

Contesting Commemorative Landscapes: Confederate Monuments and Trajectories of Change

Christina Simko,¹ David Cunningham,² and Nicole Fox³

¹Williams College, ²Washington University in St. Louis and, ³Sacramento State University

ABSTRACT

Following the racially motivated shootings at an African American church in Charleston, South Carolina, in 2015, a wave of contentious campaigns around Confederate statuary emerged, or at least intensified, in communities across the country. Yet local struggles have culminated in vastly different alterations to the built environment. This paper develops a framework for differentiating distinct “modes of recontextualization” rooted in the relocation and/or modification of commemorative objects. Building on models of memory as an iterative, path-dependent process, we track recontextualization efforts in three communities—St. Louis, Missouri; Oxford, Mississippi; and Austin, Texas—documenting how each mode alters the meaning of contested symbols. An analysis of local news sources in the year following recontextualization shows how each mode exerts identifiable proximate effects on broader political debates and, through that process, structures the horizon of possibility for longer-range outcomes.

KEYWORDS: collective memory; commemoration; monuments; memorials; social change.

Symbolically charged public spaces hold significant political and cultural power. As Mukerji (2012:501) argues, “people learn politics from places,” and built environments—from the king’s fortress to the democracy’s capital city—“serve as pedagogical tools . . . that can teach identities and political logics through material activity,” naturalizing the prevailing social arrangements (2012:513). Likewise, transformations in material environments underwrite, usher along, and even inspire changes in social and political relations (Zubrzycki 2013). In the United States today, the role of material symbols in reordering social relations and reconstructing collective narratives is plainly visible in struggles over Confederate iconography.

In many communities, such struggles have long histories. But recent acts of racial violence have imbued them with fresh national significance. Disrupting a Bible study led by Reverend Clementa Pinckney, the 2015 mass shooting at Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, left Pinckney and eight parishioners dead. In the ensuing days, a widely

The authors wish to thank Raj Ghoshal, Erin Hatton, and Ashley Mears for their insightful feedback on an earlier version of this manuscript. We are also grateful for the Ferguson Academic Seed Grant from Washington University that enabled our collaboration in its early stages. Please direct correspondence to the first author at Williams College, 85 Mission Park Drive, Williamstown, MA 01267; email: cs9@williams.edu.

circulated image of the perpetrator, Dylann Roof, claspng a gun in one hand and a Confederate flag in the other, cemented the association between Confederate symbols and white supremacist violence. No longer was it viable for public officials to proudly defend such symbols as positive expressions of “heritage,” and conservative political leaders across the South proceeded to remove Confederate imagery from public spaces to promote “unity” in their respective states. For instance, just a week after the shootings, Alabama Governor Robert Bentley quietly removed four Confederate-era flags from the state capitol grounds. In South Carolina, following Bree Newsome’s iconic act of civil disobedience—taking down the Confederate flag that had flown above the statehouse since 1961—the legislature voted to remove the flag permanently.

Debates over the flag quickly gave way to conversations about the Confederate monuments that still dot the landscape: images of the past that are literally cast in stone. Yet local struggles have culminated in vastly different alterations to the built environment. While some monuments have been removed from public view entirely, others have been altered with discursive plaques. Still others have been moved to museums, where they reside among historical artifacts. In the pages that follow, we develop a typology that differentiates three distinct *modes of recontextualization* rooted in material transformations to commemorative objects: namely, their *relocation* and/or *modification*. Building on models of collective memory as an iterative, path-dependent process (Olick 2007; Saito 2006), and splitting acts that might otherwise be aggregated (Zerubavel 1996), we track recontextualization efforts in three communities—St. Louis, Missouri; Oxford, Mississippi; and Austin, Texas. We then document its initial effects, examining local newspapers to understand how commemorative objects figured in public discourse during the year after recontextualization. In doing so, we show how different modes of recontextualization exert divergent proximate effects on broader political debates, and, through that process, structure the horizon of possibility for longer-range outcomes.

BACKGROUND

As Sewell (2005) and Wagner-Pacifi (2017) argue, *events*—ruptures in the ordinary flow of time that command public attention—create rare openings for structural transformation. In the language of social movement theory, the events that transpired in Charleston presented a window of opportunity for activists, many of whom had been engaged in longer term efforts to transform commemorative landscapes outside the national spotlight. Consistent with the expectations outlined in the literature (McAdam 1996; Meyer and Minkoff 2004; Tarrow 2011), political realignment provided an opening for cultural innovation, extending, in this case, into the mnemonic sphere (Armstrong and Crag 2006; Ghoshal 2013). Through commissions, task forces, and public forums, communities across the South questioned the values embodied by Confederate monuments, asking how public spaces might be transformed to articulate contemporary ideals. Two years later, the August 2017 “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia—organized by white supremacist groups that opposed the city’s plan to remove an equestrian statue of Robert E. Lee from its central square—culminated in the death of counter-protestor Heather Heyer. Once again underscoring the relationship between Confederate symbols and racial violence, this event created another rupture, generating a parallel window of opportunity: renewing, deepening, and refocusing local debates.

In general, commemorative symbols signify as much about the social context in which they were constructed as the historical moment they are intended to commemorate (Schwartz 1982). Although Southerners began erecting Confederate symbols immediately after the Civil War, the dedication of new monuments spiked much later, during two critical junctures for American race relations (Southern Poverty Law Center [SPLC] 2019). First, from 1900 through the 1920s, Confederate statues were erected as a symbolic counterpart to Jim Crow laws. During this period, their construction supported the triumph of a “reconciliationist” narrative of the Civil War—emphasizing the commonalities between Northern and Southern whites and celebrating the valor of individual soldiers—over an “emancipationist” alternative that privileged the struggle for racial equality (Blight 2001). Second,

from the mid-1950s to the late 1960s, as the Civil War centennial approached, a substantial number of new monuments appeared, in some cases as a defiant response to the Civil Rights Movement.

Today, almost 800 Confederate monuments still stand.¹ Many are situated at the centers of community life: in public squares, on state capitol grounds, outside courthouses, and in central locations on university campuses. As such, Confederate monuments generally occupy precisely the sites where political pedagogies are disseminated. Moreover, the historical spikes in installations of Confederate statuary clearly suggest their intended messages: perpetuating the Lost Cause narrative,² reinforcing racial segregation, and underwriting an ideology of white supremacy (Shapiro 2017; SPLC 2019).³ Confederate symbols have thus served to establish and perpetuate what Feagin (2013:17) terms the “white racial frame,” legitimating racial inequalities by sanitizing the past, downplaying “whites’ unjust enrichment at the expense of Americans of color” and forgetting “the bloody historical realities” associated with the enslavement and segregation of African Americans.

Yet the meanings and emotional valences associated with commemorative objects may change dramatically over time, especially given transformations in the social and political contexts surrounding them (Autry 2012; Doss 2010). Indeed, the window of opportunity that emerged in 2015 was enabled not only by a contingent series of violent events, but also by broader developments in American collective memory that cast Confederate statuary in a new light. In particular, Doss identifies a shift from the late 19th and early 20th century “statue mania,” when monuments to heroes “encouraged passionate and consensual understandings of nationhood” (2010:20), to contemporary “memorial mania,” defined by “heated struggles over self-definition, national purpose, and the politics of representation” (2010:2). Unlike the monolithic, celebratory monuments of the past, contemporary memorials are “often equivocal, unresolved, and ambivalent” (Doss 2010:45): they tend to accommodate a wide range of interpretations (Wagner-Pacifi and Schwartz 1991).⁴ The age of memorials, Schwartz suggests, is a “post-heroic era,” characterized by “fading confidence in national greatness” (2008:8, 9). Even the reputations of America’s most celebrated leaders—including Abraham Lincoln and George Washington—have eroded (Schwartz 1991, 2008). The specific dynamics at play in the U.S. context reflect a more widespread shift toward a “politics of regret,” in which state legitimation hinges on atoning for misdeeds rather than celebrating past glories (Olick 2007).

