

**Monuments of Racial Terror:  
Spatial Violence, Confederate Monuments, and Lynching Memorials**

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***Abstract:***

This paper examines the relation of memorial aesthetics between Confederate monuments and lynching memorials. It argues that Confederate monuments are problematic not only because of their false relation to history, but also because of their political relation to the aesthetics of space and place. This can be seen in direct relationship to lynching memorials and the culture they actively produce and normalize, which is most thoroughly expressed in lynching forms of racial terror.

This paper focuses on the lynching memory of Hayes and Mary Turner not only to engage the significance of the aesthetics of lynching, but also to illustrate why it is important that we think of lynching memorials as posing a critique beyond our collective political imaginary. It argues that, as monuments of racial terror, they spatialize colonial violence, memory, and culture, at the same time that they efface the aesthetic traces of lynching generationally as an extension of the culture of a place and as a continual expression of political sovereignty. It concludes that focusing on the aesthetics of lynching memory demands that we not only question the relation of art and representation to cultural narratives and memory, but also question the past and continual political relations. And, more than this, we have to actively work to dismantle not only the markers of colonial violence, but its political form and relation as well.

***Keywords:*** spectacle terror lynching, Confederate memorials, aesthetics, anti-Black violence, political sovereignty, anti-Black colonialism, memorialization, racial terror

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The people of Richmond, Virginia witnessed the removal of the 1890 Confederate Memorial to Robert E. Lee on September 8, 2021. This statue was the last remaining vestige of Confederate iconography in the city. In sharp contrast to the national outcry and politicization that these types of removals frequently elicit, this one was followed by cheers and singing from supporters. Just to add to the sense of the surreal accompanying this removal, one lone man protested from his car, driving around in circles and yelling into a megaphone.

While activists and supporters of the removal of these memorials might find comfort in this lackluster resistance to the removal of this Robert E. Lee Memorial, we should remember that this is not the norm, and far more of the surrealism of racial terror as a political form is usually on display. For instance, when the 1924 Robert E. Lee Memorial was scheduled to be removed in nearby Charlottesville, Virginia four years earlier, it became the site of the Unite the Right rally. That event was marked by the collision between the supporters of the removal of the monument and various terrorist/White supremacist groups, which ended in violence. This collision exposed the foothold of right-wing terrorism within contemporary politics and put on display the vitality of an unabated uptick in *White* terrorist group activity across the country at the same time that other terrorist group activity was and continues to be decreasing (Cohen, 2015).<sup>1</sup> The rally was used by a variety of groups as a political recruitment event, but it also made public and visible the political unity around normalized states of racial terror and, thus, promptly got these collective groups identified as the most serious terrorism threat to the country—a threat that was at least partially enacted later on January 6, 2020 (Hinton, 2021; “Understanding Race After Charlottesville,” 2017; Hatewatch Staff, 2017). Its success was not in how visible or how many recruits were obtained, but in how terror and place were expressed and how this expression continued long after the events.

Memorials function as a way of retaining a sense of events from the past, but they also mark the spaces in which people live and where lives unfold. They mark what has ended as much as they become symbolic of what will be. However, in between these ways of thinking about memorialization, their temporality often conceals their spatiality. In this article, I am focusing on the dynamics of the spatiality of Confederate memorials and their relation to the spatiality of racial terror. I use the term “terror” as a political and aesthetic concept to talk about how spaces are inflected with a sense of violence before or after explicitly violent events. Terror is political when it constitutes a sense of the public. However, terror is distinctly political when it denotes a totality of violence. “Terror,” as Hannah Arendt (1975) writes, “becomes total when it becomes independent of all opposition; it rules supreme when nobody any longer stands in its way” (464).

Similarly, Confederate memorials are not just public works of art, but, relative to questions of terror, they indicate questions of what we make, what we remember, and why. Terror contextualizes a sense in which the political questions of former violence do not stop at the level of replacing one regime with another, or of insisting on the teaching of one history over another. This way of thinking about terror is also intimately tied to aesthetics. I will use the term “aesthetics” to refer to social sensibility, to how and in what way memory, memorials, and historical events make sense and in what way they do not. Indeed, what is called into question in the retention and removal of Confederate memorials is the public and state aesthetics of violence, not memory. In this regard, the political question of terror is a question of the legitimacy or normalization of state violence, of its sovereignty, and the aesthetics that follow from it.

After decades of struggle, former enclaves of Confederate iconography have increasingly opted to remove Confederate symbols, names, and monuments from public spaces. Whether in the middle of the night, like the removals that happened in Jackson, Florida (Reid, Pantazi, Hong, Bloch, & Monroe, 2020), or through other methods, what these removals mean and what they conceal remains linked to how the public deals with its experience as well as the social and political experience of legacies of violence that is spatialized. While I begin this paper by analyzing the failure of Confederate monuments and iconography as memory, I proceed by thematizing the spatiality of racial terror and its sense of making a terror aesthetic spatially, not only through Confederate iconography but through both the events and memory of lynching *as a political experience of spatial violence*. I will illustrate how the aesthetics of spatial violence are not only entwined but remain politically present through an examination of the lynchings of Hayes and Mary Turner in Brooks and Lowndes County as well as their memorial representations.

