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Ethics in 21st Century Art Conservation: Confederate Monuments

Kate L. Hoffman
University of Mississippi

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ETHICS IN 21ST CENTURY ART CONSERVATION: CONFEDERATE MONUMENTS

by
Katelyn Hoffman

A thesis submitted to the faculty of the University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

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Approved by

Advisor: Professor Betty Crouther

Reader: Professor John Neff

Reader: Professor Kathryn Mckee
ABSTRACT

KATELYN HOFFMAN: Ethics in 21st Century Art Conservation: Confederate Monuments
(Under the direction of Dr. Betty Crouther)

This paper explores the ethics surrounding the conservation of damaged confederate monuments, specifically as educational tools for understanding their place in society and memory over time. Much of this research has been conducted through the use of contemporary news sources and memory studies scholarship on account of the recent influx of interest towards the monuments and their controversies in the 21st century. The ultimate purpose of this paper is to provide an unbiased source of material for future scholarship in memory studies towards confederate monuments, for if damages dealt to the monuments are repaired, that portion of their physical history is then erased. In summation, I argue it would be best to retain iconoclastic damages on choice confederate monuments to provide a solid basis for the future scholarship in ethics of 21st century art history and conservation issues.
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER I: THE CONFEDERATE SOLDIER’S SIGNIFICANCE IN ART

CHAPTER II: CONSERVATION OF DAMAGED MONUMENTS

CHAPTER III: AN OVERVIEW OF CASE STUDIES

CONCLUSION

BIBLIOGRAPHY
**LIST OF FIGURES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure I:</td>
<td><em>Confederate Soldiers and Sailors Monument</em> (450 x 600 pixels)</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure II:</td>
<td><em>Demopolis Soldier Monument, Pre-Toppling</em> (2600 x 1914 pixels)</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure III:</td>
<td><em>Silent Sam, Pre-Toppling</em> (569 x 599 pixels)</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

Confederate monuments occupy an entire field of scholarship through memory studies alone, constantly being analyzed so that scholars may better understand the meanings backed by their creation. The original reasoning behind commissioning such a monument was to help unify a collective memory for the Lost Cause and “Southern Identity” following the Civil War through artistic rendering. In analyzing this definitive quality of the confederate monument, we may predict that the restoration of a monument damaged through repetitive political protest and vandalism stands as a continued execution of their affiliation with memory studies. Furthermore, iconoclastic urges towards the monuments deem them as still relevant to the time of destruction. This observance solidifies their significance within 21st century scholarship of art history, mostly in part by having their political history documented through damages sustained on account of negative interpretations perceived by our current generation. In this paper, I will present the issues in regards to the conservation of confederate monuments, as well as their continual relevance as pawns in memory studies. I will also present a few case studies to provide a backdrop of scenarios in which monuments were damaged, and what actions were undertaken in order to handle the issues at hand.
CHAPTER I

THE CONFEDERATE SOLDIER’S SIGNIFICANCE IN ART HISTORY

From an art historical perspective, Confederate monuments must not be assumed as obsolete within the current historical and social context. The presence of these monuments not only allows for a better understanding of the mindset for those who erected them, but also how these monuments reflect this bending of memory and causation for the actions of those who served in the Confederacy. These monuments, therefore, constantly reflect the meanings surrounding their presence in the public sphere as living works of art, and continually create discussion on whether monuments arguably tied to the memory of white supremacy are proper images for public display. Aside from their value as “agents of historical teaching,” Confederate monuments ultimately serve as focal points for current socio-political issues in the 21st century. This significance allows for a modern approach toward their scholarship, even if their originally projected values are lost upon the current generation’s mentality.¹

Within the context of American art history, the creation of these monuments reflects an exponential increase in monument building which was never envisioned before. As Kirk Savage mentions in his writings, the rise in the creation of these statues

¹ Kirk Savage, “Race, Memory and Identity: The National Monuments of the Union and the Confederacy” (PhD diss., University of California, 1990), 180.
coincides with a nineteenth century period of mass art production, creating a new
movement of commemoration through commission and display of granite, zinc and
marble. Monument building in general reached a zenith of popularity between 1850 and
the 1880, leading to not only a popular culture around the idea of public monumentation
but also stimulating the building of commemorative Civil War monuments. Another
event which sparked the surge in Confederate monument building was that of Robert E.
Lee’s death in 1870, which caused more effort to be undertaken towards the promotion of
the Lost Cause in Southern dialogue. The earliest known Confederate monuments were
built during the late 1860’s and early 1870’s, but this new commemorative style became
even more popular as the nineteenth century was drawn to a close. The boom for these
monuments specifically developed between 1890 and 1920, with most being placed onto
courthouse and government-owned land. In order to meet growing demands for
commemoration and obsession with material proof of memory, a new industry
developed to create “catalogues of readymade soldier figures.” This production allowed
most of the population to afford a commemorative effort without the pricing of
commissioning sculptors. However, this rise in popularity began to waver in the later
19th century. At that point, critics of these mass-produced readymade monuments began
to discuss whether the significance of the monuments to the public was beginning to