Given that monumentality itself has become a source of controversy, the “commemorability” (Armstrong and Crag 2006) of the Confederate cause had already declined precipitously by 2015. Ever since its conclusion, the Civil War has been a “difficult past” that “evoke[s] disagreement and inspire[s] censure” (Wagner-Pacifi 2017; Schwartz 1991: 384). The violent events in Charleston

- 1 As recent reports by both the SPLC and Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) have shown, if we include a broader range of objects—such as plaques and the names of schools and roads—the number of documented public Confederate symbols exceeds 1,800. The reactionary establishment of such objects often follows the shifting terrain of challenge to the Lost Cause worldview. For instance, a large number of schools were established or re-named for Confederate veterans in the wake of the 1955 *Brown* school desegregation decision (see SPLC 2019).
- 2 The “Lost Cause” refers to a revisionist narrative of the Civil War, heroizing Confederate soldiers and asserting that secession and states’ rights, rather than slavery, were the war’s central cause.
- 3 Research about the contemporary meanings of Confederate symbols reveals a strong association between support for the flag and racist attitudes (e.g., Cooper and Knotts 2006; Orey 2004; Strother, Piston, and Ogorzalek 2017). Two findings illuminate the flag’s political pedagogy in particular. First, Ehrlinger and colleagues (2011) found that exposure to the flag made people less willing to vote for Barack Obama. Second, Cooper and Knotts (2006) found that Black southerners expressed the highest levels of support for removing the flag from the South Carolina statehouse, attributing the finding to their heightened sense of the racial threat imbued in the symbol.
- 4 As Doss notes, the terms “monument” and “memorial” are used inconsistently in both scholarly and public discourse. Sometimes they are treated as synonyms; at other times, they represent distinct public objects. In the latter usage, monuments are celebratory and evoke “a ‘unitary’ mass ethos” that “may seem oppressive and exclusionary,” while memorials tend to be mournful and accommodate a “fluctuating” range of “interests and feelings” (Doss 2010: 39, 45). Our own view is that distinguishing between monuments and memorials underscores important transformations in national memory. In this vein, it is worth highlighting how Confederate sympathizers have changed their orientation to statues. Today, rather than underscoring the monumentalist impulses that motivated their predecessors, defenders of Confederate symbols overwhelmingly frame statues as memorials that honor fallen veterans and preserve a particular “heritage” (Shapiro 2017).

and Charlottesville situated this difficult past at the center of national consciousness once again, opening the possibility for a more thoroughgoing transformation of structures. How, communities asked, do we deal with the symbols of violent and oppressive pasts whose legacies are still woven into both physical landscapes and social relations?

In posing such questions, communities are not merely undertaking the superficial task of reconfiguring public spaces. They also seek to transform the political pedagogies that city squares, university commons, and courthouse lawns embody. As Zubrzycki (2013:428) argues, material “symbols are not only derivative, but [they] also . . . participate in the creation of the social” by “acting as *catalysts*” for transformation. “Raising and tearing down statues,” Verdery (1997:40) writes, “gives new values to space.” In short, recontextualizing monuments is nothing less than a collective effort to reorder social relations: to reconstruct how collective narratives account for the relationship between past and present, and to begin enacting the transformation of structures that contingent events make possible.

Of course, such transformation requires social agents actively seeking to change political pedagogies. The “institutional placement” of such agents is crucial (Fine 1996:1186). While shifts in the commemorative landscape may be precipitated by pressures from the grassroots, recontextualizing monuments almost always requires participation from elites, especially public officials. In cases where monuments are governed by legal codes, the outcomes of recontextualization campaigns may even hinge on court decisions. As we differentiate among, and trace the trajectories of, several such campaigns, we highlight institutional authorities and political leaders—not to downplay longer histories of local contestation, but because elites’ participation is crucial in elevating longstanding counter-memories to the level of official memory (Whitlinger 2015).⁵

Yet even for elite actors, there are considerable constraints on the work of resignification. As Olick (2007:106) argues, collective memories take shape dialogically: social actors may work to reconstruct images of the past, but they inevitably do so in conversation with earlier narratives. Likewise, the commemorative choices that communities make in the present will structure the possibilities open to them in the future. Building on Olick’s dialogical approach, Saito (2006:355) conceptualizes commemoration as “reiterated problem-solving,” examining “how a solution” to a commemorative dilemma “at an earlier point . . . sets a new historical direction and limits future choices.” Framing memory work as problem-solving places special emphasis on “the agency and subjectivity of historical actors” whose solutions enable some futures while precluding, or at least eroding the possibilities for, others. Such an approach is especially well-suited to understanding the decision points that we examine here, when local and national pressures compel communities to act.

Accordingly, in what follows, we analyze the processual character of recontextualization—and in particular, how local decision-making enables and constrains future possibilities. Disaggregating the modes through which recontextualization efforts unfold, we show how decisions around relocating and/or modifying commemorative objects shape the trajectories of public discourse in local communities. In other words, each mode of recontextualization reshapes the meaning of commemorative objects in a distinctive way, influencing whether and how it may be taken up in subsequent debates. Because memory is an ongoing iterative process, the proximate outcomes we identify here have significant implications for the negotiated consequences that will emerge over longer time periods.

METHODS AND DATA

This study is grounded in a threefold typology of recontextualization developed inductively over nearly four years (2015–2019) of observing and documenting changes to the commemorative landscape across the U.S. South. We begin by distinguishing between two distinct approaches to recontextualization: *modification*, where the meaning of a commemorative object is altered in place (most commonly, by adding narrative material), and *relocation*, where an object is physically moved. Operating alone or in

5 By the same token, we focus on recontextualization efforts that have taken shape through official channels, leaving acts of iconoclasm for future research.

Table 1. Modes of Recontextualization

		Relocation	
		Yes	No
Modification	Yes	University of Texas Austin, Texas Jefferson Davis Statue	University of Mississippi Oxford, Mississippi Confederate Soldier Statue
	No	Forest Park St. Louis, Missouri Confederate Monument	

Note: Modes emphasize *movement* from the bottom right to each of the three other cells in Table 1, based on the material alterations made to the monuments.

concert, these modes provide a heuristic for cataloguing recontextualization campaigns: each mode generates a different set of proximate outcomes, setting the foundation for the future.⁶

While recontextualization campaigns can orient to a wide range of objects—including statues, streets, and schools—we focus here on campaigns to reappraise monuments and draw on an emblematic case within each cell to examine the mechanisms and outcomes associated with the mode in question. We selected cases to represent campaigns unambiguously located within one of the three⁷ possible recontextualization modes referenced within the cells of Table 1—i.e., *relocation without modification* in St. Louis; *modification in place* in Oxford; and *joint relocation and modification* in Austin. These cases also cross-cut contextual elements, including monuments located on campuses vs. municipal spaces, and within former Confederate vs. border states. As the spread of recontextualization campaigns was both contained and geographically diffuse during our period of investigation,⁸ our cases represent sites in states that have witnessed multiple monument removals (Missouri and Texas) as well as a Deep South state (Mississippi) exhibiting a robust commitment to honoring the Confederacy (through, among other things, recognition of Robert E. Lee’s birthday and Confederate Memorial Day, along with pronounced opposition to removing the Confederate “stars and bars” from its state flag).⁹ While much attention is given to the primacy of these battles within the confines of the former Confederacy, efforts to catalogue and document contestation around existing monuments (SPLC 2019) point to commonalities in the frequency and tenor of such campaigns across both Confederate and border areas. Such processual similarities contrast with the significant differences in the *impact* of recontextualization based on its form, an observation that motivates our overriding concern with disaggregating the modes of recontextualization to assess the differential consequences of relocation and modification.

Our analysis reveals how distinct modes of recontextualization relate to subsequent outcomes, assessing both the *mechanisms* through which each mode affects subsequent discourse (by altering the object’s meaning) as well as the *degree and form* of that discourse within local media. We assess both components via systematic searches of media and primary documentary sources. First, we

6 As such, rather than static conditions, the modes presented in Table 1 emphasize *movement* from the bottom right to each cell based on material alterations to the objects in question.

7 The fourth cell represents the null (i.e., cases in which the absence of relocation or modification signal a lack of recontextualization), and thus is not included in our case comparison below. While the null condition is theoretically interesting in its own right—encompassing active efforts to protect monuments in the face of contestation—such possibilities fall outside the scope of our analysis, which focuses specifically on the effect of *material* transformation.

8 According to the SPLC’s running list of “removed symbols” of the Confederacy (SPLC 2019), only 17 communities had removed monuments as of February 2019. During our period of investigation, no Confederate statues were removed in South Carolina.

9 In June 2020, after this article was accepted for publication, the Mississippi state legislature voted to establish a commission to design a replacement flag that would exclude Confederate symbols.

conducted a Google search to capture the widest possible range of online stories associated with the decision to modify and/or relocate each monument. We then augmented those baseline media sources with subsequent searches of online newspaper databases, including both local and national outlets, using the name of each monument as a keyword to establish and bound the arc of contention associated with the object. We also gathered official documents produced by the campus or municipal institutions responsible for carrying out any recontextualization decision, including commission reports as well as press releases, blog posts, e-mails, and other correspondence from campus or municipal officials to their communities. While it remains possible that our reliance on official reports and news sources misses specific expressions of grassroots opposition, such accounts do capture public debate and decision-making associated with such campaigns. From these accounts, we establish the process of recontextualization—i.e., negotiations associated with the decision to modify and/or relocate a monument in the face of often-competing proposals and pressures—and identify the central mechanism through which that process altered the meaning of the object in question.