I will argue that while monument removals challenge us to face up to the aesthetic and political contradictions that appear in how these sites and histories represent questions of memory and identity, they fail to underscore how the culture and politics of those spaces, places, and collective actions are disclosed in the removal. I will also attempt to show that there are further questions concerning the state, nation, and sense of the political that are continued within the spaces, places and locations of racial terror that cannot be addressed without underscoring the connection between Confederate memorials and lynching memory nor the spatial violence of racial terror as present politically. The questions that belie Confederate iconography are not only concerns of history, memory, or of the past, but also of the aesthetic politics of the present and the political experience of the spatial violence of the state made sensible. I intend to set out how and why the spatial politics of racial terror concern the state of our politics, collectively.

### **Aesthetic and Spatial Claims of Confederate Memory**

Confederate monuments are produced alongside a set of discursive claims, the first of which is the claim that they are products of memory or part of a memorial culture. In this vein, there are two central arguments that ground the idea that Confederate memorials are part of or important to cultural memory. The first states that Confederate memorials are representations of the Civil War or the longer cultural history of the American South. The second states that these memorials are symbolically part of a history of rebellion against authoritarianism. Support for these positions seems to be largely based on the arguments that hold that these monuments are an important part of the identity of the American South and that part of that identity is deeply connected to the Civil War, to the memory of the soldiers who fought in that war, and the culture that followed, but not the experience of the racial politics connected to the Civil War or necessarily to the forms of experience of political racism that came afterwards (Dwyer & Alderman, 2008: 172).

What is the sense of this identity and why does a sense of it remain important? Despite the fact that these claims are historically problematic from the start, there still remains something at the sensible level that is claimed socially and politically. Those in favor of maintaining these monuments claim the monuments to be significant to the cultural memory of Southern American

culture and the debt Southern soldiers paid in fighting the war. This claim is proposed even though these monuments were first produced nearly thirty years after the Civil War in a context in which most people would have preferred to forget the war itself. They are not claimed to be historically important but aesthetically important.

In this sense, Confederate memorials are thought of as central to the culture of the American South and its representation, memory, and the sensibility of the public. However, if these memorials are important to the aesthetics of the South, why are they not restricted only to the South? The proliferation and geographical expansion of their memory lay in the fact that they were mass produced and set up as far West as California and as far north as Seattle.<sup>2</sup> The culture and history they refer to then is not simply about the American South, but about the aesthetics of its political imaginary. What the Confederate monuments retain, over and against memory, is a spatiality that retains the sense of the plan to create a cotton/slave empire that included an expansion West to California and Washington, a new colonization of Mexico, and a re-colonization of Haiti, a plan which W.E.B. DuBois (1992) referred to as the “Cotton Kingdom” (32-54).<sup>3</sup> While he argued that this was an empire built out of human suffering and anti-democratic to the core, it also globalized an aesthetics disarticulating the political sense of racial violence as state violence.

The sense of this aesthetics and this violence are not only bound to the history that Confederate memory represents but also to the broader political vision that shaped the public through the racial terror of Jim Crow. Confederate memorials are concrete, perduring, and part of the public over generations. Even when they lose their sense of representing history, they retain a sense of their symbolism. What they stand for and what they come to mean for future generations is part of why they are important. This is part of the purely (a-historical) aesthetic sense of the memorials themselves.

As George Schedler (1998 & 2001) argues, Confederate memorials are intended as *multicultural visions* of a future under one symbol. He points out that this vision of the future was central to the Civil War. However, Schedler does not consider the Confederate vision as separate from or in conflict with the vision of a society of people oppressed through Jim Crow, and he does not consider what this version of a *multicultural vision* means to a future culture, as a politics. He does not consider, beyond trivializing, what it might mean to live within the spaces of this iconography and symbolism as a racialized person. As a result, Schedler’s a-political and purely aesthetic appraisal of Confederate memorials is deeply entrenched in an aesthetic politics that is dedicated to unthinking these monuments concretely.

