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“Lest We Forget”

The Confederate Monument and the Southern Townscape

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This paper is a re-publication of John Winberry's 1983 seminal article on the Confederate monument in the American South. Winberry described the historical geography of the Confederate monument by type, location, and time of establishment, and he concentrated specifically on the place of courthouse monuments within the southern landscape. He also provided a discussion of the social and historical forces that gave rise to the courthouse Confederate monument and the multiple ways of understanding its meaning and power as a symbol.

Este trabajo es una re-publicación del influyente artículo de John Winberry publicado en 1983 sobre el monumento confederado en el sur de los Estados Unidos. Winberry describió la geografía histórica del monumento confederado según tipo, lugar y época de establecimiento, concentrándose específicamente en el lugar de los monumentos de los juzgados en el paisaje sureño. También proporcionó un debate sobre las fuerzas sociales e históricas que dieron lugar al monumento confederado de los juzgados y de las múltiples maneras de comprender su significado y poder como un símbolo.

KEY WORDS: Confederacy, courthouse, landscape, monument, courthouse, American South

PALABRAS CLAVE: la Confereración, juzgado, paisaje, monumento, el sur de los Estados Unidos

INTRODUCTION

If the South has a symbol, it is the statue of the Confederate soldier which stands in the county seat. Hands resting on the barrel of his grounded rifle, knapsack and blanket roll on his back, he stares in stony silence to the north whence came the invading Yankee armies (Hart 1976, p 1).

John Fraser Hart's description does effectively capture our image of the Southern courthouse town, its central square dominated by the columned and domed courthouse and spreading, foliaceous trees, surrounded by lawyer's row and the county's principal commercial and service establishments. The grid-patterned streets lead to churches and two-storied frame houses of another era and trail off into the dirt tracks that lead to the black bottoms beyond the pale. Ensnorced centrally in this landscape is the Confederate monument, usually standing boldly yet serenely before the county courthouse. This study describes the Confederate monument in the South and offers an explanation of its symbolic role within that landscape.

MONUMENT TYPES AND DISTRIBUTION

A monument is a structure, usually of durable material, that has a symbolic or memorial value. It is the creation of a people, and as a symbol it “encapsulates and nurtures an idea or a set of ideas” that incorporate certain values and ideals of that society (Tuan 1978, p 364). Monuments also work to “organize individual and group memories of the immediate and distant past [so as to] . . . arouse the emotions of individuals and the sentiments of the group (Warner 1959, p 474). The meaning of the monument is defined by the act of interpretation, a complex process of public and private interactions between those who erected the monument and those who view it through time. This interaction can result in a multiplicity of meanings as various individuals participate in the act of interpretation. The meaning of monuments can change also over time as they are viewed anew by each generation.

Confederate monuments come in all shapes and sizes; they were erected within a few years after the Civil War and have been put up as late as 1980. They have commemorated a range of themes, from an individual hero to the Confederate dead in a small cemetery to battles and specific units that served during the war to all those from a particular county who served in the Confederate army. There are four basic locations for these Confederate monuments: (1) Battlefield monuments commemorating individual units or the troops from a particular state; these most frequently have been erected with state-appropriated funds. (2) Cemetery monuments commemorating the dead; these were the committed responsibility

of the Ladies Memorial Association, many county chapters of which were established within a year after the war. (3) Courthouse and urban monuments commemorating those from a particular county who served in the war and/or the Confederate dead from that county; these were funded by local contributions and commonly were the responsibility of the United Daughters of the Confederacy after their formation in 1895. Courthouse monuments were located on the lawn of the courthouse square while urban monuments were erected on main streets or in public parks and dedicated to the soldiers of a particular county or some local heroes or related event during the war years. (4) Large impressive monuments raised on the grounds of state capitols across the South. These were dedicated to the soldiers of a particular state, to major war heroes native to the state, and frequently to the women of the Confederacy. Commonly, more than one such monument occupies the grounds, and they were financed with individual contributions and state appropriations. This paper will consider those memorials erected in towns and cemeteries and concentrate specifically on the courthouse monuments because of their characterization of the Southern landscape.