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2 Savage, “Race, Memory and Identity: The National Monuments of the Union and the Confederacy,” 211.
5 Brown, 24.
7 Savage, “Race, Memory and Identity: The National Monuments of the Union and the Confederacy,” 182.
8 Kirk Savage, Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in 19th-Century America, 164.
disappear, and that other forms of commemoration, such as reenactment, were becoming more significant than monumentation.\(^9\)

Aside from the possibility of cultural insignificance, the factors which controlled the rise in popularity regarding Confederate monuments were and are still important for discussing the significance of memory to the Confederate veterans and anyone associated with them. Both the artists who were commissioned to create these monuments and those who funded them saw a commonality within the creation of a physical dedication to the Confederate dead: that “art was the vehicle of timeless signification.”\(^10\) This idea was particularly important to the two major groups who sought out the creation of permanent signification for those who had been involved with the Confederacy: the veterans and southern women. It was through the efforts of these groups that commemorative action surged and created this new era of monument building, but their reasoning for this type of media was to ultimately provide a physical part of the landscape which the memory of those who had served would not be forgotten or proverbially ‘trampled on.’ More specifically, the monuments also helped to serve a function in representing the mythological narratives of the Lost Cause.\(^11\)

The concept behind the Lost Cause of the South began after its defeat in the Civil War, after which the population attempted to provide a reasoning as to why it had faced such “divine disfavor” in what was considered to be “God’s plan for humanity.”\(^12\)

Another development in this narrative was the myth which falsely claimed that the War

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\(^10\) Ibid., 187.
\(^12\) Brown, 10.
was not based upon slavery, but of states’ rights.\textsuperscript{13} Amidst the issue of finding where to place the blame for the devastating loss, the Confederate soldier was shifted from blame and becoming instead a pivotal representational figure for the holy sacrifice made by the Southerners.\textsuperscript{14} Because the Confederate soldier could not be blamed, the Lost Cause narrative also incorporated the belief that the soldiers lost on account of the North having more manpower, ultimately claiming that the South would have guaranteed success had it not been overwhelmed by Northern numbers.\textsuperscript{15} Through commemoration, certain groups also “sought to give meaning to the mass amount of death,” providing an outlet for those experiencing anguish and a deep sense of loss.\textsuperscript{16} From the viewpoints of the veterans’ and women’s groups, the monuments were to serve as testimonials to the memory of those who had served, both living and dead, ensuring that the memory of those individuals would live on much longer in the public eye. Commemoration through monument building was an outlet that led to “historical closure” for the traumatic events they endured during the war, conserving what they believed to be worth remembering.\textsuperscript{17} The monuments also serve to reinforce the claims of the Lost Cause mythology, acting as pedagogical guides for interpreting the diluted collective memory of the Civil War.\textsuperscript{18}

Confederate veterans ultimately wanted to provide a respectful “lasting conjunction of memory and place”\textsuperscript{19} for the deeds of those who served the Confederacy, but their earliest intentions following the war were much simpler—to mark the resting

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Brown, 11.
\item Ibid., 10.
\item Neff, 7.
\item Brown, 15.
\item Neff, 9.
\item Brown, 16.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
place of their fallen comrades and a proper burial ceremony. Early veterans’ groups first formed in the 1860’s with the intentions of providing decent burials, aid for affected families, and aid for disabled and poverty-stricken veterans. Eventually, these groups grew and expanded, increasing their memberships and ideas for commemoration. One of their main objectives soon became memorializing the dead, using the erection of monuments to fulfill this purpose; in the experience of the veterans, part of caring for the dead required charity and traditional instruction. For example, under the United Confederate Veterans, there were small committees created for the purpose of overseeing the creation of monuments. However, there was a slight backlash to the idea of funding monument building during the early development of these associations. Some veterans proposed that they instead fund facilities for displaying relics of war and conducting meetings, and commented that the funds used for commemorative monuments would be much more beneficial to those who needed aid. A few veterans commented that they “asked for bread, and (were given) a stone.” Another argument was that as long as veterans required aid from the associations, any money spent on monuments would represent a mockery of those in need. Although it is important to note that if not all Confederate veterans agreed with the creation of monuments, the majority agreed upon the significance that the monuments would hold over the future interpretations of Confederate memory, therefore allowing historians to have a better insight into the post-war “Southern” experience.