The vision inscribed by these monuments is important because the Confederacy is really a political term for the landowners whose political vision was most directly expressed and unified in their opposition to the advancement, enfranchisement, and education of poor Whites in the South, and by default in the explicit oppression of Indigenous and Black people as a way of also disenfranchising poor Whites (DuBois, 1992: 626). It develops into a vision of expanding colonial spaces from the South to the West coast, colonizing Mexico and Haiti to establish an empire based on slavery. As addressed by DuBois in “The Transubstantiation of a Poor White,” this Confederate version/vision comes to national power in the figure of Andrew Jackson, and it becomes spatialized in his dispossession of Indigenous people, in his support of the vision of

expanding the slave-holding states to the West and into Mexico, and in his codifying of Black Codes to control both Indigenous and Black rebellions, which later became the Jim Crow laws that shaped the post-Civil War South and have had repercussions across the United States as well as abroad (1992: 237-324). This is nowhere mentioned in Schedler's analysis of the iconography of Confederate memorials. He does not include any of this because he is solely concerned about the "aesthetic" or art-value of these memorials, and therefore, he cannot include any reference to how these memorials are structured within Jim Crow and the culture that followed afterwards. Contrary to the stance that Schedler takes, the context is just as important to how Confederate memorials take on new meanings and how they call into question the social meanings of lives generationally, at the same time that they are lived in relation to land, place, and space. Whether one is racialized or not, racial terror is central to the aesthetics of Confederate memorials and the sense of their meaning over generations.

In contrast to Schedler's aesthetic defense of Confederate iconography, Kara Barnett (2016) has suggested that these symbols throughout the American South present a view of the political imaginary in its most explicitly delusional state. She argues that this iconography is an enactment of a delusional form of romanticism predicated on seeing the Confederate soldiers not as fighting against another part of the United States, but as fighting for Georgia or South Carolina, not as self-defined enemies of the nation, but as rebellious defenders of freedom (2016: 60). In this sense, Confederate memory is something exclusive to White people as an aesthetic relation to a vision of a past that must be protected. I think it is also fair to add that it is a vision or imaginary that many see not only as something to protect, but also as something that must be projected, passed on, spread, and continued. Barnett suggests that it might be more effective to think about the racial terror that contextualizes this iconography as a type of *haunting* (2016: 66). Instead of simply describing the politics of memory, she repositions these questions of the meaning and context in which memory works or does not, and she calls into question the sense in which this delusion remains and is a way of entertaining the haunting-presence of histories of racial terror. Barnett argues that these monuments and their related presuppositions are conditions for memory as (White) relational limits, but they also carry with them a sense of a limited framework of relationality.

Following Barnett's insights into the hauntological limits of the White political imaginary as a critical tool for problematizing White identity and memory rooted in White supremacy, we must also think of these sites as concrete and problematize the way in which they are only thought abstractly and, as a result, how space, place, and location are unthought, unclaimed, or otherwise experienced with a sense of discomfort. However, if haunting or living with discomfort is only personal, then we forget that what is being protected and projected is fundamentally political.

Confederate memory does not function as a memorial in the same way that a war memorial does, because confederate memorials are claimed to be representatives of culture and ideals, beyond their historical significance. In this sense, memorials are often understood as the expression of a version/vision of the past and as an act of preserving a sense of the past regardless of the way that this past is represented, and yet they are also very much part of the present. Owen Dwyer and Derek Alderman (2008) argue that "The social and collective commemoration of the past is constituted, in part, through the construction of material sites of

memory, generally termed memorials” (167). They argue that memorial representations should be thought of as being part of the present that is in process more than as merely being markers of the past. In this sense, it is just as important that they are seen in their historical context as it is that they are seen as taking on new meanings and reflecting different elements of the society in which they stand (2008: 169-170). If the aesthetics of memorials are built out of social accretions that collectively must continue to be thought and rethought not only as history but also in their present relation, then the question still remains as to what these memorials leave unthought, or otherwise displaced, in their presence or removal. What processes come to a halt? What questions become dislodged? How does the version or vision signified in these memorials continue or collapse?

On their own, there is nothing other than the removal or displacement of one type of iconography with another. However, as counterpoint to Jim Crow politics, the memory of lynching brings to light how these monuments are not memory, but are, and continue to be, expressions of political violence through what they displace. The sense of these monuments is that they are not merely history but forms of and expressions of racial terror. The form of racial terror is varied, but it cannot be thought without reference to the history of lynching. And while memory provides a context that makes this violence historically legible, we have to think them together to see how their aesthetics concern the continued form of racial terror, politically. There are no Confederate memorials, only monuments of racial terror. Whether the monument is of Robert E. Lee or Jefferson Davis, the symbols themselves are meaningless without their context of racial terror and the spatiality of that terror that continues to be lived, even if they are not directly experienced as such, and also recreated within the spatial aesthetics of racial terror.

### **Lynching and the Aesthetics of Racial Terror**

I have argued that Confederate memory and their monuments are relationally situated to a political sense of the history of racial terror rather than to the identity of White American culture. I think it is important to pair the sense of haunting that Barnett talks about, the political imaginary that Schedler illustrates, and the historical accounts that problematize the sites and places of these monuments, together with the way these monuments and sites are in relation to acts of racial terror. Taking up these monuments contextually also implies that much of the details through which lynchings are described also needs to be resituated and thought through relationally. In this section, I will attempt to trace the questions that are raised when the history of racial terror conditions a sense of politics that only relationally appears embodied in Confederate monuments (and not necessarily their memory). I will focus on the importance of the aesthetics of the memories of lynching, but I will also attempt to show how the personal and existential terror of these events only unveils a far more everyday sense of racial terror hermeneutically, if not also socially and politically.