Second, we extended our media search to directly assess the proximate effects engendered by each mode of recontextualization. To do so, we selected two local newspapers for each case: namely, the city's flagship newspaper and either [1] the central university-sponsored newspaper for campus-based campaigns, or [2] the most prominent African-American paper for cases rooted in a public civic space.¹⁰ For each newspaper, we conducted online database searches to identify all articles in which the pairing of the word "Confederate" and a salient noun (e.g., "monument," "statue," "plaque," "recontextualization") appeared.¹¹ Temporally, we bounded this search to include all articles published over the 12-month period that followed the initial recontextualization outcome (i.e., the act of modifying and/or relocating the object). Our emphasis on effects observed in this year-long period—which we refer to as *proximate outcomes*—is intended to balance our desire to document the impact of recontextualization in a systematic manner while also recognizing that contestation over the meaning of monumental objects can always be re-activated, undermining any effort to define absolute "final" outcomes. As noted above and discussed in more detail in our conclusion, these proximate outcomes are important both for establishing comparisons across cases and for the role they play in activating or precluding subsequent debate across a longer trajectory.

Following the tenor of the literature reviewed earlier, our expectations center on the degree to which a given mode of recontextualization provides a basis for the public to access a monumental object in a manner that renders it salient within the overall landscape—i.e., as an object that can be activated as a site for political claimsmaking. As such, we hypothesize that the removal of a monument,

10 While social media have played a crucial role in motivating transformations to the built environment, especially by providing a forum for activists to build support and exert pressure on relevant authorities, our research design enables a specific focus on how material changes influence *local* discourse. Future work might replicate this study's design, but exchange print discourse for social media, following hashtags to examine the impact of national (and possibly global) online mobilization on recontextualization campaigns.

11 This approach allowed us to capture each city's coverage of its own monuments as well as local coverage of recontextualization campaigns occurring elsewhere. The latter provides a basis for assessing whether local campaigns offered a window onto broader national debates about Confederate symbols. Our concern with contextualizing, rather than only counting, articles extends to our consideration of media outlets themselves. The newspapers differ in terms of circulation and publication interval: outlets in St. Louis and Austin publish a similar number of staff news reports ($n = 158$ for St. Louis vs. 171 for Austin for a randomly-sampled week), while our Oxford papers publish 43 staff articles per week on average. However, the difference is attenuated by the considerably more similar density of coverage around exclusively local issues, and the fact that cross-outlet differences in total number of articles published (which one might conceive as the denominator of any ratio derived from the counts reported in Table 3 below) produce a conservative assessment of hypothesized trends (i.e., we predict that relocation without modification in St. Louis—where a significantly larger pool of news articles are published—will yield a lower degree of media coverage). At root, given that highly charged local debates are likely to be covered regardless of the local media landscape's scale, we privilege the number—rather than the proportion—of articles as the relevant metric for assessing our core questions.

as an action that *expunges*¹² the object from the landscape and thus renders it inaccessible as a site of contention, will have the *most contained impact* on subsequent media discourse.

In contrast, modifying an object without relocating it serves to enhance an object's salience without altering its placement within the broader landscape. This *amplification* of the monument's significance will, we expect, provide a pronounced basis for continued critique and debate over the object itself. Correspondingly, we hypothesize that this mode will produce the *highest level* of subsequent media coverage.

Finally, *repositioning* an object through simultaneous relocation and modification suggests a more complex interplay of potential impacts. On the one hand, as with the prior category, recontextualizing an object by interrogating its meaning within the overall landscape can catalyze further debate. However, by also removing the object from its original location (especially if that move de-centers the monument to a less prominent or politically significant space), the object may also become a less compelling site for claimsmaking. Considering these countervailing forces, we hypothesize that repositioning will result in an *intermediate impact* on subsequent media discourse. However, given that the relative weighting of relocation and modification will vary case-by-case, and may pose particular challenges for generalizing the effects of repositioning, we attend not only to the relative degree of media coverage but also to qualitative differences in how repositioning shapes subsequent critique and contention compared with expunction and amplification.

Building on the two-dimensional scheme presented in [Table 1](#), in the next section we undertake a qualitative examination of the key mechanism that defines the trajectory associated with each mode of recontextualization. We then move to a comparative assessment of the proximate outcome of each recontextualization campaign, as captured within the local media sources most attuned to the process.

MODES AND MECHANISMS OF RECONTEXTUALIZATION

Expungement: Relocation without Modification in St. Louis

From 1914 to 2017, a 32-foot granite monument to the Confederacy stood prominently in St. Louis' Forest Park, long hailed as the city's "crown-jewel." Sponsored by the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC), the monument depicts a man headed southward to fight, surrounded by his family. The monument's inscriptions conjure the reconciliationist narrative, portraying the "soldiers and sailors of the Southern Confederacy" as agents in a national rather than regional narrative: valorous men "who fought to uphold the right declared by the pen of Jefferson and achieved by the sword of Washington."

The first sustained campaign to recontextualize the monument began in April 2015, with a blog entry by then-Mayor Francis Slay, coinciding with the monument's centennial year. Slay's call for "a reappraisal" began by historicizing the monument. Almost 50 years after Appomattox, the UDC's proposal for a monument was met with "[u]nderstandable ambivalence," and the organization "sought to quell controversy when it pledged during the planning stage that the monument would have 'no figure of a Confederate Soldier, or object of modern warfare'" (Slay 2015a). Sculptor George Julian Zolnay thus described the man in the sculpture as a *potential* soldier, "impelled by his wife or sweetheart, his mother and a little child to go forth to fight for the South" (*St. Louis Post-Dispatch* 1912). Yet as Slay argued, archival accounts of the 1914 dedication, as well as a 1964 rededication, "make plain the intentions behind the sculptural gift"—namely, to valorize the Confederacy and solidify St. Louisians' identification with the South.¹³ With his post, Slay announced the creation of a commission whose "charge would be to recommend whether, with the benefit of a longer view

12 To expunge is to remove or erase something that is unwanted or unpleasant, and we use the term to capture the impact of St. Louis' actions (described below) in part because of its legal meaning: to expunge a criminal record is to seal the records of a prior conviction, making them unavailable through public repositories.

13 During the war itself, Missouri was a border state with sharply divided loyalties. A core argument for the monument advanced by the *Post-Dispatch* surrounded the importance of retaining and building upon the city's economic relationships with southern states.

of history, the monument is appropriately situated in Forest Park . . . or whether it should be relocated to a more appropriate setting.” The commission was also tasked with considering “whether the monument should be accompanied by a description of the reality and brutality of slavery, over which this war was waged . . . and the bitter badges of slavery, Jim Crow and de facto segregation, that are its continuing legacy,” as well as with “reapprais[ing] the name ‘Confederate Drive’” for “the Forest Park thoroughfare on which the monument is situated” (Slay 2015a). Slay’s proposal took on added urgency after the Charleston shootings: activists wielding spray cans and paint-filled glass ornaments defaced the monument with a large “X,” along with inscriptions reading “Fuck the Confederacy” and “Black Lives Matter.”

Over the next two years, the monument’s future—and its relationship to St. Louis’ identity—figured significantly in public discourse. Public officials, preservationists, museum directors, and many local residents and activists debated how best to reimagine the meanings of both the monument and the cherished public space on which it stood. In particular, debates circled around whether either modification or relocation on its own could serve as an adequate approach to recontextualization. The Mayor’s commission advocated both, arguing for moving the monument from Forest Park to a space where it could be *repositioned*—i.e., transformed from a commemorative object into an historical artifact.

The Missouri History Museum, located in Forest Park, pushed back against calls for relocation, arguing instead for modifying the monument *in situ* by installing permanent interpretive material explaining its significance within the broader context of St. Louis’ role in the Civil War and the UDC’s “Lost Cause” movement. As the debate unfolded, Mayor Slay remained especially concerned with advocating modification, arguing that “wherever the monument ends up, it should be accompanied by interpretive material . . . that provides a faithful historical explanation of the bitter truth surrounding the monument’s installation” (Slay 2015b).

As tensions escalated, however, a statement from Slay’s deputy chief of staff, Eddie Roth, suggested that this commitment was fraying. A year after Slay’s original call for reappraisal, with the monument still standing in place, Roth told St. Louis Public Radio that one option for minimizing the costs associated with relocating the 40-ton object would be to “excavate a hole near where the monument is currently situated, put timbers down the hole, and essentially cover it up with soil” (Lippmann 2016). Strange as Roth’s proposal may have been, it marked the beginnings of the city’s turn toward relocation without modification. When Mayor Lyda Krewson took office in April 2017, she, too, emphasized relocation, proposing a move to a city storage facility rather than an alternative public space.