21 Ibid., 100.
22 Ibid., 42.
23 Ibid., 27.
24 Ibid., 98 & 106.
In regards to other sponsors for Confederate monuments, women’s groups became a dominating force in their creation and funding and were given power over the “chief business” regarding Confederate memorials, in general.\textsuperscript{25} Women associated with the Confederacy were just as concerned for the representation of “Southern memory,” if not more, causing more “monuments to be erected…than have ever been erected in any age of the world to any cause….\textsuperscript{26} Men were often concerned with quickly creating monuments with such an orderly and proper representation of the Confederate soldier as possible, whereas women often argued for artistic values to be incorporated for the living memory of the monument.\textsuperscript{27} As the appearance of the common soldier became less oriented towards purposeful artistic rendering, mass-produced “standing soldiers” became a more affordable option to the public in the 1860’s.\textsuperscript{28} However, other types of Confederate monumentation remained within the sphere of desire for a ‘higher’ form of artistic influence, such as a Robert E. Lee monument which was dedicated in 1890.\textsuperscript{29} In this instance, female sponsors advocated for a “monument which in beauty of design and execution should equal…anything of the kind in America.”\textsuperscript{30} This example particularly reveals the women’s wish to define the memorialization of the Lost Cause through a more artistic approach, allowing the monument to be considered both as beautiful and as a pedagogical item in art history.\textsuperscript{31} Although some communities “renounced” soldiers created by the women’s wishes for artistic invention in lieu for a more suitable

\textsuperscript{25} Brown, 22-23. \\
\textsuperscript{26} White, 106. \\
\textsuperscript{27} Savage, “Race, Memory and Identity: The National Monuments of the Union and the Confederacy,”77. \\
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 26. \\
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 76. \\
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 76. \\
\textsuperscript{31} Savage, \textit{Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in 19th-Century America}, 140.
the hindered desire for artistic influence was still often achieved through other additions, such as inscriptions.  

Alongside becoming physical documentations of post-Civil War social memory in the South, these monuments also provided an outlet for these groups to display what they believed to be proper reasoning behind their side of the war, despite the lack of a properly identifiable cause in the beginning, as Savage discusses in his writing. When the identity of the “Southern Cause” solidified into one for “racial subjugation” after the North “insisted on the compatibility of sections despite slavery,” there was a movement in the South to cloud the idea that the most important reasoning behind their side of the war was slavery34 “according to the leaders of the secession movement” following the South’s defeat.35 Therefore, these monuments are also important for current discussions of history in that they provide insight into the psychological workings of those involved with promoting a new memory of the South in the wake of loss and consideration of topics to memorialize alongside the Confederate veterans. Under the views on historical teaching in the nineteenth century, monumental art and architecture forms were to serve as methods of public teaching, particularly that of civic lessons. There was an idea that the public would not retain the historical memory of a group unless there were physical contexts to look back on as permanent and stable records, because the past was no longer in existence.36 This idea was usually achieved through the use of inscriptions, which could relay the majority’s views of the war in the South.37

32 Savage, Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in 19th-Century America, 183.
33 Brown, 35.
34 Savage, “Race, Memory and Identity: The National Monuments of the Union and the Confederacy 127.
35 Ibid., 7-8 & 127.
36 Ibid., 44.
37 Ibid., 7.
More often than not, inscriptions on Confederate monuments detailed the sponsors, names of the dead, and poetry; the most common and notable, however, was the repeated phrases that mentioned the “purity of the soldiers’ motives,” leaving out what exactly their intents were during the war.\textsuperscript{38} As Brown clarifies in his prologue, veterans were bent on presenting their stories and motives in the pure view of patriotic service to their country; however, they more so presented imagery that attempted to justify “the Lost Cause” which had apparently “implemented God’s plan for humanity…”\textsuperscript{39} Therefore, viewers are often left with a description of how obedient, honorable, and patriotic the soldiers were for serving in the Civil War.\textsuperscript{40} The popularity of the Confederacy’s imagery combined with the trope of ambiguous language referencing sacrifice and patriotism allowed for the South to redefine its image, creating a “vehicle for post-war reinterpretation for the political significance of (their) conflict.”\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{38} Brown, 38.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 10.
\textsuperscript{40} Savage, “Race, Memory and Identity: The National Monuments of the Union and the Confederacy, 35-38.
\textsuperscript{41} Brown, 16.
CHAPTER II

CONSERVATION OF DAMAGED MONUMENTS

When Confederate monuments are considered as works of art historic value, there are issues within the realm of their conservation and restoration which must be discussed. More specifically, if a monument is removed after repetitive acts of defacement and public protest, then there is a question of whether the monument should retain damage sustained from acts of vandalism, removal, or overall poor management. Throughout this chapter, there will be more focus on whether conservators should allow Confederate monuments to continue to display damage caused in relation to the issues surrounding their controversial presence today in the public eye. Moreover, I will also discuss the deeper connotations as to why Confederate monuments continue to be relevant within the political issues of today, and how these new layers of meaning contribute to the Confederate monument’s artistic lifespan as a significant form.