The year 1890 provides a context whereby the practices of racial terror appear through the very real acts and contexts of spectacle terror lynching as these practices reflect a shift toward anti-Black violence normalized in the social and public sphere. The first monument to Robert E. Lee appeared in 1890. This was important not only because of the memorial but also because this was the year that saw the accounts of lynching shift dramatically toward Black

people. That year 11 White people suffered lynching compared to 85 Black people, and from this point out the chasm between the two groups only increased until almost no White people were lynched, and terror spectacle lynching primarily targeted Black men (Equal Justice Initiative, 2017: 38-43).

The question that the violence of lynching brings up is not simply a question about what is remembered, or even solely about memory, but about the aesthetics of the politics of space. As Jonathan Markovitz (2004) points out, “The lingering ability of this discourse to shape contemporary racial meanings can be identified by examining the sedimented traces of lynching narratives within recent racial spectacles” (xxi). The very sense of a memory of lynching raises the point that what we live with makes no sense generationally and geographically. Likewise, in *Troubled Ground*, Claude Cleggs (2010) points to just this sense, in which lynching violence structures a sense of place in which forgetting has been passed down and yet the memory is completely present at the same time. He states,

Time has a significant impact on local memory regarding the lynchings of a century earlier. There are, in fact, no conspicuous signs that the tragedies ever took place. None of the murders are openly memorialized in any fashion, nor is the prosecution of George Hall—the first lyncher to be convicted in the state’s history—the subject of public remembrance. In talking to local people, one gets the sense that very few had previously heard of the Lyerly murders or the lynchings, and what little awareness exists is predicated on vague rumors and sketchy details. To be sure, there are traces of this history available to the observant. The offices of the *Salisbury Post*, located adjacent to a downtown Confederate monument, still keep an archive of the news events of the early 1900s. Moreover, the county public library, a treasure trove of genealogical records, houses a “Lyerly File” containing assorted newspaper clippings, property records and other items. (2010: 180)

But the spatiality of racial terror is not only about what one does not know or comes to know without knowing it. It is also bound up with the aesthetics of violence, lived with generationally, and, like both the iconography of Confederate memory and lynching memory, dispersed widely. Lynching memory—whether suppressed or not—is an expression of an inverted political relation to the aesthetics of space. To draw out this relation, I will refer to the lynching of Hayes and Mary Turner, which is possibly one of the most significant lynchings in this (and our) history owing to the fact that its horrific details changed the way the public saw the practice of terror spectacle lynching internationally.

The representations and memory of the Hayes and Mary Turner lynchings stand out as significant for national and international public awareness of lynching as well as activism against racial terror. I reinterrogate the details of the lynching of Hayes and Mary Turner and its relation to Confederate cultural representation in order to make sensible the spatial aesthetics that remain present in the memory of racial terror and, more importantly, the spatiality of racial terror as an expression of politics. The details of this lynching are among some of the most gruesome accounts provided in its already vast and very public history. Like other lynchings, the accounts did circulate in newspapers when it occurred and continued to do so for some time afterwards.

The publicity of the accounts, of the images, and of the violence was essential to the aesthetics of lynching and racial terror, retaining and reproducing the violence not only over time but also across space, because the appearance of these accounts here and abroad in newspapers and through photographs expanded the spatiality of these events. They were not only part of local public records; their violence could also be felt or given a sense anywhere across the globe. In contrast to the context in which the Lee monuments were produced—reviving a memory that was being forgotten—the Hayes and Mary Turner lynchings mark something of a turning point in the social consciousness of the country as a racial terror that revealed the brutality of this violence in plain sight.

Like 1890, 1918 is an important date. It marks a high point in the record of spectacle terror lynchings. This high point was met in Brooks and Lowndes County, which is the terrain joining Georgia and Florida and the place where Hayes and Mary Turner lived. Aesthetically, without underscoring this, focusing on the individual circumstances of the lynching of Hayes and Mary Turner conceals the spatially violent, yet quotidian, circumstances of 1918. It conceals the how the aesthetic question of racial terror is already always constitutive of the sense of space, place, and location in this context.

The details of the lynching of Hayes and Mary Turner are scattered across several public reports and require some reassembling to illustrate the circumstances in which the lynchings took place, so I will try to provide as straightforward an account as I can. On May 17th, a farmer named Hampton Smith—who had the habit of not paying his Black farmhands—was found dead on his property. There was a rumor that a Black man had killed him and assaulted his wife.<sup>4</sup> The White community started to round up, beat, kill, and lynch any Black person the mob assumed to have been associated with Smith prior to his death. Hayes Turner was one such person who was caught up in what has been called a “lynching rampage” that lasted a week (Armstrong, 2011: 38). Historian Phillip Dray (2003) points out that

[Smith’s wife] had accused a black man named Sydney Johnson of having carried out her husband’s murder, but [Johnson] disappeared and could not be found, despite the best efforts of a hastily formed lynch mob. Irritated at not being able to lay hands on their primary suspect, the lynchers exacted summary revenge on several black men, including Hayes Turner. (246)

The mob became a public expression of racial terror with no regard for its target. Hayes was caught up in this mob and beaten by a crowd of both men and women. His flesh was torn by them, his ear and his nose were cut off by them, and he was castrated by them. He was then hung from a telephone pole and his body shot full of holes by them. His body was left on display off the main highway after the lynching by them.

