is its projector. Harvey Young contends, "the black body is both an externally applied projection blanketed across black bodies and an internalization of the projected image by black folk." [313] Thus, Black people may also project a Confederate gaze. The next "Secretly Woke" video analyzed invites us to explore an interracial habitus in which both the Confederate gaze and homophobic messaging in the Black church are subverted by a Black body. The newest *Secretly Woke…* video introduces a revamped cast of characters, one of whom is a Black man. The Black man, dressed in a sleeveless flannel shirt and a contemporary beaver felt hat, announces to the group that "the Black community" condones queerness. Below is the first sixteen seconds of the transcript from "Secretly Woke Southern Men Discuss Rhianna's Super Bowl Performance,

[312] Eyerman, *The Making of White American Identity*, 8.
[313] Young, *Embodying the Black Experience*, 13.

Expressing Yourself, and More…" copied directly from YouTube's caption service (I have included information in parentheticals to distinguish between characters):

> (White man 1 speaking to children who are offscreen) oh kids y'all settle down back there
> 0:02
> (White man 2 also speaking to children who are offscreen) come on now be nice (Black man speaking to his children offscreen) you be nice to them
> 0:04
> we got new friends now (same Black man turns to the group of White men and says in a lower volume) you know what
> 0:07
> is okay especially in the black
> 0:08
> community on day like this it is okay to
> 0:11
> be what you want to be if you want to
> 0:13
> love a man if you love want to love a
> 0:15
> woman and you are a man and you are a
> 0:16
> woman it's okay[314]

What the transcript doesn't reveal is the Black man's stumbling to find the right words to describe his family's *new friends.* When I first watched the video, I filled the stumbling gap in with *White*—their *new, White friends.* Since the Black man is the only non-White man in the friend group, I think the intentional beat taken by the Black performer creates an anticipated response from the audience. In my experience, I co-performed the intended role I assume Hartline et. al… intentionally cast for me: the role of someone not expecting to see a Black man in the "Secretly Woke…" series.

[314] Shane Hartline, "Secretly Woke Southern Men Discuss Rhianna's Super Bowl Performance, Expressing Yourself, and More…" *YouTube* (February 2023). https://www.youtube.com/shorts/aHz9QDofUqo

Figure 24 The Black man in "Secretly Woke Southern Men Discuss Rhianna's Super Bowl Performance, Expressing Yourself, and More…" posted on Shane Hartline's YouTube channel, YouTube, February 2023, screengrab, accessed February 23, 2023. https://www.youtube.com/shorts/aHz9QDofUqo

These lines introduce Blackness into the "Secretly Woke" series, and what I find most interesting is the character's declaration, "especially in the Black community," that queerness is welcomed since it is well established that homophobia is a prevalent characteristic in Black church communities across America.[315] Black churches, especially in the American South, use

[315] Anthony Stanford, *Homophobia in the Black Church: How Faith, Politics, and Fear Divide the Black Community*, (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2013).

fear as a mechanism to pressure Black Americans to conceal their queerness and faith as a tool to keep Black queers in the closet. In fact, the Black church as an institution is notorious for this brand of homophobia and its subsequent "faith-based solutions," healing-queerness-through-faith.[316] Yet, in this digital safe-space of *secretly woke Southern men*, queerness is appreciated on behalf of the Black church—as well as by the other men gathered around the grill.

The Black man is simultaneously usurping the Black church's stance on homosexuality as he usurps the Confederate gaze. He first introduces himself as a member of "the Black community," thus, establishing his difference from the WHCCNNm group while providing an assumed endorsement from an interpellated "Black community." In other words, just as the White secretly woke men subvert racism and heterosexism of the WHCCNNm group, so, too, does the Black man subvert the homophobia of Black church culture.

Additionally, this video extends an invitation to audiences to co-perform an interracial habitus. Ron Eyerman contends, "As unacknowledged entitlement, whiteness is a habitus, a lived-in social space and cultural framework through which the world is experienced and acted upon in a subliminal way."[317] The *black habitus,* as Harvey Young writes, "allows us to read the black body as socially constructed and continually constructing its own self. If we identify blackness as an idea projected across a body, the projection not only gets incorporated within the body but also influences the ways that it views other bodies."[318] In this instance, the Black man is expressing a becoming—the other men are not projecting Blackness onto the Black man, the Black man is declaring his Blackness and his friends listen and appreciate what he has to say about "the Black community." Thus, the video, acting as a website specific performative

[316] Stanford, 3.
[317] Eyerman, *The Making of White American Identity*, 36.
[318] Young, *Embodying the Black Experience*, 20.