In light of Krewson’s commitment to relocation, the monument became a focal point for local activists. Amidst escalating protests and counterprotests, the city initiated the relocation process, cordoning off the monument with traffic barricades and removing its top portion (Blume 2017). The Missouri Civil War Museum responded by filing a lawsuit claiming ownership (Bott 2017a). Work resumed quickly, however, after the city, the museum, and the UDC reached an agreement transferring ownership to the museum. The agreement stipulates that the monument “will not be placed or publicly displayed in the City of St. Louis or St. Louis County at any time in the future.” Moreover, “any future placement will be limited to . . . a Civil War Museum, a Civil War battlefield, or a Civil War cemetery” (*St. Louis Post-Dispatch* 2017).

Despite Slay’s original intention to *reposition* the Confederate monument—by unearthing its history and reframing it as an historical artifact—St. Louis’ decision culminated instead in *expungement*. As Figures 1–3 illustrate, in today’s Forest Park, newly-planted grass covers both the monument site itself and the semi-circular “Confederate Drive” that once surrounded it, whose name Slay sought to reappraise. Given the total absence of the eradicated object, and indeed the absence of any physical evidence on the landscape suggesting its earlier presence, the Forest Park monument remains only in the memories of those aware of the park’s transformation. Furthermore, the legal agreement governing the transfer of ownership permanently severs the city’s tie to the monument.



Figure 1. St. Louis' Confederate Memorial, placed in the city's grand Forest Park in 1914 by the United Daughters of the Confederacy.

Amplification: Modification in Place in Oxford

Since 1906, a 22½-foot monument topped with a 6½-foot figure of a Confederate soldier has towered above the historic Circle at the University of Mississippi. As in St. Louis, the monument was commissioned by the UDC, and dedicated, according to one of its inscriptions, “to the heroes of Lafayette County whose valor and devotion made glorious many a battlefield.” The monument has



Figure 2. Removal of the Confederate Memorial’s top section, on June 19, 2017.

played an increasingly significant role in public discourse since 2014, when the university announced “a comprehensive plan for fostering a more inclusive and welcoming environment” (University of Mississippi 2014a). The plan was guided by recommendations from the university’s Sensitivity and Respect Committee, along with outside consultants (University of Mississippi 2014b), and motivated by a charge from then-Chancellor Dan Jones to take “an earnest and hard look at how to address race and related issues” on campus. On the whole, the recommendations slanted toward bureaucratic



Figure 3. The Forest Park site in August 2017. For more than a century, the monument had stood in front of the two trees, center-right in the image. The dirt area in the foreground was previously part of “Confederate Drive.” On August 21, 2017, without notice or formal announcement, the city plowed over the paved roundabout to create an unbroken green area.

reforms, but also included a call to “offer more history, putting the past into context, telling more of the story of Mississippi’s struggles with slavery, secession, segregation and their aftermath” (University of Mississippi 2014b).

The initial effort focused on modifying the Confederate statue by adding a plaque intended to “contextualize” the object. A four-member committee appointed by Chancellor Jones penned the plaque’s text, unveiled in March 2016: “As Confederate veterans were passing from the scene in increasing numbers, memorial associations built monuments in their memory all across the South,” it explained, before noting that the statue had subsequently become “a rallying point” for “a rebellious mob gathered to prevent the admission of” James Meredith in 1962 (University of Mississippi 2016a). Portraying the monumental site as a “reminder of the University’s past and of its current and ongoing commitment to open its hallowed halls to all who seek truth and knowledge and wisdom,” the script omitted any overt reference to enslavement or Jim Crow.

In the post-Charleston environment, controversy over the text erupted swiftly. The NAACP called for the university to “wholly distance itself from these symbols of racial terror,” and the history department released a statement highlighting the failure to fulfill the university’s original call to tell “more of the story of Mississippi’s struggles with slavery, secession, segregation, and their aftermath.” The historians proposed alternative text that deconstructed the “Lost Cause” mythology and characterized the monument as an effort to “recognize the sacrifice of Mississippians who fought to establish the Confederacy as a slaveholding republic” (University of Mississippi Department of History 2016). Prominent historians expressed support from across the country (Mitchell 2016).

Less than a month following the plaque's unveiling, the Chancellor responded to such concerns, announcing that the committee would "consider further input and reexamine whether the plaque's language should be changed." Seeking to incorporate a broader range of voices in the conversation, he expanded the committee's membership and solicited public input via an online interface (Sigler 2016; University of Mississippi 2016b).

The committee's process incorporated ideas from the history faculty, who also hosted two community forums and crafted a detailed report expanding on their initial statement (Neff, Roll, and Twitty 2016). Placed in October 2016, the revised plaque retains something of the apologetic tone from the original while incorporating phrases from the historians, including explicit acknowledgment that Confederate monuments "were often used to promote a popular set of beliefs known as the 'Lost Cause,' which primarily denied that slavery was the principal cause of the Civil War." This hybridization is particularly evident in the line: "Although the monument was created to honor the sacrifice of local Confederate soldiers, it must also remind us that the defeat of the Confederacy also meant freedom for millions of people" (Vitter 2016).

The iterative struggle that resulted from the decision to modify but not relocate the monument highlights a number of aspects associated with this mode of recontextualization. Broadly speaking, both versions of the plaque clearly *amplified* the statue, calling attention to its enduring significance and its role in wide-ranging discussions about the university's identity, both past and present. Indeed, amplification occurred in part through contention over how, precisely, to re-interpret the statue's meaning: as a site of mourning that now reflected outmoded values, or as a site of oppression testifying—as the historians put it—to the "belief . . . in white racial supremacy" (University of Mississippi Department of History 2016) embodied in the Lost Cause narrative. Modification, in short, opened the door to debate that cut deeper into university and national history.

Following its modification, the statue became an ambiguous, contested space, with its significance open to negotiation. The monument's orientation to broader university values remained in flux, subject to change (as evinced by the dual versions of the plaque placed to date) while the object of interest—the statue itself—remained fixed. Most broadly, the university's commitment to modifying the statue in place created a foundation for institutionalizing this approach across the campus's overall commemorative landscape. By 2016, the university's Chancellor,¹⁴ Jeffrey Vitter, asserted publicly that "our whole framework is predicated on the principle that it's better to educate and contextualize rather than remove or move or erase."¹⁵

Repositioning: Joint Relocation and Modification in Austin

UT-Austin's joint pursuit of modification *and* relocation reveals another possible trajectory. From 1933 to 2015, an 8½-foot statue of Jefferson Davis stood tall on the university's Main Mall. Likenesses of three additional Confederate leaders—Robert E. Lee, Albert Sidney Johnson, and John Reagan—joined him among a total of six statues lining the Mall. In 2015, however, UT-Austin President Gregory Fenves responded to national events by establishing a Task Force on Historical Representation of Statuary, which included students, faculty, staff, and alumni of the university.

Although the committee's charge was to assess all six of the Mall's statues—including U.S. President Woodrow Wilson and Texas Governor James Stephen Hogg along with the four Confederate leaders—they were asked to adopt "a particular focus on the statue of Jefferson Davis." "History is not innocent; it is the living foundation for the present," the report acknowledged, before recommending that the university embrace a "conservative but not uncritical" approach in

14 A year after shepherding the Confederate statue issue, Chancellor Jones's contract was not renewed. While several issues were at play in his dismissal, media reports emphasized rifts with Board members based on his "measures aimed at dissociating the school from its Confederate history" (McLaughlin and Gallman 2015).

15 In July 2020, after this article was accepted for publication, the University moved the statue from the Circle to a Civil War cemetery on campus, where it continues to generate contestation.

determining the monuments' futures (Task Force on Historical Representation 2015: 3, 5), outlining a series of options that ranged from installing explanatory plaques on the Mall to relocating all six statues to a museum setting.

Embracing the distinction underlined in the committee's charge, in August 2015, Fenves announced his decision to jointly *relocate and modify* the Davis statue: "It is not in the university's best interest to continue commemorating him on our Main Mall. Davis had few ties to Texas; he played a unique role in the history of the American South that is best explained and understood through an educational exhibit" (Fenves 2015). The statue's new venue would be UT's Briscoe Center for American History, a research center that houses one of the nation's largest collections on Southern history. "[T]he Briscoe Center will bring a scholarly depth that enhances the educational value of the Davis statue," Fenves explained. The Wilson statue, which stood opposite that of Davis, would be removed "to preserve the symmetry of the Main Mall," but would ultimately be relocated "to an appropriate exterior location on campus" (Fenves 2015).