The mob may have believed that it sought justice and that it was driven to lynching Hayes in the absence of the original target. However, Sydney Johnson had already been found and lynched by the time the mob had lynched Hayes Turner. Johnson had been shot, and his body was dragged 20 miles behind a pick-up truck and paraded through the neighborhoods. Johnson’s head was severed from his body and taken as a souvenir by members of the crowd. What remained of Johnson was left in the Black neighborhood. Racial terror is a context of the



public and not an act or event with an end in view. And it was within the context of the week of lynching, of Johnson's lynching, and of Hayes's lynching, that Mary Turner was also lynched.

Mary Turner, in grief and eight months pregnant, became the next target after she threatened to pursue justice for the "mistaken" lynching of her husband. For protesting too much, not only was Mary placed under arrest for her own protection by the police, but she was also given over by the police to a lynch mob that "took her into the woods near Little River at a place called Folsom's Bridge" (Dray, 2003: 246). Somewhere between 500 to 1000 people came to witness this, gathering from Lowndes, Brooks, and other nearby counties. She was brought in front of the crowd. Her other children were nowhere to be found.

Given the place of her capture, she would have been driven past the remains of her husband's lynched body as it hung from a post off the highway (Armstrong, 2011: 38). Mary Turner's ankles were bound together; she was striped almost naked, doused with gasoline, and hung upside down from a tree. Mary found herself encircled by a White mob, both men and women. Here is the account provided by Walter White, reporter for the NAACP:

Gasoline and motor oil were thrown upon her dangling clothes; a match wrapped her in sudden flames. Mocking, ribald laughter from her tormentors answered the helpless woman's screams of pain and terror. 'Mister, you ought to've heard the nigger wench howl!' a member of the mob boasted to me a few days later as we stood at the place of Mary Turner's death. ... The clothes burned from her crisply toasted body, in which, unfortunately, life still lingered. A man stepped towards the woman and, with his knife, ripped open her abdomen in a crude Cesarean operation. Out tumbled the prematurely born child. Two feeble cries it gave—and received for answer the heel of a stalwart man, as life was ground out of the tiny form. (Pinar, 2001: 91)

The remains of Mary Turner's body were then cut down and buried in a shallow grave along with the remains of her baby. In some accounts and representations, there are reports that cats gnawed at Mary's intestines, which lay scattered on the ground for some time afterwards. Mary's grave was marked by a whisky bottle with a half-smoked cigar stuck in the top.

Hayes and Mary Turner's lynchings were memorialized in the public sense in which racial terror is spatialized aesthetically. Most people in the area would have read detailed accounts of the lynching from either the *Valdosta Times* or other local newspapers, but the account was reprinted so that relatively soon the account of either or both lynchings was reprinted in every major outlet across the country and then in other countries. The fact that Mary Turner was pregnant, and that the fetus was torn from her belly, was initially omitted in these accounts. However, after White's article appeared, no one disputed this detail and this too became part of its spatiality (Armstrong, 2011: 38-39). The political sense in which racial terror is spatialized, in the highway, the forest, the community, the police station, and the womb, is such that each site is commensurate with a political project of making sensible spatial terror over and against the sense of memory.

However, I think what is also implied is that if we attend to only the temporality of the memory, memorial, or iconography then the sense of political terror is decontextualized. For instance, if we focus on just the lynching of Hayes Turner, then we lose the week, the detail that Sydney Johnson was lynched, and the assemblage of society for whom these details do not matter (i.e. the lynch mob). If we focus solely on the lynching of Mary Turner, we lose the violence of the week, the question of the relation of lynching violence to police, and the question of state violence as it appears in the context of the condition for living in a material sense. The politics of space cannot be thought without also emphasizing the lived terror implied here and the sense of what Confederate monuments do over and against what they memorialize. Beyond the politics of memory, however, is the political sense of place that is disarticulated without a political sense of terror. As Julie Buckner Armstrong (2011) points out, “Lynching claimed public space for whites by making it hostile territory for blacks” (192). It is this understanding that makes sense of the spatial politics of Confederate monuments and their aesthetics politically as well as why they fail to make sense in terms of memorial aesthetics without their relation to the politics of lynching and the political violence that follows socially.