Besides location, there are four general types of monument found in cemeteries, parks, and courthouse squares:

- Type I. The Confederate soldier atop a column (described by Hart with certain variations, such as the rifle held at parade rest or a weaponless figure looking downward or forlornly into the distance with his arms folded) accounted for almost 49 percent of the 666 monuments

Fig. 1. Type 1 monument.

Fig. 2. Type 2 monument.

Fig. 3. Type 3 monument.

Fig. 4. Type 3 monument.

Figures 1–4. Confederate monument types. Photographs by author.

noted in cemeteries and parks and on courthouse squares (Figure 1) (Field work observations and Widener 1982). On courthouse squares, however, they represented 62 percent of 362 observations.

- Type 2. The Confederate soldier atop a column with his weapon held at the ready or in a combative stance or carrying a flag or bugle accounted for over six percent of all observations (Figure 2).
- Type 3. The obelisk, a single shaft with a peaked top, covered with a shroud or flag (Figure 3), or supporting an urn, cannon balls, or other objects (Figure 4), was noted in almost 28 percent of all observations. It accounted for about 18 percent of the monuments on courthouse squares, but in cemeteries it was the most common, occurring about 48 percent of the time.
- Type 4. Miscellaneous. This covers all other types, including plaques, standing stones, fountains, arches, and other memorials. These represented 17 percent of all observations.

The erection of monuments showed a marked temporal variation. Of all the Type 1 monuments, the Confederate soldier at rest, 80 percent were erected after 1900; but of the Type 3 monuments, the obelisk, more than 51 percent were erected before 1900. The earliest Type 1 monuments were erected in 1870, one in a cemetery and one in an urban setting. The first monuments erected, however, were a Type 3, specifically an urn surmounting a shaft, two being erected in 1867, one before a courthouse and one in a cemetery. Another two obelisks, but with a peaked top,

were erected in 1868 and 1869, both in a cemetery.

About 93 percent of the monuments erected in a courthouse square dated after 1895 and well over half between 1903 and 1912 (Figure 5). On the other hand, 59 percent of the cemetery monuments were erected before 1900; and before 1895, almost 70 percent of the other-than-battlefield monuments were erected in cemeteries. Urban monuments, those located in towns and cities but neither in cemeteries nor on courthouse squares, represent a transitional pattern. Between 1889 and 1895, 10 such monuments were raised, while only six were erected in courthouse squares. What resulted, therefore, was a change over time in type and location. During the decades leading into the 1890s, cemetery monuments, especially obelisks and columns surmounted by urns, were most frequent. During the 1890s, the urban monument symbolized the movement of the Confederate memorial out of the cemetery and into the town center. By the turn of the century, the traditional Type 1 Confederate monument erected in the courthouse square had become the most common.

In contrast to what an observer would expect, the monuments were remarkably diverse. Of almost 75 monuments surveyed in fieldwork from Florida to Virginia and the Carolinas to Texas, there were only a few instances of repetition of inscriptions. Even the soldiers themselves on Type 1 monuments differed in regard to uniform and facial features. Monuments could be as elaborate as the one in Augusta, Georgia, with a Confederate soldier atop a 76-foot shaft guarded by four Confederate generals near the

Figure 5. Dedication of Confederate monuments by time period.

Compiled by author from data in Widener (1982).

base, or as simple as a plaque in a granite marker.

Inscriptions followed general themes but were distinctive in content. In Monticello, Georgia, for instance, the monument was dedicated to the memory of all the soldiers who fought in the war:

To the Confederate soldiers of Jasper County, the record of whose sublime self-sacrifice and undying devotion to duty, in the service of their country is the proud heritage of a local posterity.

Well over a third of the courthouse monuments that I studied were dedicated specifically to the Confederate dead. The monument in Clinton, North Carolina, for instance, read:

In honor of the Confederate soldiers of Sampson County who bore the flag of a nation's trust and fell in a cause

though lost still just and died for me and you.