Less than two years later, on April 10, 2017, the Briscoe Center reopened following a long-planned renovation. In an exhibit titled "From Commemoration to Education," the university *repositions* the Davis statue, transforming it into an historical artifact rather than a commemorative monument glorifying its subject. "By moving the statue of Jefferson Davis to the Briscoe Center, it is preserved as historical evidence," the label text explains. "However, the statue's presence in an educational exhibit—as opposed to a place of honor on campus—underlines the fact that Davis, as well as many of his ideas and actions, are no longer commemorated or endorsed by the university" (Courtney 2017). In narrating the statue's history, the exhibit incorporates the story of its conceptualization and construction, as well as prior relocations. Commissioned by former UT Regent George Littlefield, a veteran of Terry's Texas Rangers, it was originally installed at a downtown bank in 1924 before being moved to the state capitol in 1925 and, finally, the UT campus in 1933. Its most recent relocation to the Briscoe Center is also cast as an historical act, occurring "after an intense period of discussion and protest" (Herman 2017a) billed as "#DavisMustFall," reflecting a 2015 social media campaign¹⁶ to remove the statue.¹⁷

Shortly after the Davis statue re-appeared in the Briscoe Center, the events of August 2017 in Charlottesville brought renewed attention to the Confederate monuments remaining on the Mall. Along with several other city and campus leaders across the South, Fenves acted quickly. Within two weeks, he oversaw a nighttime removal of the statues depicting Johnson, Reagan, and Lee.¹⁸

Crucially, in the post-Charlottesville context, Fenves's language justifying the relocations shifted considerably. In 2015, Fenves' main substantive consideration in deciding which statues to relocate was each figure's ties to Texas. He critiqued Davis in ambivalent terms—referring to his "mixed legacy"—before noting that his ties to Texas were tenuous. By contrast, two years later, Fenves explicitly linked Confederate symbols and racial violence. The events in Charlottesville, he explained, "make it clear . . . that Confederate monuments have become symbols of white supremacy and neo-Nazism." He went on to underscore the connection between past and present: "Erected during the period of Jim Crow laws and segregation, the statues represent the subjugation of African Americans. That remains true today for white supremacists who use them to symbolize hatred and bigotry." Accordingly, all three statues would be relocated to the Briscoe Center "for scholarly study" (Fenves 2017).

Fenves' more recent comments illustrate the iterative possibilities that repositioning opens. For one, the original decision to jointly relocate and modify the Davis statue enabled swift actions after

16 The campaign took inspiration from a spray-painted message appearing on the statue on April 16, 2015, following the convention of the precedent-setting #RhodesMustFall campaign to "decolonize education" in South Africa, which led to the 2015 removal of a Cecil Rhodes statue from the University of Cape Town.

17 The Wilson statue, removed from its former position alongside Davis, remains in storage. In 2017, a university spokesperson said that there were "no future plans for [the Wilson statue] at this time" (Herman 2017a).

18 The Hogg statue was also removed for aesthetic balance, but, like Wilson's, may be re-installed elsewhere on campus.

Charlottesville. Even more, an object that was, two years earlier, portrayed as out of step with the university’s contemporary values—and outside the scope of Texas history—has now been officially recast as an emblem of white supremacy, a system that endures in the present social context. As we will see, the Davis statue’s repositioning in the Briscoe Center had a much wider impact on public discourse in the year that followed, on campus and beyond.

RECONTEXTUALIZATION TRAJECTORIES AND PROXIMATE OUTCOMES

Table 2 summarizes the mechanisms identified above. Yet their theoretical significance resides in how they shape the process of reiterated commemoration: that is, whether they allow us to specify how different modes of recontextualization shape future pathways by enabling or precluding distinct outcomes. Our analysis of local media coverage captures and assesses the proximate outcomes that emerged within the year-long period following the recontextualization measures described above. This analysis provides a basis for testing the hypotheses introduced earlier, which predict that expungement will produce the smallest—and amplification the largest—impact on public media discourse.

Expungement in St. Louis

Consistent with our general expectation, the Confederate monument in St. Louis’ Forest Park—is almost entirely absent from local news in the year following its relocation. Most superficially, which is not to say insignificantly,

Table 2. Mechanisms Associated with Each Mode

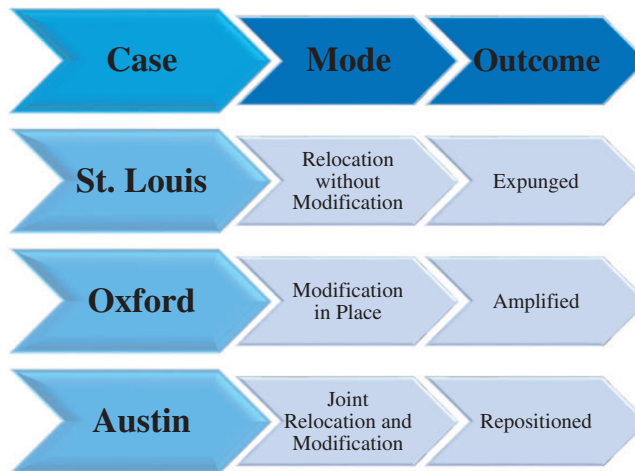


Table 3. Proximate Outcomes (Number of Local Media Articles Produced in the Initial Year Following Recontextualization Action)

		Relocation	
		Yes	No
Modification	Yes	Repositioning in Austin: 32	Amplification in Oxford 27
	No	Expungement in St. Louis 5	

Table 3 reports that only five direct references to the Forest Park monument appeared within the city's major daily (the *Post-Dispatch*) and weekly African-American paper (*The St. Louis American*).

Two such references appeared in brief summaries of Mayor Krewson's early months in office (Bott 2017b, 2018); one came in an *American* interview with the National Urban League president, with the reporter praising Krewson's decision (King 2017); and one was a *Post-Dispatch* editorial responding to the city's "erasing all vestiges of Confederate Drive" (*St. Louis Post-Dispatch* 2017). The most robust engagement occurred in a January 2018 report on two dueling bills in the state legislature—one that would mandate the relocation of all Confederate monuments; the other creating a review process for removing or renaming any war statue—that includes images of the Forest Park removal and, in the online version, an embedded video. In the article text, however, the Forest Park removal is not explicitly mobilized as a precedent that has framed ongoing struggles, but mentioned in passing as part of the wider context for the bill: "Missouri has 20 [C]onfederate monuments, including names of courthouses and an elementary school in Columbia. . . . This past summer, the Confederate monument in Forest Park was removed."

More notable than the contexts where the Forest Park monument is invoked are those where it is absent: for instance, in the *American's* coverage of St. Louis' Confederate history (Nadal 2018), of monument removals in Memphis (Robinson 2018), and of controversies surrounding the defacement of a Confederate statue in Springfield, Missouri (Griffin 2018; *St. Louis American* 2017). In the *Post-Dispatch*, an op-ed discussing statues as forms of protected free expression includes a photograph of UT-Austin rather than its local parallel (Warren 2017). The monument's absence in local media discourse is particularly striking given the timing: the violence in Charlottesville occurred a mere two months after Krewson oversaw the statue's removal, and there had been notable parallels between the two cities in the dynamics of protest and counterprotest.

Despite Mayor Slay's original intentions, then—which revolved around repositioning St. Louis' monument to the Confederacy, placing it within an archive that elucidated the relationship between past racial oppression and enduring racial violence and inequity—the city's decision culminated in expungement. Removed from the park, the monument no longer serves as a record of its past, and its memory is rarely mobilized. If commemoration is an iterative process, expungement severely limits the possibility for re-engaging the Forest Park site's century-long role in communicating the political pedagogy of white supremacy.

Amplification in Oxford

Following the Confederate soldier statue's initial modification in March 2016, coverage in both the flagship local daily the Oxford *Eagle* and the UM campus newspaper the *Daily Mississippian* engaged the monument debates head-on. As Table 3 shows, these newspapers published 27 articles—more than five times the number we saw in St. Louis—covering issues associated with the contextualization plaques. Reporting in both papers highlighted controversies over the exclusion of slavery and the inclusion of James Meredith in the plaque's original text. Chancellor Vitter's reports to the community, published in the *Daily Mississippian*, encouraged a view of recontextualization as an ongoing process, underscoring the monument's significance as the beginning of a larger campus project. "As we complete a productive academic year," Vitter wrote in June 2016, "we continue to work on important goals related to history, context, and identity. The University of Mississippi . . . continues on a journey to acknowledge and address the challenging and complex history around the issues of slavery, injustice, and race." Announcing the revised plaque text, Vitter articulated the next charge for his Advisory Committee on History and Context: "to recommend which [other] Oxford sites should be contextualized, so as to explain the environments in which they were created or named" (Vitter 2016).