In the case of the conservator, there are many outlets for ethical discussion regarding the restoration of damaged Confederate monuments and the new era of political interest towards their presence in the public sphere. Although many state laws may disallow the total removal and require the eventual restoration of a public historical monument as close to its original likeness as possible, whether or not some damaged monument examples may be kept in their damaged state as educational examples should be considered. Regardless, a conservator’s effort is dictated by methods of good practice which aim for the best possible outcome of an object’s total lifetime, despite the
possibility of ethical dilemma. First and foremost, conservators follow an “obligation to acknowledge the site or work as a cumulative physical record of human activity embodying cultural values, materials, and techniques,” as well as to “safeguard authenticity.”

Through this guideline, then, an argument may arise which calls for the reversal of damage in order to showcase the monuments’ original associations with memories initiated by the allies of the Confederate veterans that followed the Civil War. Another definition for ethical conservation states that “the ultimate aim of…conservation is to retain or recover the cultural significance” of an object, which may also pertain to the idea of preserving the respectful air of memorial and “Southern” memory for which the monuments were originally commissioned.

On the other hand, it may also be argued that damages of any significance dealt to a Confederate monument involving political protest reflects their major relevance in society today. To cover up alterations caused by contemporary events of the 21st century could be equated to actively erasing an historical example of this type of ethical and political dilemma of our developing period in art history. This idea also points out another base necessity for good practice in conservation, which would be in opposition to the previous arguments: another “ultimate aim of…conservation” is to “not distort the material evidence, especially that evidence that reveals traces of additions and alterations of history and use.”

This definition of good practice in conservation allows us to assume instead that other culturally prominent changes in views toward Confederate monuments in today’s society should also be deemed relevant for the record of

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43 Ibid., 17.
44 Ibid., 17.
historically ethical and significant physical changes, including damage through vandalism and forced removals by activist groups.

One specific concern in which this point may be relevant includes retaining and displaying the damage dealt to Confederate monuments simply for the education of future conservators who may find themselves assigned to work on them. For example, damage to monuments may even be caused by those who care for them in the first place, mostly in the form of botched ‘home-remedies,’ especially in the case where a town cannot afford to hire a professional conservator. As pointed out by conservator Carol Grissom, ‘home-remedying’ usually “results in inappropriate treatments…more serious is the irreplaceable damage caused by pouring concrete inside zinc monuments,” for example, than the “well-intentioned effort of strengthening them.”

Keeping a damaged monument in situ within small towns is another matter to consider for the education of future conservators, especially when it comes to versatile materials like zinc.

Many types of production with Zinc also lead to various types of breakage and respective conservation methods, all of which have been categorized, taught, and practiced within recent years. For example, in the case of cast zinc monuments, if they are “pushed off their pedestals,” they may break into many pieces that may be reassembled at their broken seams. "Cast zinc is brittle…and typically fracture into many pieces when they have fallen," in contrast to stronger bronze forms. On the other hand, in the case of thinly stamped sheet-zinc statues, with their smooth lightweight

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47 Ibid., 97.
structures, there is heavier risk of denting and bending. Denting is often so commonly seen on sheet-zinc statues that the damages “can be reliably used to distinguish them, even from a distance.”

For the benefit of conservators, using the zinc monuments as an example, it would be an advantage to retain the damage on a few affected Confederate monuments and display them for the purpose of education. The flaws caused by their associated history with the mammoth mass production of monuments in the 19th century makes them more susceptible to damage, but also highlights their place as indicators for the artistic boom in American history which led to the creation of “cheaper” and “shoddily” made forms. Both of these points would make great reasons for retaining a few damaged monuments for the sake of a conservator’s education, not to mention for learning basic identification of certain types of damage for metallic monuments. Even Grissom admits that "zinc statues are often incorrectly identified, and that “even the Smithsonian's Inventory of American Art lists some as made of bronze, iron, and even stone!”

When it comes to the discussion of ethics regarding whether damage done to an historically prevalent monument or artwork should be kept for the sake of physically recording the object’s history, this same dilemma may be compared to the situations of other objects damaged from political strife, especially that of war. Although one of the priorities of conservation is to not alter the original artist’s or commissioner’s intent

49 Ibid., 100.
50 Ibid., 62.
52 Grissom, Zinc Sculpture in America, 1850 - 1950, 93.
within their context of history and memorialization, certain exhibitions of art have recently transpired in order to educate viewers on the contemporary political issues within the timeframe when the damages occurred. One specific example is the Bode Museum’s 2015 Lost Museum exhibition in Berlin, Germany. At a specific point in World War II, many of Berlin’s historic and cultural collections were moved to a Friedrichshain bunker for protection. However, in May 1945, multiple fires occurred inside the bunker and destroyed hundreds of priceless sculptures and paintings.

“According to curator Julien Chapuis, the exhibition explores the ethics behind the restoration of war damaged art. ‘Whether or not to show war-damaged art is a controversial issue among conservators, historians and archivists,’ he explained.”

“We will be showing a number of horrendous-looking pieces, works that are so badly damaged that they haven’t been displayed in generations,’ Chapuis told the Art Newspaper. ‘We want to be brutally honest about the condition of these works so that we can start a dialogue as to how they can be presented in the future,’ he added.” Since this exhibition opened, the museum has begun restoration for the badly damaged objects in its workshop, which has been compared to an “intensive care unit.” They have been able to accomplish this work so far due to private and public foundation funding.