Some inscriptions insured a dedication to both. The Walterboro, South Carolina, monument is inscribed:

To those who fought and lived, and those who fought and died. To those who gave much and those who gave all.

Inscriptions varied from the simple to the elaborate, from the Bishopville, South Carolina, monument that read simply yet poignantly:

In memory of Lee County's Confederate soldiers.

To that of Lumberton, North Carolina:

This marble minstrel's voiceless stone, in deathless song shall tell, when many a vanished age hath flown, the story how they fell. On fame's eternal

camping ground, their silent tents are spread, and glory guards with solemn round, the bivouac of the dead.

The Marshall, Texas, monument also exemplified this eloquence:

No more they hear the Rebel yell
where battle thunders rose and fell;
'tis now a welcome and a cheer, to
friends, to foemen, far and near; and
peace, sweet peace, born of despair,
walks forth and sheds of her radiance
fair upon lost fields of honor.

Hart and many others have argued, perhaps apocryphally, that the soldiers on Type 1 monuments all face north. Such a characteristic would be symbolically pleasing to observers, but it does not hold true. In fact, a bit less than 45 percent of about 50 Type 1 monuments for which I have directional information were oriented toward the northern quadrant. What was most characteristic was the monuments usually faced the same direction, as did the courthouses themselves, which leads logically to the question of why do county courthouses face north?

The erection of monuments was undertaken most frequently by Southern women, organized soon after the war in a Ladies Memorial Association and, after 1895, in the United Daughters of the Confederacy. To finance the monuments' construction, these organizations sponsored fairs, concerts, and dinners to raise funds and undoubtedly received frequent contributions (Simkins and Woody 1966, p 348). Sometimes, it took a number of years to raise sufficient funds; for example, the women of Anderson, South Carolina, required 18 years to collect enough money to erect that city's memorial (Emerson

1911, p 257). The cost of monuments varied between \$1,500 and \$4,000. The bases were 15 to 20 feet high and were made of granite quarried usually within the Southern Piedmont (Emerson 1911). The life-size statues were sometimes of bronze but most commonly were of domestic or Italian Carrara marble; they usually did not represent a real person. Among the 19 statues in South Carolina, for instance, only three apparently portrayed actual individuals (Huff 1978). Some firms, predominantly located in the South, did participate in the mass production of monuments and contributed to an increased commercialization of monument-raising (Davis 1982, p 14–17), but the observation of many statues confirms my opinion that this represented a small portion of all monuments. Some monuments did come from the North, as indicated by the uniforms that are more characteristic of Union soldiers. Most frequently, however, the soldier statues wear the characteristic blanket roll and a belt buckle inscribed "C.S.A." (Confederate States of America).

The courthouse and urban monuments are widely distributed across the South, and the pattern follows the general political boundaries of the Confederacy (Figure 6). The absence of monuments in eastern Tennessee and western North Carolina indicates those regions' Union sentiment, and the few monuments in Maryland, West Virginia, and Kentucky reflect those states' ambivalent wartime politics. Not every county within these bounds, however, has a monument located in the courthouse square or central park. This could be due to the fact that many counties were established long after the war, but this conclusion is complicated by the fact that some of these did erect courthouse monuments

Figure 6. Spatial distribution of courthouse and urban Confederate monuments.

Compiled by author from data in Widener (1982).

whereas not all counties in existence at the time of the war have monuments.

The geographic dispersal of monument building does not exhibit a clear-cut pattern. The first Confederate monument on record was erected in June 1867 in a cemetery in Cheraw, South Carolina, but the first courthouse monument was located in Bolivar, Tennessee, and unveiled in the same year (Davis 1982, p 3–4). By 1880 nine courthouse monuments had been raised. Three were located in Virginia, scattered among county seats along the Potomac River. Five others were located in Georgia, South Carolina, and northern Florida (Widener 1982 and field work observations). We could very cautiously, therefore, isolate two hearths of

Confederate courthouse monuments. One would comprise the Potomac counties of northern Virginia, whence the tradition spread predominantly southward and southwestward across the state and into North Carolina. A second, larger hearth would include Georgia, South Carolina, and northern Florida. From those states, the tradition spread southward into central Florida and westward across the Deep South. Interestingly, eastern Tennessee, despite having the first courthouse monument in the South, apparently did not become a center for dispersal of such monuments.