monument, creates an interracial habitus for—*and with*—its audiences. This is precisely how the Confederate gaze becomes inverted, by "making whiteness strange" and by valuing the reflections and experiences from the *black habitus.* [319] Stuart Hall contends, "[Popular culture] is where we discover and play with the identifications of ourselves, where we are imagined, where we are represented, not only to the audiences out there who do not get the message, but to ourselves for the first time."[320] In "Two Secretly Woke…" audiences are allowed to *play* with co-performances of pre-conceived racial dynamics. The remainder of the video features the Southern men discussing the body positivity of Lizzo and Rhianna and how they also feel encouraged to express their own femininity. When the "off-screen" wives and children go into the kitchen, the video ends with one of the White men taking off his pants so that he can put on a skirt and express his full spectrum of gender. The men quietly cheer and celebrate their ability to feel seen and heard by their friend-group of *secretly woke Southern men.*

This is a video about usurping the Confederate gaze, but it is especially interesting because a Black body is performing the character of a secretly compassionate man trapped by the projection of a Southern good ole' boy. He is usurping a gaze that historically has cast his Black body aside and much, much worse. He makes it a point to tell us he's Black and in doing so he draws a distinction between his body and the other bodies around the grill. Lisa Guerrero argues, "African Americans are inherently postmodern subjects whose condition has consistently been one of dislocation—from society, from self, from humanity, and in the supposedly post-racial twenty-first century, even from race."[321] Yet, his race is declarative and not hidden, nor dislocated. In fact, the Black man *both* locates himself within "the Black community" *and* within

[319] Dyer, *White*, 10.
[320] Stuart Hall, "What Is this 'Black' in Black Popular Culture," in *Black Popular Culture*, ed. Gina Dent (Seattle: Bay Press, 1992): 21–33, 32.
[321] Guerrero, "Can I Live?," 267.

the realm of the Southern WHCCNNm group. He is not a postmodern object of Blackness but an agent of his declarative intersectionality, and he is also *secretly woke* within the context of the Black church. The Black man is shoring up a lot of misconceptions about Blackness. He is usurping the Black church's stance on homosexuality as he simultaneously usurps the Confederate gaze by affirming homosexuality and by performing the good ole' boy stereotype of Southern masculinity.

Conclusion

Mediated invitations to co-perform racial dynamics are abundant online, and the content creators I discuss in this chapter employ popular memory and counter memory to create digital safe spaces to examine racial hierarchies and the legacies of white supremacy. As I have demonstrated, Black American humor reperforms its roots in rebellion by creating satirical subversions of white supremacy. Black American humor also works as a release valve articulating the Black American experience through moments of grievances and grief radiating from the afterlife of slavery. In this way, satire is a redressive measure in processing the cultural trauma of chattel slavery and the legacies of white supremacy in America. This chapter explored satire as a device of Black American humor that relies upon ridicule and exaggeration to amplify Black American voices and historical narratives that expose ridiculous projections of Blackness projected by the Confederate gaze.

This chapter also analyzed invitations to disrupt neocolonial spaces online. I have examined how moments of sass and shade work in redressive measures that also employ *the theory of superiority* to invite Black (and non-Black) Americans to enjoy *satisfying racial moments*. Situating some of these mediated performance within the afterlife of slavery, I argued that the afterlife of slavery remains in performances of intergenerational trauma as well as how

performances of white supremacy are indexically linked to the performance remains/artifacts of chattel slavery. Additionally, I explored how Stuart Hall and Roopika Ripsam talk about mediated disruptions within the hegemony. Hall through encoding and decoding mass mediated messaging and Risam in describing how disruptions build postcolonial worlds (worlds that resist colonialism) online. Additionally, I explored two "Secretly Woke…" episodes to explore how the Confederate gaze becomes usurped by both Black and White male bodies. Taken together, my mediated co-performances with these website specific performative monuments symbolize the algorithmic (or coded) bricks building a postcolonial digital new world—a world where we are all encouraged to "discover and play with the identification of ourselves," and, in doing so, we can subvert white supremacy by adopting a postcolonial gaze in which all of history is represented and no one is silenced.[322]

[322] Hall, "What Is this 'Black' in Black Popular Culture," 32.