The revised plaque text thus furthered the monument's amplification rather than undermining it: for instance, by inspiring in-depth coverage of the university's "identity struggle" in the *Daily Mississippian* that highlighted the institution's historic role as what one administrator called "the

keeper of Southern symbols, the keeper for all of the South” (Turnage 2016). In comparison with St. Louis, recontextualization in Oxford had a durable effect.

Yet the symbolic ambivalence of modification—amplifying an object and its role in a community’s history, but without undermining the object’s monumentality—has truncated its impact relative to joint relocation and modification, as we describe below. Even after overseeing the revised plaque’s installation, Vitter was reluctant to acknowledge the role of Confederate symbols in maintaining white supremacy. Instead, he reflected that during his childhood in New Orleans, “the Confederate flag was a symbol of Southern pride,” arguing that today “[i]t has been usurped and is clearly harmful to a lot of people because there are hate groups that identify with the flag” (Turnage 2016). The plaque’s placement has thus solidified the statue as a flashpoint object. By amplifying its presence, this particular mode of recontextualization maintains its monumentality while also catalyzing a broader campaign to evaluate how the university presents other spaces associated with Mississippi’s white supremacist past.

Repositioning in Austin

Of the cases examined here, the move to reposition the Davis statue had the widest and deepest impact. Table 3 reports that, in the year following recontextualization, the action was invoked directly within 32 articles in the flagship Austin *American-Statesman* and the UT campus outlet the *Daily Texan*—a number 18.5 percent greater than the coverage in Oxford and more than six times the number of articles observed in St. Louis. Relatedly, the articles reveal that recontextualizing the Davis statue inspired further mobilization on campus and in the surrounding community.

At UT, students leveraged the statue removals to call for further alterations to the built environment. “[T]he statues’ removal was just one step to reckoning with a still-painful legacy,” argued an August 26, 2017, *Daily Texan* editorial, pointing out that “Robert Lee Moore Hall and Littlefield Dormitory are still named for a notorious segregationist and a Confederate officer, respectively” (*Daily Texan* 2017). The next day, an op-ed underscored that “we still have some work to do here on the 40 Acres. Buildings named after Confederates have a similar force to that of statues” (Vernon 2017). Later, a February 2018 article examined Moore’s history, describing him as “a staunch segregationist who refused to teach black students,” someone who had a documented “obsession with claims of intellectual differences among the races” (Jacobs and Mata 2018).

To be sure, conversation does not automatically generate transformation. Despite significant support for a campaign to rename Robert Lee Moore Hall, the UT administration resisted the proposal. “[A]fter last year’s relocation of the Confederate statuary . . . the university is not engaged in efforts to change or remove other historic names or monuments,” explained Fenves’ chief of staff. Even so, the repositioning of the Davis statue remains a robust precedent motivating further efforts to interrogate the built environment. It has also fueled broader conversations about campus climate—conversations that seek to elucidate the political significance of Confederate symbols, and to render visible their impact on campus life today. “The campus community should now ask, what are we normalizing and asking from students of color?” wrote Hannah McMorris and Zoya Zia in November 2017.

The Davis statue’s repositioning also played an integral role in conversations about the symbolic landscape in the city of Austin and the state of Texas more generally. Of course, not all invocations of the UT case advocated transformation. In April 2017, the *American-Statesman* framed a monument preservation bill in the Texas House as a direct response to UT’s actions (Herman 2017b). After Charlottesville, though, the city paper magnified Fenves’ language, endorsing joint relocation and modification: “It’s even clearer now that the University of Texas was wise in moving the Jefferson Davis statue from the campus into the school’s Briscoe Center. . . . The Old South should not be forgotten. It’s part of our history. That’s why its monuments belong not in places of honor, but in places of history” (Herman 2017c).

In the ensuing months, the UT precedent figured prominently in calls to rename the city's Robert E. Lee Road (e.g., Jankowski and Findell 2017), Jeff Davis Avenue (Findell 2017), and several local schools with names linked to the Confederacy (e.g., Taboada 2017, 2018); in a City Council resolution to condemn the display of monuments and memorials to the Confederacy (Jankowski 2017); and in efforts to remove a plaque titled "Children of the Confederacy Creed" from the state capitol (Silver 2017b), as well as wider-ranging discussion of the Confederate symbols adorning the state capitol grounds (Silver 2017a). In Austin, it seems, UT's initial act of repositioning has underwritten a thoroughgoing interrogation of the local symbolic landscape.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

More than 150 years after the Civil War, and a century after the reconciliationist narrative's triumph (Blight 2001), Americans are faced with re-negotiating the meaning of the past. Commemorative landscapes are the core battlegrounds in such re-negotiations. As we show, in response to pivotal events, communities have seized the opportunity to transform entrenched structures (Sewell 2005; Wagner-Pacifci 2017). Thus, the stakes are high in the ongoing contestations over how these landscapes will be re-constituted. As embodiments of communal values, public spaces shape our most basic assumptions about the relationships among past injustice, present oppression, and collective political futures.

The cases presented here represent three modes of recontextualization, linked to distinct outcomes driven by the core mechanisms associated with each: expungement, amplification, and repositioning. As captured within one outcome metric—i.e., subsequent local media discourse—we find significant differences in both the *degree* of newspaper coverage and the *manner* in which that coverage relates to broader consideration of local commemorative landscapes. Consistent with our expectation, expungement resulted in the least amount of dialogue. The removal of the Forest Park monument offered no meaningful basis for continued conversation about the object or evaluation of the role of Confederate or other monuments in the city.

We hypothesized that the amplification of an object through modification in place would result in the highest level of subsequent dialogue. Our findings in the Oxford case did indicate that amplification may inspire sustained contestation, evidenced by the multiple iterations of the plaque. However, the subsequent impact of recontextualization was attenuated by the fact that the monument's continued presence on its original site enabled university leaders to avoid sweeping claims that the plaque's installation represented a transformation in the object's *meaning*. That is, given its pride of place in the community, the statue retained its monumentality, even as the plaque's text became more critical. As such, the recontextualization campaign in Oxford has fueled calls for a broader "contextualization" movement at the university, while also maintaining the possibility that such actions will serve to sustain, rather than resolve, the university's ongoing "identity struggle."

Of our three cases, the UT-Austin statue's repositioning resulted in the deepest and most widespread proximate outcomes. The campaign resulted in the highest level of observed media coverage, much of it centered on how the Davis campaign sparked broader mobilization—not only by UT-Austin students seeking to remove additional symbols of white supremacy on campus, but also in the city and the state more generally. UT's actions also offered a platform for university leadership to deepen its rationale for removing Confederate symbols in a manner that unambiguously acknowledged their connection with white supremacy. Assessing this trajectory alongside those in Oxford and St. Louis serves not only to underscore the power of events to catalyze opportunities for cultural and mnemonic change (Ghoshal 2013; Sewell 2005), but also demonstrates how tactical and framing choices—say, between pursuing the removal vs. modification of a commemorative object—can shape the trajectories and outcomes of associated campaigns. Joint modification and relocation in Austin, in particular, functions to explicitly transform the political pedagogies embodied in public space, eroding

the “white racial frame” (Feagin 2013) that has long concealed the relationship between past violence and present inequities.

Future studies able to adopt a longer-range lens would benefit from a fuller assessment of these trajectories, and, in particular, the relationship between media discourse and on-the-ground mobilization. Such studies might evaluate how recontextualization campaigns and/or court rulings pertaining to monument relocation influence public opinion (Banaszak and Ondercin 2016; Kane 2003; Tankard and Paluck 2017). Researchers might also examine cases that fall in the null portion of our table: in particular, how do communities work to change the meanings of monuments in the face of legal barriers to recontextualization? Finally, in the much longer term, researchers could use our threefold typology to assess whether recontextualization is associated with other changes in race relations and racial inequality. Variables could include, but are not limited to, black–white poverty levels/wealth gaps, the prominence of the Lost Cause narrative in public discourse, past desegregation policies/practices, and the legacy and historical role of enslavement in that particular community.¹⁹

Since we offer an analysis at a relatively early moment, with local debates far from settled, we cannot fully predict the long-range impact that the symbolic transformations we have examined here will have on collective memory. Given memory’s path-dependency, however, the proximate outcomes we identify are not merely liminal moments waiting to be overwritten. Rather, they are the very foundation upon which longer-range trajectories will iteratively evolve (Olick 2007; Saito 2006). Each mode of recontextualization alters the meaning of commemorative objects in distinct ways—through the mechanisms of expungement, amplification, or repositioning—and, in doing so, lays a different foundation for ongoing efforts to specify the relationship between the past and the present. By illuminating variation—in some cases quite sharp variation—in proximate outcomes, our typology of modes and associated mechanisms offers tools for scholars (as well as activists, public officials, commission members, and citizens) to think systematically about a crucial, path-defining moment in the process of reconstructing the past—tools that clarify the broader stakes of the choices that communities make in the present. Our findings may be especially relevant given that some of the cities closer to the theoretically significant events—most of all, Charlottesville—remain in a liminal mode, waiting for the courts to determine whether they can move ahead with recontextualization.