I think several things follow from this. First, the aesthetics of racial terror required that Mary Turner was made to see and remember the violent fate of her husband as a terror she herself would face as well as a form of natal violence—a violence against the unborn.<sup>5</sup> Second, lynching violence is outside the purview of the law and constitutes the boundlessness of state violence directed toward Black people or, in other words, an expression of sovereignty that is spatialized. Indeed, the sense of racial terror expressed in lynching is a form of political sovereignty lived; it is also entangled with a larger and broader sense of political sovereignty, not simply located, expressed, or operative in the American South, nor simply implicated and reproduced during these particular times. Third, as a form of sovereignty, this violence is not only expressed in the independence of a nation to form its own laws, but also, as Carl Schmitt (2007) observed, to determine when the actions of the state or its actors are exempt from the law. For Schmitt, expressions of sovereign power do not remain within the domain of politics, but transform every element of the cultural landscape into expressions, ultimately, for developing ways of eliminating the public enemy. Indeed, sovereignty is expressed not only in the forming of laws but also in the expression of lawlessness with immunity. Fourth, lynching is a form of political sovereignty, and political sovereignty is the proliferation of this immunity into the lived spaces, places, and sense of geography and environment.

Moreover, if racial terror is a form of sovereignty, it is so not only because collectively we fail to remember lynchings but also because it is carried in the familiarity of the places and roads, people and faces, that are turned strange because of the absent context of these events and the sense of these violences that continue as locations. The aesthetics of racial terror required that Mary was made to see it in the familiarity of the road, the woods, the post. More than this, though, its spatiality works as an expression of sovereign power or sovereign violence entangled in how and where monuments of racial terror claim the political aesthetically.

Terror is not simply represented or not represented; it is expressed in the aesthetics of space and place. The lynchings of Hayes and Mary Turner are not un-memorialized, but additionally they further illustrate the strange aesthetics of lynching memory. A marker was established at the site of their lynching to memorialize Hayes and Mary Turner in 2010. More

than acting as a site of social memory, it gives legitimacy to the entire history of the victims of lynching while also not being an end in itself (Armstrong, 2011: 196). The memorial places the Turner lynchings as both individual and within the continuum of known lynchings, but it also gives rise to the sense of those lynchings that remain unknown. It marks the place of the lynchings as a site of memory, and therefore it renders a sense in which the place and lynching violences are entwined.

Confederate monuments and the Turner lynchings not only represent memory, but also call into question the political sense of racial terror.<sup>6</sup> I think what follows from this is that we need to shift our way of reading these sites and events, these places and these histories, to also open questions of the state of their spatiality, aesthetically, and question what it means to live in this state. While the memorial to this and other lynchings are routinely shot full of holes and the site unkempt, overgrown, and covered in weeds, they continue to call into question not only the culture of the South but also the state of racial terror as reproduced generationally.

### **The Political Sense of Racial Terror**

I have been focusing on the relation of the political memory of lynching violence to that of Confederate monuments. I have concluded that both are revealed as sites that are expressions of the political violence that reflects continued states of racial terror aesthetically. Unlike other elements of racial violence, the memorial culture of lynching and that of Confederate monuments cannot simply be explained away by violence perpetrated by individuals or select groups. These ways of framing them strip memorialization of its meaning and go beyond the aesthetics of the monument to reflect the disarticulations of the state in relation to racial violence. A history or memory of racial terror does not simply reflect the cultural attitudes of people living within particular regions in the United States or living at particular times. The extent to which these two forms of memorialization are disassociated from one another shows the missing context in which the social, historical, and spatial all collide within the questions of the aesthetics of a memorial culture of lynching. This collision takes place because lynching violence is continued in the aesthetic states of racial terror, which is thoroughly political and is central to the sovereignty of the racial state/nation.

In the former sections I have focused on the political sense of racial terror in this conjunction by exploring what it means to live this terror as a political experience without abstracting these examples into a series of descriptions of memories. By engaging with the aesthetics of the memory culture of lynching and its relation to Confederate monuments, I have been led to reframe the problem itself more politically and against the framework of questions that follow from analyses—critical or otherwise—of memory, memorialization, or memory cultures. My aim is flatly not that we need more memory-spaces for lynching monuments or fewer for Confederate monuments, because my aim is not to provide some anodyne answer for a problem misdiagnosed.

In addition, I am not arguing for more memory-spaces, not because I think memorialization is futile, but because it becomes a site through which racial violence and terror are retained, integrated, and dismember the political sense of this violence, spatially. Instead, I

think the questions that are involved in the spatial dynamics of racial terror call into question not only the representations of history or types of racial violence but also the way in which state violence has continued, is legitimated, and is practiced as sovereignty insofar as it is a continuing violence. In this concluding section, I will focus solely on the spatial aesthetics of this violence and explore this aesthetics as a critique of state/nation violence and as a form of and expression of sovereignty.