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55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
Although the Bode Museum is now currently focused on the restoration work for these badly damaged objects, the exhibition that took place beforehand allowed for the current lifetimes of the artworks to be further explored within their association with World War II as seen through their damaged state, rather than halting at the layer of meaning intended by the original artist. Not to mention, this exhibition was created as a means to spark conversation and education of the public regarding the discussion of restoration being a possibility in the future, due to their damage being so severe that the works could not even be exhibited any longer. In the case of Confederate monuments, to leave the damage would also allow for the work to become an object of discussion for the political era in which they are now being damaged, rather than allowing this significance to be glossed over in favor of only one or two layers of previously researched memory. Ethically, part of conservation should be to “study, record, retain, and restore the culturally significant qualities of the object,” including that of the present. How, if the damage is reversed, could the physical effects of today’s political climate against these monuments be observed? To leave the damage left behind by controversial political matters regarding the monuments would be to reveal their constantly developing story, in a more theoretical approach to their art historical lifetime.

As we observe the vandalism and conservation of Confederate monuments today, as well as the ethical dilemmas brought up regarding their place in the public eye, it is important to note that these controversies add an entire new layer of historical context which will now always be tied to the monuments in the future. Similar situations in the past as to how controversial public monuments were treated draw many similarities to

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59 Ibid.
how Confederate monuments are rejected by certain groups in today’s society. However, we now reference those historic actions towards the monuments in the past with a specific term: iconoclasm.

The United States has retained a long relationship with the use of iconoclastic urges against images which have represented abusive power structures in order to achieve the freedoms that we enjoy today. Most all historians would agree that American values were essentially built on iconoclastic tendencies and the rejection of power structures that have held its citizens back, for the most part. As writer Percy Douglas commented in the 1880’s, “the American is by nature and education an iconoclast. To this fact we owe nearly all our moral and material progress.”61 The earliest instance of American iconoclasm, within a physical sense, took place shortly before the start of the Revolutionary War against George III and the British military. This act occurred “in 1776, just five days after the Declaration of Independence was ratified…soldiers and civilians tore down a gilded statue of Britain’s King George III in Manhattan” as a form of iconoclastic protest against his hold over the newly created country.62

America is not the only basis for comparison when it comes to iconoclasm towards monuments in the 21st century, however. We may also draw comparisons from other countries around the world in which the populace has rejected monuments of historical figures who represented historical oppression in their society. Multiple areas in South America have very recently removed monuments as an iconoclastic means for symbolically representing change and the rejection of a hushed history regarding their

experiences with colonialism and oppression. For example, a monument depicting Christopher Columbus, the now infamous traveler “who claimed the land for Spain during the 1400’s, was toppled in 2004 in Venezuela.”\textsuperscript{63} Afterwards, “the toppled statue…was replaced by a likeness of Guaicaipuro, an indigenous chief who resisted Spanish conquerors like Columbus” in order to celebrate those who attempted to resist the atrocities committed by the so-called explorers of the New World in the eras of colonialism and mistreatment of indigenous peoples.\textsuperscript{64} Another form of iconoclasm in recent history includes the dismantling of mass numbers of Lenin statues, especially in Ukraine. “They have met all manner of fates; some have been painted over, others smashed to pieces, and still others stored in basements.”\textsuperscript{65}

In regards to Confederate monuments, there is now a more profound change in attitude towards Confederate monuments than ever before, in a revolutionary manner. The previous historical attachments and contexts are now overlooked for the racist and white supremacist meanings attached to them through association with “Southern Memory.” Many activist groups that are for the removal of Confederate monuments argue that the monuments do not represent overall values of American culture and acceptance, due to their association with power structures which are abusive towards citizens of minority statuses. Therefore, we can label the damage dealt towards the monuments as an iconoclastic feature of contemporary American protest, just as it has occurred in the past towards other artistic symbols of oppression such as the George III monument.

\textsuperscript{63} Fortin, “Toppling Monuments, a Visual History.”
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid.
However, to label the actions taken today against Confederate monuments as iconoclasm would also open the door to an argument for those who stand by the monuments’ current positions in the public as markers of “Southern heritage.” These ‘pro-monument’ groups may argue that the monuments should be restored to their original appearance and position in order to reflect a respective outlook towards them and what they mean as a form cultural memory. On the one hand, Confederate monuments do indeed contain elements of reflection upon the "Southern” memory, heritage, and the “Lost Cause,” as well as physical documentation of the reaction towards the massive loss of life throughout the war. Considering these elements, it is understood why supporters of the monuments may wish for restoration upon damaged monuments. Those who fiercely defend the markers of "Southern history," as pointed out by Jansson, do not necessarily "fear the bodily death of the ‘Southern people’ but rather their psychological (and ideological) death. If ‘Southerners’ stop thinking of themselves as ‘Southerners,’ stop honoring their heritage, stop learning their history (all as defined by the League), the ‘Southern’ nation (as an imagined community) will cease to exist" in their perception.