One must approach such a model of diffusion with considerable caution. The spread of information about monuments

was hastened by general meetings of various organizations such as the United Confederate Veterans (UCV) and especially by notices in the group's magazine, the *Confederate Veteran* (Foster 1982). As a result, although a general diffusion pattern does seem to exist, it is not the sole explanatory mechanism for the dispersal of the courthouse monument.

SYMBOLISM AND ROLE IN THE LANDSCAPE

How did the Confederate monument become such an integral part of the Southern courthouse townscape? As soon as the war ended and the tattered legions returned home, concern was expressed for the dead, especially those buried on distant battlefields and in unmarked graves. These concerns and the decoration of the Confederate graves on Confederate Memorial Day (usually April 26 or May 10) became the responsibility of the Ladies Memorial Associations. Many of these grew out of the Ladies' Aid Societies or Ladies' Relief and Hospital Associations established during the war years to voluntarily staff wayside homes and hospitals. They were confederated under the Southern Memorial Association in 1900, but prior to that the local associations organized Memorial Day ceremonies, sponsored the creation of cemeteries for reburial of the dead, and erected monuments to the memory of the fallen Confederates. It was during this pre-1900 period that the majority of monuments in cemeteries were built, largely under their direction (Confederated Memorial Association 1904).

Almost all of the courthouse monuments, on the other hand, were erected after 1900. Why did this trend develop?

One explanation is that these monuments were built not just for those who died in the war but for the many who had served in the Confederate armies and returned home. The early 1900s constituted a period that was between 35 and 50 years after Appomattox. Age and death were taking their toll of the men who had fought in the war, and people realized that their fathers, brothers, and uncles would soon become vague shadows in their descendants' thoughts. This time factor was explicitly expressed by the monument in Manning, South Carolina: "In 1914 when this memorial is erected to the Confederate soldiers when the sun of life of the few who remain hovers in the western horizon. . ." The monument was an attempt to preserve the memories of them and their exploits.

A second explanation is that the early 1900s marked a quarter century since the end of Reconstruction, and many individuals who had been ruined after the war rebuilt their lives and fortunes over those ensuing years. The memorial was as much a monument to them as to the Confederate past. As one dedicatory speaker noted, "the poor Confederate soldier . . . came wandering o'er desolated fields and blackened heaths, to find his home dismantled, his family in want, himself proscribed, and an alien upon the soil which gave him birth" (Confederated Memorial Association 1904, p 176). Poverty still stalked the region and cotton prices remained in the doldrums, but the courage and sacrifice embodied in the spirit of the Confederate soldier through the war's four years underpinned the energy of rebuilding. As another speaker remarked, "Dixie land now blossoms like a rose, she has trampled disaster under her feet. The busy hum of the

Confederate Soldier's hammer has made music as she rose from her ashes" (Confederated Memorial Association 1904, p 239). The courthouse monument, therefore, was not in spirit dedicated to the memory of long-past events but a recognition of the present and a symbol of the transition of the South from an alien conquered region to a distinct but equal part of the nation.

The latter years of the nineteenth century saw another development that could provide a third explanation for the monuments, and this was the theme of the "Lost Cause." It would be best described as "a cult of archaism, a nostalgic vision of the past," and was a reaction against the changes wrought by the New South of Henry Grady and the economic depression that followed hard on its heels (Woodward 1951, p 154).¹ At that time, the present and the future held, it seemed, empty promises and the Southern mind retreated into the past and a memorialization of the Southern cause. It was a cause that had struggled for liberty and rights but preserved honor and sacrifice, a sense that these precious commodities constituted the core of the Southern identity and "a cause though lost still just." It was this that should be preserved and passed down to later generations. The Pearisburg, Virginia, monument quoted Jefferson Davis: "It is a duty we owe to posterity to see that our children shall know the virtues and rise worthy of their sires."