Since sovereignty is tied to the legitimacy of the state or nation, politically, then it is bound to its expression in terms of what legitimizes the state or nation. To this extent, Confederate monuments and lynching memorials reflect the legitimacy of state violence as a continual state of racial terror. At first glance, the memory culture of lynching seems amnesiac at best, and the corrective of this would be to provide for more legitimate spaces of memory. However, lynching violence is distinctly not without memory. Indeed, lynching violence is essentially public, utilizing the most public ways to extend the spectacles through the display of bodies, distribution of body parts, publications in newspapers and magazines, and photography of both the events and the aftermath with family photographs around the remains of the lynched body. It is not that there is no memory or memory culture, but rather that this memory culture exists decontextualized as something individual, regional, historical, yet always as memory antagonistic to legitimacy of space, state, and nation. The same is true of the efforts to mark spaces of memory, whether it is through dedicated markers and sites or through the collecting of soil, the memory culture is both amnesiac and very present. Its mediation is reflected in the racial state's continued spatial violence.

It is not the memory but the negation of the legitimacy of the racial state that conditions the sense of lynching memory inverted in relation to the monuments of the Confederacy. For example, although a marker was established at the site of their lynching to memorialize Hayes and Mary Turner, the memorial registers memory as much as a sense of terror, both contemporary. The Turner memorial stands off highway 122, near the site of where Hayes Turner's lynched body was hung—Mary's site remains unmarked. The place, once surrounded by flowers, now sits in a tangle of weeds. Much like the memorial plaque that memorializes the lynching of Emmett Louis Till and other memorials dedicated to the memory of people lynched, it is routinely shot full of holes.

Although Confederate monuments are also targeted for vandalism and destruction, such acts are not enforcing a sense of terrorism in articulating the violence of the state. They are discontinuous violence, calling into question the legitimacy enfolded into the continuance of states of racial terror, expressed in various ways and contextualizing the sites of memory. Confederate monuments are seen as and unfold within the context of other war memorials, as part of the memory of the nation rather than as violence and terror, and protected as such even when people decide that they do not want to live alongside these symbols of racial terror. Thus, the spatial politics of racial terror are not only a mode of political expression, but are fundamentally aesthetic in that they make the political a part of the condition of living politically within the form of the racial state.

I think the aesthetics of this violence, its reproduction, and its re-deployment undergird a spatial sense of sovereignty. More than state or national politics, however, these reflect the

continual dismemberment of a Black sense of spatial legitimacy within the racial state. Indeed, as Katherine McKittrick (2011) has argued, Black diasporic histories and their intertwining geographies with the transatlantic slave trade are marked with both the legibility of this violence and its erasure. The geography disavowed through the slave trade is also a context for anti-Black spatiality, globally. She argues that these practices were “predicated on various practices of spatialized violence that targeted black bodies and profited from erasing a black sense of place” (2011: 948) and that anti-Black violence, including premature and unnatural death, is a condition of Black life that is constant, and ought to be reframed not only as a condition but also a struggle for life. Moreover, she argues that these geographies, and the absence of a sense of Black space, is an architecture of political life, globally.

While McKittrick (2011) argues that the inchoate manifestations of continual anti-Black violence can be linked to a loss of a sense of Black space (952), I think her argument can be further developed insofar as it also implies that this loss is an expression of anti-black racial terror spatialized (954). As McKittrick argues, these conditions are not only located in the Black experience of the Americas, but also are globally indicative of the experience of the diaspora of colonialism as the deployment of anti-black violence and, I would add, at the same time as it is an expression of a form of sovereignty. Moreover, *terror* is not only related to freedom but also to the continual mediation of the sense of liberation, of politics, and of the *mitsein* that binds the *here* to a *there*, the *what* to a *not yet*, and the *now* to a *when*. In a structural sense, the violence that remains in sites of terror is written into the divisions of the social. The question of the racial politics of terror emerges in the aesthetics of spatial existence, in the meaning of being in the right or wrong place, of moving in the right or wrong way, but also embedded in the danger of being any place at all, in the living political reality marked by history, memory, and sociality. The normativity of the aesthetics of racial terror questions the very legitimacy of state and nation in the reproduction of its expression of violence as normative, and thereby unthought.

McKittrick challenges us to think of how Black existence is de-naturalized as an origin globally and points out how strategies of resistance are also uprooted and lost with this sense. The plantation, likewise, is misread within the system of production of Western capitalism, without reading in the spatial economy of terror and death. However, unlike McKittrick, I think that lynching further elucidates the plurality of spatial political violence. In contrast to the plantation, lynching comes at the moment when the plantation and its economy are dissolved. The dissolving of the system of bondage really does create new Negroes; and thus the Black body that is the target of racial state violence is suddenly bound up with violence elaborated within the notion of peoples, subjects, and democracies in ways that were restricted to the plantation, internal to the discourses on economy and the rights of property. The dissolving of slavery does not require lynching violence in any way. Indeed, there is no continuity between slavery’s anti-Black violence and the anti-Black violence of lynching other than the way in which both develop spatial terror politically, in how it expresses the determinations of the racial state as norms, nationally and internationally.