On the other hand, if damaged monuments retain their new marks of current history, they will ultimately allow for the reflection of iconoclastic tendencies in America by today’s standards, as well as the present views of a society which rejects a one-sided history presented by the supporters of the Confederacy and its memory. For “Southern heritage” groups to focus only on this aspect of the art history behind the monuments, and to not consider their current historical value as objects of iconoclasm, would be to

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continue the distortion of the history and memory surrounding the damaged monuments. To assume that these reflections on Southern culture should still be upheld would also be to assume that those values are ultimately still accepted amongst the majority of people who represent the southern states today. Another assumption which may be strengthened is that Confederate monuments continue to uphold values of a culture completely separate from the values of the United States, or what used to be the Union states, as well as continue the trend of “internal Orientalization” of the south, as further discussed by Jansson.67 Although the monuments themselves are historic pieces that reflect the history and altered memory of “Southern” American ideologies which developed after the Civil War, there are still other layers of meaning present to analyze in regards to their newly developed all-around iconoclastic art history.

The layers examined around the contexts of the Confederate monuments are much more complex than the standard arguments for and against removal that are portrayed in the media. Regardless, the monuments remain markers of an ongoing American history, whether it be for the positions of Southern women and their call for artistic memorial, the study of the 19th century monument boom of America that led to the mass production of damage-prone statuary, or the now culturally relevant iconoclastic rejection of hedonistic power structures in America today. Simply removing and restoring the monuments will not erase the relevance of these monuments to current American issues, for they will still be marked by the political and social struggles that they are now seen as symbols for in our society today. As Dr. Allais remarks, “stories do not end when statues fall…we should definitely not think that historical legacies are made, or ended, only by destroying

symbols. 68 However, the damaging marks of history and protest dealt to the monuments now will allow for the future unabashed study of the problems at hand in our society’s current state. 69 To allow such historical marks to remain untouched in specific instances of major national development would allow for an untainted view of historical action, rather than a continuation of clouded collective memory for which the monuments are already known.

68 Fortin, “Toppling Monuments, a Visual History.”
CHAPTER III

AN OVERVIEW OF CASE STUDIES

The current political climate surrounding the identity and memory of the Confederacy is a radical one full of protests and heated debate, especially towards the public display of their monuments. The length of time following the violent outcomes of the Unite the Right rally surrounding the Robert E. Lee statue in Charlottesville, Virginia has provided momentum for advocates calling for the removal of controversial monuments, especially those which reminisce upon the collective memory of the Confederacy. This chapter will provide brief overviews regarding events surrounding three case studies of Confederate monument removals, as well as why these removals are key to understanding the issues regarding the conservation of Confederate monuments, leading up to and following the event of removal.

Many reasons are provided for and against the removal of Confederate monuments, but the majority “for removal” is public opinion. However, many states make use of legislation which prevents the removal of historic and military monuments on the basis that they are ultimately civic monuments that provide historical significance and memorial for events from the past; one such state includes Maryland. However, specifically in Baltimore, there is a public safety clause within this legislation regarding the removal of public monuments that states historic monuments may be removed on the basis of conservative care or due to infraction upon public safety; it was the latter which was cited by Baltimore Mayor Catherine Pugh when the bronze Confederate Soldiers and
Sailors Monument (Figure I), along with a few others, was removed from Mount Royal Avenue. Her argument was the result of concern following the events in Charlottesville, stating that her decision ultimately reflected upon the “safety and security” of her people. William Cook, who is the associate general counsel at the National Trust for Historic Preservation, also mentioned that there was a “direct threat to public safety, in which the white supremacists who marched in Charlottesville were threatening to demonstrate in Baltimore next…” The Confederate Soldiers and Sailors Monument and others were removed quickly and as gently as possible with a crane and a flatbed truck; no other methods of coverage and care were reported or recorded to have been used, aside from security cables to help lessen movement during the transport.

Although the monument was ultimately removed on behalf of Mayor Pugh’s concern for public safety, there were also a few instances of vandalism leading up to the removal of the monument which were cause for concern in matters of conservation. For example, the monument was “tagged with ‘Black Lives Matter’ in yellow spray paint” in 2015 following the Charleston church shooting of June 2015 in South Carolina. The monument was covered with red paint in August of 2017, close to the time the Unite the Right rally was held in Charlottesville. It can be inferred that any material which is

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73 Miller, “Baltimore Quietly Removed All 4 Of its Confederate Statues Overnight.”


75 Ibid.
scraped and scrubbed for cleaning due to consistent vandalism is liable to wear down and become more fragile over time, but the issue of placement for Confederate monuments after removal ultimately determines the lifetime of the material. As for the Confederate Soldiers and Sailors Monument presently, a lack of proper conservation methodology has not yet been reported as an issue; Mayor Pugh has refused to disclose the location of it and the other monuments in order to prevent additional vandalism and damage, only stating that they are “in a safe place.”