The "Lost Cause" involved a number of developments including the formation in 1889 of the United Confederate Veterans (UCV), which in 1903 had 80,000 members. This was in sharp contrast to the veterans organization of Union soldiers, the Grand Army of the Republic

organized in 1878, which had a membership of 409,000 by 1890 and, despite an increasing frequency of deaths, still had a quarter million members in 1900 (Buck 1937, p 236–237; Connelly 1977, p 110). In 1895 the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) was organized in Atlanta and involved itself with a number of projects including the memorialization of the "Lost Cause" (Woodward 1951, p 156). The UCV and UDC had much to overcome because for about 25 years Congressional Republicans had waved the "bloody shirt" and accused the Southern cause of being sullied "with crimes more horrible than matricide" and its ranks of being filled "with the odium and infamy of traitors" (Buck 1937, p 242). As the Confederate cause was resurrected, memorials were raised. In 1886 Jefferson Davis laid the foundation of the monument to the Confederate dead at Montgomery, Alabama; in 1884 the Lee monument in New Orleans and in 1890 the equestrian statue of Robert E. Lee in Richmond were dedicated. In defeat, and in memorialization of that defeat, the Southerners found a sense of rectitude. As the Centreville, Alabama, monument expressed it:

These were men who by the simple manhood of their lives, by their strict adherence to the principles of right, by their sublime courage and unspeakable sacrifices, even to the heroism of death, have preserved for us through the gloom of defeat a priceless heritage of honor.

A fourth explanation offers a political dimension and a rationalization of why these monuments were raised in courthouse squares. The end of the nineteenth century saw a movement, Radical

Populism, flame across the South. During the years after the end of Reconstruction, the Bourbons, the landholders, merchants, and professionals, returned to political control of the South; but it was not long before their policies alienated the small farmers. Before the war, small farmers constituted the bulk of Southern agriculturalists; they felt a unity with the antebellum landholders because the feeling that they too could become slaveholders and planters was a part of the Southern psyche (Rothstein 1967, p 376; Saloutos 1956, p 59–60). By 1900, however, over half of all the farmers in the Deep South were tenants, and the gulf between them and landholders had widened considerably. The economic depressions struck tenants and small independent farmers, both black and white, severely (Labyak 1979, p 37). A sense of dislocation had affected these groups, and by the end of the 1880s this discontent began to crystallize in the creation of the Southern Alliance (Church 1953, p 12). Though initially apolitical, Southern farmers soon realized that their ends could best be served by political action and they began to support a third party, the Populists. The 1893 depression further encouraged desertion from the Democratic party, and the Populists generally advocated the political union of black and white farmers to overthrow Bourbon rule (Woodward 1951, p 257).²

This political union of black and white was respondent to mutual self-interest, and the Populists implied no correspondent social equality (Gaither 1977, p 81).³ Another approach advocated by the Populists was fusion with the Republicans, an artificial unity of two unlike political philosophies in an attempt to overthrow the dominant Democratic party. The Democrats,

however, struck back. They controlled the election machinery, both local and statewide, and undoubtedly interfered with voting results. They also focused on the Populists' link with the Republicans and related characteristics:

These volatile charges received added impetus with the development of a "cult of the Confederacy" under the aegis of the Democratic party. This blind devotion to the "Lost Cause," bolstered by the racial issue, laid a firm foundation for the absolute and unanimous loyalty demanded of the white voters for the state's Democratic organization—an obstacle which the Populists failed to surmount, either psychologically or politically (Gaither 1977, p 83).