Moreover, while McKittrick focuses on the death-dealing practices of the racial state, the practices of lynching violence are distinctly reduced or distorted in, if not completely alien to, this framework. While lynching resulted in death, its end was not the death or destruction of Black bodies. Its end was the spatialization of terror, terror prolonged, terror retained by leaving

the bodies, by distributing body parts, by circulating photographs, by forcing life to unfold within the terror iconography of Confederate monuments sanctioned by the state. When the Hayes and Mary Turner memorials appeared, they represented memory, but they left the Confederate discourse in place and, indeed, made explicit the violence of the racial state as encoded in state terror. Moreover, the term “the racial state” has been used to underscore how racism is a formal relation of subjects, lived out in the sense of what is normal or not, what one has a right to or not, what one legitimately sees or hears or not, as a political relation. However, understanding that the spatial memory of the Confederacy is a Monument of Racial Terror to the same degree that the memory of lynching in its various displacements is the mirror image of the same Monuments of Racial Terror means that the aesthetics are not doxa, not ideology, but are continua of political terror as generational violence set out *as* the form of the racial state/nation. It is its highest political concept, and thus, its form of terror, its form of violence, is the expression of its sovereignty.

The conclusions that follow from McKittrick’s critique of a dismemberment of a Black sense of space, however, are only further elaborated and complicated in the contexts of lynching, memorials, and racial terror. Just as with plantations, the dismemberment of a Black sense of space reflects the politics of racial terror aesthetically, and the aesthetic critique of this destruction reflects the sense in which this aesthetics recoils from problematizing the political. This political sense is precisely what is left disarticulate in the memory-spaces and thus is tied to the retention-reproduction of states of racial terror. In relation to lynching, however, this is reflected in an inverted sense of the public, in how little of these rituals make sense and what they make legible. Beyond the question of memory is the sense of unity that is framed in memory and the sense that is reflected in a sense of its dispossession, held together without a link or mode of political articulation other than a lived sense of terror as the remnants of a worn away *mitsein*, without resistance and absolute. And, just as a monument of racial terror is a political expression of this history of terror, it is also an expression of sovereignty aesthetically in the form of state violence articulated between these two types of memorial content—Confederate monuments and lynching memorials—and lived with generationally.

What follows from these expressions is that the aesthetics of memorialization repeats this sovereign form when it asks precisely the wrong question in relation to racial terror when it attempts to address these violences as past, historical, or within modes of memory. Confederate monuments are not remnants or symbols of *former* states of racism. Memorializing lynching is not a way of *addressing* histories of racial violence and injustice. Both only mean something if they are connected to the past *and* present state of racial terror, which is lived with. Between these two understandings, racial terror articulates a political sense in which the racial state has been and continues to be a state of un-livability. What follows is not whether one memorializes this history or this violence correctly or brings this history or this violence to an end in the removal of the monuments or memorials. Rather, what follows is the question of whether the racial state continues in its un-livability. What follows is whether or not, in memorializing racial terror, the political racial state and its form of sovereignty is not only called into question but also its abolition is articulated in terms of both the spatiality of its content and the sovereignty of its lived form.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The analysis and recommendation are in response to the 2015 Charleston Massacre at the Mother Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church and the survey data showing the upward trend of anti-government and White terrorist group activity.
- <sup>2</sup> See the Forever Monument in Hollywood, California. Also see the United Veterans Confederate Memorial. The United Veterans Memorial was funded by the Daughters of the Confederacy and established in 1926 in Seattle, Washington. The monument was toppled in 2020.
- <sup>3</sup> W.E.B. DuBois argues that understanding the intersections between labor, race, land, and empire is the only way to understand the Civil War and its effects on democracy. Essential to this is reading the discourse of state rights against the plan to expand slave holding states across all of the Southern states, into the West, and south into Mexico to stabilize a “Cotton Kingdom” or a form of empire rooted in human slavery, perpetuating the form of state as a racial state in general, but practiced as anti-black in particular. This is also why DuBois argues throughout the text that the sense of democracy followed the Negro out of slavery. See W.E.B. DuBois, “The Planter” (1992: 32-54).
- <sup>4</sup> The charge of assault appears to be made up and is not confirmed by Smith’s wife.
- <sup>5</sup> One version of the story holds that Mary Turner was busy securing the safety of her other children in the time between Hayes’ lynching and her own. The only reason she experienced the lynching was because she had made sure she could send her children to Florida, before they were all caught (Armstrong, 2011: 202).
- <sup>6</sup> See Frantz Fanon’s “On Violence” (2004: 1-52). While Fanon theorized a type of violence that was part of the milieu and thought this in terms of its collective aesthetics between people and what it is like to live these spaces differently, he did not talk about this spatiality and its development in a more dispersed and active sense. In addition to the spatiality of the term, environmental violence, posing the aesthetics of monuments and memorials in this way shows that the term can also be used to draw connections between racial violence and ecological destruction.

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