Conversation regarding what should be done with the monuments has also taken place between the Mayor and the city’s director of historic preservation, Eric Holcomb. Holcomb has stated that the monuments would not be given to those who could not properly display, maintain, or place them within correct historical context. Although Baltimore’s Confederate Soldiers and Sailors Monument does not face the risk of additional damage due to its removal and undisclosed location, and did not gain extensive damage leading up to its removal, this example is a considerable reference for other cities when debating the removal of controversial historic artworks, especially Confederate monuments. Their conservation should be an essential component of the conversation as discussions of removal and recontextualization continue, just as it was in the case of this specific monument.

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These same issues regarding the conservation of a historical monument within a public space and the laws concerning its removal can be applied to another monument which is located in Demopolis, Alabama. However, in contrast to the bronze monuments which were safely removed in anticipation of further public damage in Baltimore, this marble monument (Figure II) was struck accidentally by a police car in 2015, resulting in it toppling over and snapping off just above the ankles. The life-sized statue, currently registered within the Smithsonian Institute’s catalogue, fell into debate as to whether it should be repaired and replaced in its original context; however, a few experts were reported to have said that this option would pose “a maintenance challenge forever,” creating a problem case for future conservators. Instead, other members of the town council proposed an obelisk replacement, to be paid for by the insurance company which covered the monument and placed on the original statue base dedicated to the “Confederate Dead” by the United Daughters of the Confederacy. This option proved to have issues with some members of the council, due to the installment of the Alabama Memorial Preservation act in May of 2017, which prevents the removal and alteration of historically significant monuments over 40 years old. This act would effectively prevent the addition of the obelisk replacement.

81 Robert Blankenship, “Damaged Soldier That Stood atop Monument Will Be Replaced.”
As debates surrounding the Demopolis soldier continued in 2017, the monument was simply placed in a city barn, on top of a wooden pallet, with no reported decision on methods to repair the broken marble. In July of 2018, however, the Demopolis city council voted to effectively replace the statue with the aforementioned obelisk while also researching repair methods for the statue. An expert stated that the “use of dowels” would help to insure a longer life for the statue within the Marengo County History and Archive Museum, rather than adhesive. In comparison to the safer removal and security of the Baltimore monument, the case of the Demopolis statue will help provide insight as to how relevant laws may further restrict the replacement or restoration of damaged monuments, even if the original statue will amass maintenance issues and pose a lack of structural integrity. It is in this type of instance that the option to place the monument within a historical site or museum may improve the lifetime of the materials once they are reassembled. As for the monument’s historical life as an artistic work, no malicious intent was necessarily directed towards it during its destruction. Instead of the event of destruction bringing change towards the monument’s original meaning in the community, the attention which the accident brought to the monument led to the community debating the relevance of the monument themselves. It is in this case the debate regarding restoration and meaning fell upon those who provide and organize the tax dollars which would affect the monument right away, rather than protestors.

82 David Montgomery, “A Car Crash Topples a Confederate Statue and Forces a Southern Town to Confront Its Past.”
84 Ibid.
Another case which will benefit from alternative placement would be that of the University of North Carolina’s (UNC) Silent Sam (Figure III). However, this bronze monument’s situation is unique in that it has faced decades of increasing vandalism and damage, and was forcefully removed by protestors in August of 2018, rather than concern for public safety or repair. In 2017 alone, the University set aside $390,000 on security and surveillance around the statue in an attempt to prevent further vandalism. Three thousand dollars of this total was used to clean the monument itself. The acts of vandalism committed against this monument create a lengthy list, but the most recent prior to the removal include that of a man “pounding its face with a hammer,” and a graduate student dousing the monument with red ink and her own blood which cost $4000 in supplies and labor for repair. At the time of its forced removal, Silent Sam was pulled down with ropes, tramped on with mud and dirt, and taken away in the back of a dump truck.

86 Ibid.
In North Carolina, there is also a law which states that historic monuments and works of art owned by the state may not be removed or altered unless public safety is at risk.\(^{92}\) However, recently passed legislation as of May 2018 will allow UNC’s Chancellor Carol Folt to move the monument to a “permanent indoor location ‘due to recent acts of vandalism…that threaten the preservation and integrity of the monument’” by April of 2020 with nonstate funds.\(^{93}\) This decision will prevent future costly repairs and surveillance associated with the monument’s original situation, and will allow for the monument to be placed within public viewing with the intent of supporting educational values and the historic preservation of material objects representing Confederate memory.\(^{94}\) In comparison to the events in both Baltimore and Demopolis, the case of Silent Sam’s removal provides a more complex outlet discussion in regards to the presence of protests surrounding Confederate monuments, and a basis as to what should be done if similar situations arise in the future. Because Silent Sam’s entire art historical context now revolves around the string of vandalistic acts that continually follow it, retaining the damage dealt towards it through focused intent would enhance this historical aspect and modern lifetime of the piece as an educational tool.