By the turn of the century, the Populist movement had subsided; but a potential rift in the solid South always threatened. Governor Charles Aycock of North Carolina, in 1904, spoke in this vein: "The Democratic party is alone sufficient. We need a united people. We need the combined effort of every North Carolinian. We need the strength which comes from believing alike" (Kousser 1974, p 78). Part of that common belief was the "Lost Cause," the Confederacy, the common experience that brought all Southern whites together, both rich and poor. And, one symbol of that was the Confederate monument rising before the courthouse and reminding the county of its heritage. The potential black-white union was cleaved, and blacks were separated politically through poll taxes, literacy tests, and white primaries, and socially through the enactment of Jim Crow laws (Woodward 1951, p 85–86, 98–99; Fischer 1977, p 154–155). By 1910

these laws had reconstructed the social and legal landscape of the South.

No one of these four possible explanations for the Confederate monument is adequate or complete in itself. The monument is a symbol, but whether it was a memory of the past, a celebration of the present, or a portent of the future remains a difficult question to answer; monuments and symbols can be complicated and sometimes indecipherable. I have considered it in a political sense, a response to the contemporary; but a monument is primarily "a reminder of the past, . . . a symbol of another community to which we belong" (Jackson 1970, p 158). It is a reminder of a people's faith and history and spirit. The South has for a long time been a dichotomous conundrum, a contradiction between the friendly and trustworthy Andy Taylor of Mayberry and the snarling dogs and police clubs of "Bull" Connor of Birmingham. The Confederate monument, perhaps, fits this duality. It is more than a manipulation of public sentiments and a symbol of late nineteenth century political behavior; its roots are deep and tie a people to their past and its traditions.

CONCLUSION

The Southern courthouse square can be hot during the summer as the sun blazes down from an almost cloudless sky that provides a hazy blue backdrop to the lonely sentinel standing on his pedestal. Looking into the distance, he seems almost ethereal, and the observer himself can become oblivious to the din of traffic and the sounds of the busy courthouse square as his thoughts slip back through time. The Confederate soldier is not just the meaningless image or creation of a

long-past and almost-forgotten era but is also part of the present. The monument symbolizes the suffering that a county endured, the loss of manhood and vitality through death and maiming, and the heroic courage and loyalty that kept the ragtag, shoeless armies of the Confederacy in the field for four years. It symbolizes also the rise of the South out of the ashes of that war and the persistence through decades of poverty and isolation that have led finally to the region's vindication today as the "New South." It is not a symbol shared necessarily by blacks or newcomers, but it does unite a people and their history; as the Elberton, Georgia, monument asserts:

Let the stranger who in future times reads this inscription recognize that these were men whom power could not corrupt, whom death could not terrify, whom defeat could not dishonor. Let the Georgians of another generation remember that their state taught them how to live and how to die, and that from her broken fortunes she has preserved for her children the priceless treasure of their memories.

The monument has another role; it is a symbol that differentiates the South and makes it unique. It is one of the few distinguishing landscape features in a growing sea of neon and concrete that has spread also across the South and has tended to homogenize the American scene. Perhaps it promises also the retention of certain traits that will keep the region distinctly Southern.

Landscape features are ambiguous in meaning. They are dynamic but also are evaluated differently by different people and at different times. We can probe the reasons for their erection, but also we can

seek to decipher what they mean to the observer. Perhaps it is simply a function of the fact that a landscape is not the creation of a monolithic culture but the result of hundreds and thousands of individual acts, each based on a particular distinct reasoning (Duncan 1980, p 181–198; Newton and Napoli 1977, p 360–383). As we look at the Confederate monument, we perhaps should not focus on the commonality that seems to link them but on the uniqueness of each.

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NOTES

1. Foster (1982, 283–285) argues, however, that the Confederate monument was more a symbol of, rather than a reaction against, the “New South.”

2. “The colour line seemed to have broken down [by 1894] and the time seemed near at hand when all the political rights of the negro, and all the rights that could be secured to him through political action, would be granted him” (Woodward 1951, 257). This simple interpretation has been questioned in subsequent works.

3. “While the two races shared a sense of economic desperation and urgency for reform, social integration, even if it had been desired, would have been difficult, if not impossible, because of

southern values and inbred prejudice” (Gaither 1977, 81).

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