Building on the single-case studies that so clearly established memory’s path dependency (e.g., Autry 2012; Olick 2007; Saito 2006; Schwartz 1982, 1991), our comparative and typological approach generates a finer-grained heuristic that is transposable to an even wider range of symbols, and potentially applicable to studies of numerous controversies both nationally and globally. Within the United States, for instance, debates over statues depicting Christopher Columbus have again bubbled to the surface. Beyond U.S. borders, an artist in Odessa, Ukraine, made international news in 2015 when he transformed a statue of Vladimir Lenin into an image of Darth Vader, protesting decommunization laws that mandate the removal of Soviet symbols (Chow 2015); in 2016, the Polish state Institute for National Remembrance urged officials “to liquidate Soviet monuments before a relevant law is created” (Sharkov 2016); in January 2017, Japan recalled two diplomats from South Korea after a statue depicting a World War II-era “comfort woman” was erected outside the consulate in Busan (Sang-Hun and Rich 2017). Whether motivated by political transition, cross-national conflict, or the general skepticism toward monumentality that is a hallmark of the contemporary era, such debates will undoubtedly remain a significant part of public life for years to come. The analytic tools we have developed can help the communities which navigate them as well as the scholars who seek to understand them.

19 See O’Connell’s (2020) finding that, among Southern counties where the enslaved population was relatively low, having a Confederate monument was associated with significantly higher black–white poverty inequality.

REFERENCES

- Armstrong, Elizabeth A., and Susanna M. Crage. 2006. "Movements and Memory: The Making of the Stonewall Myth." *American Sociological Review* 71:724–751.
- Autry, Robyn. 2012. "The Monumental Reconstruction of Memory in South Africa: The Voortrekker Monument." *Theory, Culture & Society* 29:146–164.
- Banaszak, Lee Ann, and Heather L. Ondercin. 2016. "Public Opinion as a Movement Outcome: The Case of the U.S. Women's Movement." *Mobilization* 21(3):361–378.
- Blight, David W. 2001. *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Blume, Brett. 2017. "Big Rally Planned for Supporters of Confederate Monument at Forest Park." *CBS St. Louis*. <https://stlouis.cbslocal.com/2017/05/30/big-rally-planned-for-supporters-of-confederate-momument-at-forest-park/>.
- Bott, Celeste. 2017a. "Judge: Forest Park's Confederate Monument Can't Be Removed Until Trial." *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, June 19, A1.
- Bott, Celeste. 2017b. "After Months Reacting to Crises, Krewson Takes Aim at Priorities—Chiefly on Public Safety." *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, August 8, A1.
- Bott, Celeste. 2018. "After a Tumultuous First Year as Mayor, Lyda Krewson Looks Ahead." *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, April 19, A1.
- Chow, Andrew R. 2015. "Lenin Statue in Ukraine Turned Into Darth Vader." *New York Times ArtsBeat Blog*, October 25. <https://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/10/25/lenin-statue-in-ukraine-turned-into-darth-vader/>.
- Cooper, Christopher A., and H. Gibbs Knotts. 2006. "Region, Race, and Support for the Confederate Flag." *Social Science Quarterly* 87:142–154.
- Courtney, David. 2017. "Jefferson Davis is Back at UT." *Texas Monthly*, April 17. <https://www.texasmonthly.com/the-daily-post/jefferson-davis-back-ut>.
- Daily Texan. 2017. "Confederate Statue Removal is a Valuable Step Forward, Must Drive Future Change." August 26. <https://thedailytexan.com/2017/08/26/confederate-statue-removal-is-valuable-step-forward-must-drive-future-change>.
- Doss, Erika. 2010. *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Ehrlinger, Joyce, E. Ashby Plant, Richard P. Eibach, Corey J. Columb, Joanna L. Goplen, Jonathan W. Kunstman, and David A. Butz. 2011. "How Exposure to the Confederate Flag Affects Willingness to Vote for Barack Obama." *Political Psychology* 32:131–146.
- Feagin, Joe. 2013. *The White Racial Frame: Centuries of Racial Framing and Counter-Framing*, 2nd ed. New York: Routledge.
- Fenves, Gregory L. 2015. "President Fenves' Decision on UT Austin Statuary." UT Office of the President. <https://president.utexas.edu/messages/statuary>.
- Fenves, Gregory L. 2017. "Confederate Statues on Campus." UT Office of the President. <http://president.utexas.edu/messages/confederate-statues-on-campus>.
- Findell, Elizabeth. 2017. "After Charlottesville, Austin's Confederate Monuments Get a Second Look." *Austin American Statesman*, August 20. <https://www.statesman.com/article/20170820/NEWS/308209905>.
- Fine, Gary Alan. 1996. "Reputational Entrepreneurs and the Memory of Incompetence: Melting Supporters, Partisan Warriors, and Images of President Harding." *American Journal of Sociology* 101:1159–93.
- Ghoshal, Raj. 2013. "Transforming Collective Memory: Mnemonic Opportunity Structures and the Outcomes of Racial Violence Memory Movements." *Theory and Society* 42:329–350.
- Griffin, Marshall. 2018. "State Rep Who Called for Lynching is Not Punished." *St. Louis American*, January 9. http://www.stlamerican.com/news/local_news/state-rep-who-called-for-lynching-is-not-punished-warren-love-said-vandals-of-confederate/article_7f50663a-f54c-11e7-ac4f-ff9d55da3363.html.
- Herman, Ken. 2017a. "Jefferson Davis Statue Returns to University of Texas." *Dallas News*, April 7. <https://www.dallasnews.com/opinion/commentary/2017/04/07/jefferson-davis-statue-returns-to-university-of-texas/>.
- Herman, Ken. 2017b. "Battle Would End 'Whims' on Moving State Statues." *Austin American Statesman*, April 26, B1.
- Herman, Ken. 2017c. "Cornyn's Silence on Trump is Deafening." *Austin American Statesman*, August 18, B1.
- Jacobs, Suzanne, and Elizabeth Gutiérrez Mata. 2018. "Robert Lee Moore Hall Needs Renaming." *Daily Texan*, February 11. <https://thedailytexan.com/2018/02/11/robert-lee-moore-hall-needs-renaming>.
- Jankowski, Philip. 2017. "Goodbye, Columbus." *Austin American Statesman*, October 6, B1.
- Jankowski, Philip, and Elizabeth Findell. 2017. "Push on to Rename Austin Road." *Austin American Statesman*, August 16, B1.
- Kane, Melissa. 2003. "Social Movement Policy Success: Decriminalizing State Sodomy Laws, 1969–1998." *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 8(3):313–334.