Conclusion: The Existential Both/And of White Supremacist Heritage

Through this dissertation, I announce my contribution to critical ethnography and performance studies. I now belong to a long list of critical ethnographers (notably, Dwight Conquergood, Soyini Madison, Sandra L. Richards, Saidiya Hartman, Claire Whitlinger, and Diana Taylor) who make their bodies vulnerable, susceptible to physical violence or emotional distress, so that we may produce epistemes and analyze experiences that engage with life's most challenging conundrums—often connected to the construction/subversion of systems of power. Critical ethnography challenges researchers to soften their egos to receive culture—to make oneself willing and open to new experiences and new ways of doing/knowing. I hope to have shown how critical ethnography, otherwise described as co-performative witnessing and ¡presente!, requires vulnerability and compassion—alongside a commitment to truth and justice—to operate effectively.

D. Soyini Madison, penning a tribute to Conquergood writes, "For Dwight, Co-performance or co-performative witnessing meant a shared temporality, bodies on the line, soundscapes of power, dialogic inter-animation, political action, and matters of the heart."[323] Co-performance requires the ethnographer's vulnerability and bodily commitment. It requires that the researcher engage with deliberate and reflexive inner-dialogues that forces the researcher out

[323] D. Soyini Madison, "Co-Performative Witnessing," *Cultural Studies,* Vol. 21, no 6. (November 2007), 826-831, 827.

of one's comfort zone. Diana Taylor contends, "We—scholars, artists, and activists—often co-emerge from and inadvertently continue to coproduce these colonial scenarios. It's not just a decolonial theory about 'it' (be it oppression, inequality, subalternity, and so forth) addressed to 'them,' it's about a decolonial practice (as Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui says) that implicates me and the way I teach, research, write—remembering that the way I do this is the way I do everything."[324] Taylor suggests that critical ethnography is more than a research methodology: it is an existential state. It is a manner of living that requires constant remembering and re-membering of situated knowledge and experiences.

This dissertation has documented a range of ways that co-performance allows us to see and experience white supremacy. In Chapter One, I assume the identity of a White, Heterosexual, Christian, Cis-gendered, Non-disabled, Neurotypical man, what I have referred to as the WHCCNNm group, to engage with white nationalists on social media forums like Stormfront and Patriot Force. Co-performing Whiteness as *patriotism* (what I have described as an affirmation of one national history in which all Americans are descended from courageous colonists) activates a strange nostalgia in which I experience *both* warm feelings of childhood ("*Sugar, spice, and everything nice…"*) *and* disgust in realizing I am engaging/perpetuating legacies of white superiority ("*I am afraid of Black men*…"). In Chapter Two, I co-perform a prayer wall dedication, a performative monument, and a candlelight vigil during the centennial commemoration of the Tulsa Race Massacre. Co-performing Whiteness through *allyship* (which I have described as a collaboration between Blacks and Whites to process the cultural trauma of chattel slavery), I experienced a surreal moment in which I imagined myself taking the place of my segregationist ancestors, and I transformed their hate into love. I stared the white devil down

[324] Diana Taylor, *¡Presente!: The Politics of Presence*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 8.

and I transformed the ancestors through love, vulnerability, compassion, and a firm commitment to truth and justice. I heard my grandmother saying, "Becky, you cannot trust Black men," and I answered, "Grandma, stop! Your indoctrination stems from the tenets of white supremacy which I reject. I resist the Confederate gaze for both of us." I assert this for my grandmother and for the ancestors I do not know: I am *both* the daughter of white supremacy *and* I am the ethnographer affirming and subverting these legacies. I am *both* the benefactor of white privilege *and* I negotiate these inheritances with vulnerability, compassion, and a commitment to allyship. The afterlife of the Confederacy is my inheritance: white power, white privilege, lower incarceration rates, helpful police officers, better access to higher education—my access to earn the very degree for which I write this dissertation—these are among the performance remains/artifacts of white supremacy. These are the cultural inheritances incurred by (and in) my White body.

One of the strangest feelings I still have is a fondness for the song, *Dixie.* I feel nostalgic towards the fantastical memory of a mythical Dixieland when I sing it. The song irrationally creates a closeness to my childhood, and I feel strangely proud of my Southern heritage when I sing it. This *strangeness* is a sticky positioning that I experience as heady waves of fondness, patriotism, shame, and disgust. *Dixie* represents my existential quandary of *both* loving my heritage *and* recognizing the recycled, racialized violences of that heritage. The song, ironically, is written by a White Northerner named Daniel Decatur Emmett, or Dan Emmett. He performed the song, in black face, in *Bryant's Minstrels*—a popular vaudeville troupe in New York City during the mid-nineteenth century.[325] The contemporary song lyrics are:

> I wish I was in the land of cotton,
> Old times there are not forgotten;
> Look away! Look away! Look away! Dixie Land.
> In Dixie Land where I was born in,

[325] Robert Huhn Jones. "Uncle Dan Emmett's" Dixie"." *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society (1908-1984)* 56, no. 2 (1963): 364-371.

