

Concept Paper

Anti-Racist Monument



Introduction

The 1910 monument to the Confederate dead at Ocoee St. and Broad St. has been the source of tremendous tension in Cleveland, TN recently. The monument was established as part of the Lost Cause narrative to whitewash the sins of the Confederacy and create a moral equivalency between the Confederacy and the Union. The recent efforts to remove the monument have met tremendous resistance. Additionally, there are potentially significant legal challenges in getting the monument moved since the 12' x 12' plot of land on which the monument sits is owned by the United Daughters of the Confederacy.

The Compromise

There was a compromise proposed which would move the Union monument from the cemetery to the island on which the Confederate currently stands along with adding a text panel to provide historical context for the monument. This compromise was conceived, I believe, in good faith as an effort to get around the apparent stalemate in moving the monument. However, I also believe that the compromise unintentionally reinforces the Lost Cause narrative and creates a moral equivalency between the Union and the Confederacy. In fact, since the Confederate monument is so much more impressive it may well send completely the wrong message.

But I do believe there is an opportunity to do something meaningful even if the United Daughters of the Confederacy are able to keep their monument in its current location.

The Opportunity

I have been an active supporter of removing the monument and have been dedicated to demonstrating to that end. However, the commitment of the UDOC to keep the monument along with the compromise proposal got me thinking about potential ways to accomplish an anti-racist outcome.

Recently, I have been influenced by Ibram X. Kendi's argument that one is either racist or anti-racist. I believe it is important for Cleveland to make an anti-racist statement at this time. Taking down the monument would be a clear anti-racist statement. But we can use this opportunity to make an anti-racist monument even if the UDOC is not compelled to remove the monument. In some ways, the anti-racist statement could be even more powerful if the monument stays. An anti-racist monument would be an enduring anti-racist statement readily visible for residents and visitors to Cleveland.

The Anti-Racist Monument

There seems to be no other public anti-racist monument in the United States. Potentially, Cleveland could start a national conversation.

The Cylinder

The genesis of the concept came from someone joking on a social media group designed to support the monument demonstrations about simply erecting a cylinder around the monument. That stuck in the back of my mind. As I thought about it over the next few days, the idea to build a gleaming stainless-steel cylinder around the monument developed. The cylinder would be just wide enough, approximate diameter of 17', to avoid the 12' x 12' plot of land owned by the UDOC. It would rise to the same height as the current statue. It would

not be solid, however. There would be doors and windows cut in the cylinder through which the confederate monument could be seen and approached. However, the doors would be odd sizes, either short or narrow, and the windows would not be at perfect eye level so that looking through the windows and passing through the doors would require an embodied engagement. These windows and doors would only be holes in the cylinder with no glass or wood. The view of the Confederate monument would be mediated through the windows and doors never allowing the entirety to be viewed—fragmentary vantagepoints like memory.



The stainless-steel would be bright and gleaming. The Confederate sculpture is made in an academic style which was used throughout the 19th and early 20th century to reinforce power structures. The modernist & post-modernist language of the anti-racist monument calls on the very visual language which supplanted those power structures reinforced by the academic style.

The Exterior

The exterior of the cylinder will have deeply etched lines connecting the doors and windows with an escher-esque logic referencing the constructed narratives through which we view our cultural memory. Additionally, the exterior will be heavy laden with quotes etched in the stainless steel. These quotes will be selected by a committee of Black citizens to show the racist and racialized history in our nation and the hopeful promise of equal rights. So, they may be as varied as quotes from Martin Luther King Jr. or quotes from founding Confederate documents. These quotes will give context to the monument and provide texture to the surface of the cylinder. Additionally, they will add a visual sparkle.



This image provides a visual to help imagine the type of texture and interest that the colorless etchings can provide.

The Interior

On the interior of the cylinder images will be etched in the same colorless fashion as the quotes on the exterior. These images should be designed and executed by Black artists and reference the history which the Confederate monument sought to erase and the Jim Crow era that it sought to normalize. The Lost Cause narrative of the monument would be surrounded by images speaking to the reality which it ignores.