Overall, the laws regarding the prevention of removal and alteration of Confederate monuments in these cases have led to difficulty in making decisions based upon the crucial well-being of damaged monuments, whether they were damaged prior to removal or not. And, if in the case that the monument has not faced vandalism or damage prior to removal, public safety and potential protests become issues. In the end, these


\(^{93}\) Stancill, “UNC’s Silent Sam Could Be Relocated under Bill Filed by NC Democrats.”

\(^{94}\) Ibid.
monuments are not only representational of Southern viewpoints towards the Confederacy following the American Civil War, but also of the emergence of a unique desire for mass statuary production in America which was never before seen.

Although it can be argued that removing damaged monuments from their original placement to an indoor location that is of similar visibility and honor will take away its original significance and context, it can also be argued that the current ongoing political climate and discussions surrounding these monuments are also a part of their historic significance in the U.S. For example, Silent Sam has suffered enough damage that it most likely does not provide a mirror image as to what it once looked like; the damage done to its interior and exterior are now essential to the artwork’s story, forever displaying the marks of social conflict and dialogue from the 21st century. If one were to argue for the past historic significance of structurally impaired monuments, then one must also argue for their present significance; to ignore their current placement in American memory and simply focus on their past significance through physical placement would be to ensure continual damage and increasing maintenance costs within the public sphere. Another point to note is one made by art historian Lucia Allais; in accordance with the definition of vandalism, any monument marked by modern vandals with intent to destroy increases the contemporary relevance of that monument to the time in which it was damaged. To be targeted is to still be considered relevant and worthy of continual scholarship.95 Therefore, select Confederate monuments which have been damaged on account of protest and dissent should be preserved as such in order to fully document the ongoing lifetime of these pieces. This decision would allow future generations to have a full

rendering of their significance in 21st century American art history, rather than a few one-sided records from the lack of current coverage.
CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

I respectfully believe that select Confederate monuments should keep the damage sustained by intentional destructive and iconoclastic efforts, more so than those which have developed damage from natural causes of deterioration and accidental events through nature and human error. For example, as I have reviewed through the case study of Silent Sam, I have established that recurring instances of vandalism are definite issues to address for most historic monuments. However, the monuments are a living works of art displaced within a generation which mostly rejects the ideologies perceived to be attached to them by today’s societal standards. It may be best to reserve the work from public and showcase the living history as an example to the future as to why it was damaged over time, as both a traditional amusement and as a political statement. Therefore, for future cases which may happen to be controversially similar to Silent Sam’s event, it may be best to entertain the option of relocating the damaged monument and showcasing it with additional context nearby, at least until other decisions are made in order to determine the best situation for the monument elsewhere.

A final thought which I would like to open for future discussion is that of the research which went into this matter. Overall, there is not a vast amount of official current research regarding the political climate and ethics of conservation of Confederate monuments. Most of my own research has been undertaken by locating primary source material on Confederate veteran discussion, as well as a multitude of news articles and opinion pieces. It was ultimately the lack of published research on the conservation of Confederate monuments, which is also pointed out by Grissom in her own research on zinc monuments, which led me to the discussion of the ethics of memory studies.
surrounding the matter. Overall, it was not entirely difficult to find material that was unbiased in discussion towards Confederate monuments and their place within historical scholarship and memory studies. However, I do foresee issues where bias could lie against future discussion of research towards Confederate monuments as remaining relevant for continual study, due to the controversies I have witnessed within the grounds of my own Alma Mater, the University of Mississippi.

Merely moving Confederate monuments to secluded areas or museum basements is not the answer to removing the marks of history from any space. There must still be broader discussion of these matters which does not singularly rely on whether a monument should be displaced or removed. As for the media and reports regarding the future of Confederate monuments, there must be dialogue provided regarding their relevance to American history thus far and what future generations may learn from them, no matter the controversies surrounding them. There is still value in discussing their place in society, both in the past and in the present. Ultimately, the conservation tactics used towards damaged monuments today will help to shape how future scholars perceive their significance in 21st century art history.
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Figure 2: Newell, Edward. Confederate Monument in Demopolis, Alabama. Photograph, 2013.
Courtesy of The Washington Post.
Figure 3: Silent Sam on the campus of The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Photograph, March 24, 2007. Courtesy of Yellowspacehopper at English Wikipedia. (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/) https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:SilentSam.jpg

As a side note, I should explain that I use the term “Southern” as a reference to the meaning coined by historian David Jansson (211). In his definition of “Southern,” which includes a capitalized “S” and quotations surrounding the word, he explains that "this "Southern" nation is racialized by internal orientalism such that the “Southerner” most often refers to a white person" who lives in the south and abides by the notion that “Southern” heritage contains an innate national difference from what used to be “the rest” of America.