> Early on one frosty mornin',
> Look away! Look away! Look away! Dixie Land.
> Then I wish I was in Dixie! Hooray! Hooray!
> In Dixie Land I'll take my stand to live and die in Dixie,
> Away! Away! Away down South in Dixie!
> Away! Away! Away down South in Dixie![326]

Instead of looking away, I look within. And I hear the voices of my ancestors calling—I wrestle with them. I hear them singing *Dixie* and I sing with them. I sing with tears in my eyes and heartbreak in my spirit, but I cannot stop tapping my feet and feeling swells of Southern pride as I listen to or sing the song. I *both* experience the heartbreak of reconciling a heritage of white supremacy *and* the disgust I feel knowing this song was performed by the ancestors to perpetuate White superiority and Black inferiority. I experience this song as a performance remain of white supremacy and I recognize white superiority/white power as being articulated with its re-performance. In this way, I demonstrate my grappling with the ancestors—when do I embrace them? When do I reject them? These questions are profoundly personal and not easily answered.

Sandra L. Richards explores uncomfortable truths in memory work in *Performing Memory in Ghana's Slave Castle Dungeons (A Multimedia Performance Meditation),* a performance piece performed at an event celebrating Leon Forest's contributions to African American Studies at Northwestern University. Richards creates a performance piece in which *the ancestors come calling.* Richards accepts the invitation of her ancestors as they come knocking from the door of no return, the infamous portal enslaved Africans used to forcibly board

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[326] Robert Huhn Jones writes that the original lyrics are: "I wish I was in de land ob cotton, old times dar am not forgotten; Look away! Look away! Look away! Dixie Land! / In Dixie Land whar I was born in early on one frosty mornin' Look way! Look away! Look away! Dixie Land! / Den I wish I was in Dixie! Hooray! Hooray! In Dixie's Land we'll take our stand, to lib an' die in Dixie! Away Away! Away down South in Dixie! Away Away! Away down South in Dixie!
Robert Huhn Jones. "Uncle Dan Emmett's" Dixie"." *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society (1908-1984)* 56, no. 2 (1963): 364-371, 366-367.

transatlantic slave ships—it earned the ominous moniker *door of no return*. Richards answers *the door* through a creative workshopping of her co-performance with slave castle-dungeon guides, research colleagues, fellow slave castle-dungeon tourists, and in her self-reflexive essay documenting the experience in total: "Who is this Ancestor?"[327]

In the performance piece transcript within the essay, Richards confronts Philip Quaque, the first European-educated African missionary whose involvement and life at Elmina, a slave castle-dungeon, haunts and disturbs Richards.[328] In the performance piece, she likens memory to "grandmother's crazy quilt," and through one of her autobiographical characters, *SLR the Scholar*, Richards asks, "So, what happens when, warmed by grandma's crazy quilt, we begin to listen to ancestors? What happens, when the ancestral world complies with the desire of humans to remember but with a perverse logic, sends representatives whose stories we would rather forget?"[329] She suggests a reasoning for this "perverse logic" could be, "that the ancestors send a variety of messages in order to disturb your arrogance."[330] I have used this dissertation to challenge my own arrogances and I have heeded the call to explore uncomfortable truths about a white supremacist heritage. And, so, I return to my ancestors and their invitation to sing *Dixie.*

Can I Sing Dixie?

I have re-performed white supremacist expressions from an inherited repertoire of white superiority as cultural genealogy. I wonder: should I grant myself permission to sing *Dixie*? I wonder if my crossing the street upon seeing a Black body is a performance remain from an inherited repertoire passed down from my parents or my grandparents, or a conscious choice I

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[327] Sandra L. Richards, "Who Is This Ancestor?: Performing Memory in Ghana's Slave Castle-Dungeons (A Multimedia Performance Meditation)," in *The Sage Handbook of Performance Studies*, Eds. D. Soyini Madison and Judith Hamera, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2006), 489-507.
[328] Richards, "Who Is This Ancestor?," 491.
[329] Richards, 491.
[330]Richards, 504.

make to perpetuate white power? Will I still waive a Confederate flag? And what would that look like? I hear the ancestors asking these questions, too, and I answer them and for myself.