- King, Chris. 2017. "President Marc Morial Discusses National Urban League Conference Coming to St. Louis." *St. Louis American*, July 13. http://www.stlamerican.com/news/local_news/president-marc-morial-discusses-national-urban-league-conference-coming-to-st-louis/article_b71cebde-6748-11e7-98b4-17448ade8e77.html.
- Lippmann, Rachel. 2016. "A Year Later, Confederate Memorial Remains in Forest Park." St. Louis Public Radio. <http://news.stlpublicradio.org/post/year-later-confederate-memorial-remains-forest-park#stream/0>.
- McAdam, Doug. 1996. "Political Opportunities: Conceptual Origins, Current Problems, Future Directions." Pp. 23–40 in *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements*, edited by Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer Zald. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- McLaughlin, Elliott C., and Stephanie Gallman. 2015. "Donors, Alums Rebel against Decision to Ax Ole Miss Chancellor." *CNN.com*, March 26.
- McMorris, Hannah, and Zoya Zia. 2017. "UT's Racist Past, Present Leave Students of Color Vulnerable." *Daily Texan*, November 9. <https://thedailytexan.com/2017/11/09/uts-racist-past-present-leave-students-of-color-vulnerable>.
- Meyer, David S., and Debra C. Minkoff. 2004. "Conceptualizing Political Opportunity." *Social Forces* 82:1457–1492.
- Mitchell, Jerry. 2016. "Ole Miss History Profs Say Confederate Sign Must Go." *Jackson Clarion-Ledger*, April 12. <https://www.clarionledger.com/story/news/local/journeytojustice/2016/04/12/ole-miss-history-profs-say-confederate-sign-must-go/82933574/>.
- Mukerji, Chandra. 2012. "Space and Political Pedagogy at the Gardens of Versailles." *Public Culture* 24:509–534.
- Nadal, Cecilia. 2018. "Germans and the Abolition of Slavery in Missouri." *St. Louis American*, October 23. http://www.stlamerican.com/news/columnists/guest_columnists/germans-and-the-abolition-of-slavery-in-missouri/article_97b43f2c-d808-11e8-ad81-873eb517ba35.html.
- Neff, John, Jarod Roll, and Anne Twitty. 2016. "A Brief Historical Contextualization of the Confederate Monument at the University of Mississippi." <https://history.olemiss.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2017/08/A-Brief-Historical-Contextualization-of-the-Confederate-Monument-at-the-University-of-Mississippi.pdf>.
- O'Connell, Heather A. 2020. "Monuments Outlive History: Confederate Monuments, the Legacy of Slavery, and Black-White Inequality." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 43:460–478.
- Olick, Jeffrey K. 2007. *The Politics of Regret: On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility*. New York: Routledge.
- Orey, Byron D'Andra. 2004. "White Racial Attitudes and Support for the Mississippi State Flag." *American Politics Research* 21:102–116.
- Robinson, Jeffery. 2018. "Tami Sawyer Helped Galvanize City Government to Disown Slaveholders." *St. Louis American*, February 1. http://www.stlamerican.com/black_history/tami-sawyer-helped-galvanize-city-government-to-disown-slaveholders/article_0351aafc-0b5a-11e8-bd29-07a69c245689.html.
- Saito, Hiro. 2006. "Reiterated Commemoration: Hiroshima as National Trauma." *Sociological Theory* 24:353–76.
- Sang-Hun, Choe, and Motoko Rich. 2017. "Objecting to Statue, Japan Recalls Envoy to South Korea." *New York Times*, January 7, A5.
- Schwartz, Barry. 1982. "The Social Context of Commemoration: A Study in Collective Memory." *Social Forces* 61:374–402.
- Schwartz, Barry. 1991. "Social Change and Collective Memory: The Democratization of George Washington." *American Sociological Review* 56:221–236.
- Schwartz, Barry. 2008. *Abraham Lincoln in the Post-Heroic Era: History and Memory in Late Twentieth-Century America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Sewell, William H., Jr. 2005. *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Shapiro, Gary. 2017. "The Meaning of Our Confederate 'Monuments.'" *New York Times*, May 15. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/15/opinion/the-meaning-of-our-confederate-monuments.html>.
- Sharkov, Damien. 2016. "Poland Plans to Remove 500 Soviet Monuments." *Newsweek*, March 31. <https://www.newsweek.com/poland-plans-removal-500-soviet-monuments-442661>.
- Sigler, Rob. 2016. "Plaque on UM Confederate statue to undergo revision?" *Oxford Eagle*, March 30. <https://www.oxfordeagle.com/2016/03/30/plaque-on-um-confederate-statue-to-undergo-revision/>.
- Silver, Jonathan. 2017a. "Why Confederate Monuments Were Erected at Capitol." *Austin American Statesman*, October 15, A1.
- Silver, Jonathan. 2017b. "Plaque in Capitol Targeted." *Austin American Statesman*, August 18, B1.
- Slay, Francis M. 2015a. "The Confederate Monument in Forest Park: It's Time for a Reappraisal." <https://www.mayor-slay.com/from-fgs/confederate-monument-forest-park>.
- Slay, Francis G. 2015b. "Art, Expression, History, Logistics: Questions about Forest Park's Confederate Monument Begin Getting Answers." <https://www.mayorslay.com/from-fgs/art-expression-history-logistics>.

- Southern Poverty Law Center. 2019. "Whose Heritage? Public Symbols of the Confederacy." <https://www.splcenter.org/20190201/whose-heritage-public-symbols-confederacy>.
- St. Louis American. 2017. "State Rep. Warren Love Must Resign or be Removed from Office." August 31. http://www.stlamerican.com/news/editorials/state-rep-warren-love-must-resign-or-be-removed-from-office/article_ef429dd8-8e71-11e7-a7e1-2f3f4c03d879.html.
- St. Louis Confederate Monument Reappraisal Committee. 2015. "Report of the St. Louis Confederate Monument Reappraisal Committee." <https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/2655272/Report-of-the-St-Louis-Confederate-Monument.pdf>.
- St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. 1912. "Zolnay Design for Confederate Monument Wins." November 4, 1.
- St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. 2017. "Short Takes on Out-of-Bounds Politics and Purple Airplane Sitings." August 25, A11.
- Strother, Logan, Spencer Piston, and Thomas Ogorzalek. 2017. "Pride or Prejudice?: Racial Prejudice, Southern Heritage, and White Support for the Confederate Battle Flag." *Du Bois Review* 14:295–323.
- Taboada, Melissa B. 2017. "5 Schools to Shed Confederate Names." *Austin American Statesman*, November 14, A1.
- Taboada, Melissa B. 2018. "Confederate School Names Back on Agenda." *Austin American Statesman*, February 12, A1.
- Tankard, Margaret E., and Elizabeth Levy Paluck. 2017. "The Effect of a Supreme Court Decision Regarding Gay Marriage on Social Norms and Personal Attitudes." *Psychological Science* 28(9):1334–44.
- Tarrow, Sidney G. 2011. *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Task Force on Historical Representation of Statuary at UT Austin. 2015. "Report to President Gregory L. Fenves." http://diversity.utexas.edu/statuses/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Task-Force-Report-FINAL-08_09_15.pdf.
- Turnage, Clara. 2016. "The Symbols' Keeper: Ole Miss' Identity Struggle." *Daily Mississippian*, November 17. <https://thedarchives.com/the-symbols-keeper/>.
- University of Mississippi. 2014a. "UM Announces Plan for Leadership on Issues of Race and Diversity." <https://news.olemiss.edu/um-announces-plan-for-leadership-on-issues-of-race-and-diversity-2/>.
- University of Mississippi. 2014b. "Action Plan on Consultant Reports and Update on the Work of the Sensitivity and Respect Committee." <<http://chancellor.wp.olemiss.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/17/2013/08/2014-ActionPlanonConsultantReportsandUpdateontheWorkoftheSensitivityandRespectCommittee.pdf>.
- University of Mississippi. 2016a. "UM Begins Installing Plaque Offering Context for Confederate Statue." <https://news.olemiss.edu/um-begins-installing-plaque-offering-context-confederate-statue/>.
- University of Mississippi. 2016b. "Letter from Chancellor: New Plaque Language, Progress on 2014 Action Plan." June 30. <https://hottytoddy.com/2016/06/10/letter-from-chancellor-new-plaque-language-progress-on-2014-action-plan/>.
- University of Mississippi Department of History. 2016. "University of Mississippi History Faculty Statement about the Plaque Recently Installed in Front of the Confederate Memorial on Campus." https://history.olemiss.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2016/07/History-Faculty-Statement-about-the-Confederate-Memorial-Plaque_4_2_2016.pdf.
- Verdery, Katherine. 1997. *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Vernon, Emily. 2017. "Administrators Must Heed Students' Predictive Perspectives." *Daily Texan*, August 27. <https://thedailytexan.com/2017/08/27/administrators-must-heed-students%E2%80%99-predictive-perspectives>.
- Vitter, Jeffrey S. 2016. "Chancellor Releases Letter Regarding Contextualization Goals." *Daily Mississippian*, June 10. <https://thedarchives.com/chancellor-releases-letter-regarding-contextualization-goals/>.
- Warren, Kenneth F. 2017. "Offensive Statues Should Be Protected under First Amendment." *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, August 24, 2017, A15.
- Wagner-Pacifi, Robin. 2017. *What is an Event?* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Wagner-Pacifi, Robin, and Barry Schwartz. 1991. "The Vietnam Veterans Memorial: Commemorating a Difficult Past." *American Journal of Sociology* 97:376–420.
- Whitlinger, Claire. 2015. "From Countermemory to Collective Memory: Acknowledging the 'Mississippi Burning' Murders." *Sociological Forum* 30:648–670.
- Zerubavel, Eviatar. 1996. "Lumping and Splitting: Notes on Social Classification." *Sociological Forum* 11:421–433.
- Zubrzycki, Geneviève. 2013. "Aesthetic Revolt and the Remaking of National Identity in Québec, 1960–1969." *Theory and Society* 42:423–475.