Yes, I *both* feel swells of pride when I hear this song—I remember fondly singing *Dixie* with my family—*and* I concede that this song promotes racist ideologies and symbolizes White superiority and Black inferiority. So, yes, I sometimes find myself humming this song (unwittingly and privately) and then I often weep when I realize Dixie Land is not real, and once more, it is a fantastical memory that supports and perpetuates the other tenets of white supremacy (Confederate Stewardship and the Confederate gaze). And if I cross the street coincidentally upon seeing a Black body, am I re-performing white anxieties or just crossing the street? Yes, I am *both* re-performing white supremacy *and* my performance is passed down intergenerationally as a performance artifact of white power. I am *both* responding to a conditioned response in my White body *and* I accept the invitation to negotiate and re-negotiate with my ancestors by recognizing irrational embodied moments of racial bias and then renouncing them as part of the both/and of my heritage.

Will I still waive a Confederate flag? I did. I brought a Confederate flag (contained within a Ziplock bag) to a meeting with Dr. Sahakian and I presented it to her in a waiving motion. She was touched, and said she felt goosebumps, "by the weight [I] carried in the prop of that flag, the burden of the Confederate legacy and of the duty [I] feel to transform it."[331] Her reaction perplexed me until I reflected more upon what had actually transpired between us. In researching this dissertation, I had acquired this Confederate battle flag riddled with bullet holes. The flag was given to me by John Paul Anderson, the proprietor of a roadside veteran's memorial off King's Pike Road in Bristol, VA. One day I stopped by the roadside memorial to

[331] A clarifying comment from Dr. Sahakian's review of this conclusion.

snap some pictures and the then eighty-one-year-old former municipal judge, emerged and welcomed myself and Sarah Morgan into his house. He recounted the Civil Rights Movement and then shared stories about his experiences with Black people and his reverence for American veterans. When we left, Anderson blessed us in Latin, kissed us both on the cheek, gave me the Confederate flag, and told me I was "an earth angel" sent to help him carry on his legacy. The exchange lasted thirty minutes and was documented on my recording device. This is the story of how I acquired the Confederate flag from John Paul Anderson, a staunch supporter of Confederate monuments and memorials to American veterans; Anderson passed away July 30, 2022. [332]

Figure 25 My Confederate flag—part of the legacy I carry with me. Athens, GA, March 10, 2023, author's photo

Upon further reflection I realized I had re-performed a Confederate legacy. I had waived the Confederate flag in public and I did so excitedly. I had *both* re-performed a Confederate legacy *and* subverted it in the same action. I raised the flag, wadded-up in a Ziplock bag, with

[332] Joe Tennis, "Monuments at Washington County Courthouse Draw Interest from Three Parties," *Herald Courier*, December 11, 2021, accessed March 1, 2023. https://heraldcourier.com/news/local/monuments-at-washington-county-courthouse-draw-interest-from-three-parties/article_4ca2c6f0-4faa-5684-b369-12cb3ea80009.html

the intention of saying to Dr. Sahakian, "Look at this flag! It is a performative monument! It is riddled with bullet holes. In Bristol, VA, the Confederate flag invites passersby to engage with the memorial, and some people choose to engage with it by shooting bullets into it!" I note here Anderson's memorial is a collection of flags on tall flagpoles, each representing a branch of the military or a specific war. Anderson displays a flag for Vietnam veterans, for Desert Storm veterans, and for Confederate veterans. The Confederate flag is the only flag in the group that repeatedly gets shot down. It is the only flag in the collection in need of constant replacement. I realize that I, too, am also constantly replacing the Confederacy.

I am still re-performing from the repertoire but with altered actions. I can *both* waive a Confederate flag from my position as an ethnographer *and* I am waiving it from my position as a White Southerner. Richards writes, "A both/and remembering that uses empathy as one avenue to knowledge of and connection to the past and at the same time, acknowledges the differences that will always keep that past beyond our desiring grasp. A difficult both/and memory of continuity and the disruption that in our acts of re-membering challenges us to act differently, to interrogate and reconfigure our present."[333] I am the both/and of confusing inheritances from white supremacist ancestors. I am *both* a performance remain of white supremacy *and* I re-perform legacies and subversions of white supremacy. I accept the invitation to disrupt by re-membering and acting differently. These inheritances of white supremacy are bodily, they are performed and personal. We need vulnerability, co-performance, and a commitment to antiracism to further subvert the legacies of white supremacy. Which means a person growing up with the both/and existential negotiation, similar to mine, will need to exercise vulnerability and compassion to subvert racist heritages and legacies of white supremacy. I hope this dissertation

[333] Richards, "Who Is This Ancestor?," 504.

has proven it is possible and necessary as White Americans to honor ancestors as ancestors and to stand against racism and the perpetuation of white supremacy in America.

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