Material

The rendering of the monument seeks to show scale but cannot communicate well the materiality of the new anti-racist monument. Stainless-steel is the material I have envisioned though another material may finally be selected, copper and oxidized steel are potentially good alternatives depending on the desired aesthetic. But even stainless-steel has a variety of available finishes. Below are but three examples to help visualize how the monument may look. The monument would be bright and modern feeling. A stark and welcome contrast to the traditional feel of the surrounding architecture and the classical feel of the Confederate monument.



The Three Arc Variant

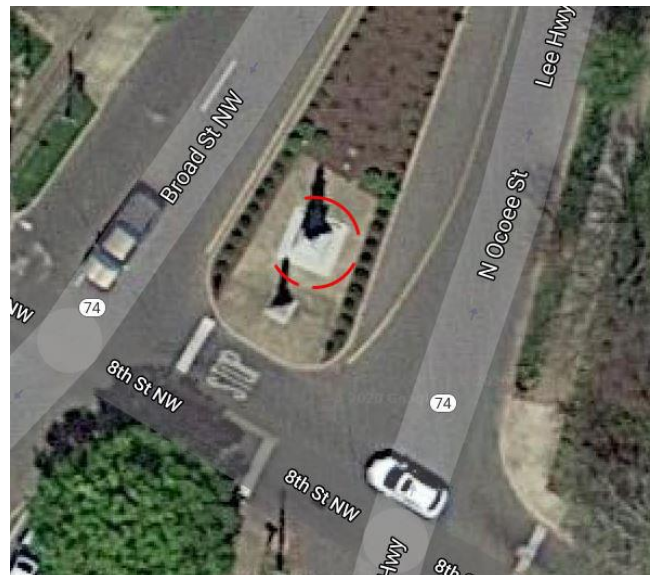
Two potential challenges with the cylinder solution is obstructing the view of traffic from the small cross street looking north on Ocoee and the UDOC may have a right of way claim to their land locked 12' x 12' plot. An elegant solution would be to deconstruct the cylinder into three arcs that follow the line that the cylinder would have followed but leaves an opening of at least 12' for right of way on the west side of the monument which would also clear the line of site for oncoming traffic. Aesthetically, this solution may be an improvement over the cylinder solutions, though conceptually it does not fully block the Confederate monument. However, the arcs would be arranged to block the line of site of the Confederate monument from all directions on Ocoee and Broad streets. The fact that the arc variant does

not fully block the Confederate monument may also make the project more tenable politically.



Otherwise, the design would be identical with windows (but no doors) and etchings on both the interior and exterior of the arcs.

This Google Satellite image shows, in red, the approximate location of the three arcs in relation to the existing monument. This diagram illustrates how the view of the Confederate monument would be obstructed from both directions on N. Ocoee St., Broad St., and westbound on 8th St. But it could leave clear the line of sight



for cars on 8th St crossing or turning on to Broad St.

This design would allow collaboration with the City or TNDOT to make sure that the arcs are appropriately placed for safety. An option which may be a possibility for consideration is to make 8th St. between N. Ocoee St. and Broad St. one way heading east. This would allow access to the library but eliminate any line of sight concerns.

If the Monument is moved

While this concept has received broad support from within Cleveland's Black community many prefer an iteration of this anti-racist monument in which the Confederate monument is also removed. If the current monument is moved it could be replaced by a 10' x 10' dark stone floor marking the footprint of the current monument with text or imagery speaking to history and purpose of the Confederate monument. Either with or without the Confederate monument this new anti-racist monument could make a powerful statement.

Benefits for the City

It appears that this proposed monument would be the first anti-racist monument in the nation. As a result, the construction and completion of such a monument holds significant potential to receive both regional and national media coverage. Additionally, some people, at least initially, would journey to Cleveland to visit the monument bolstering tourism. Such a monument would change the narrative of Cleveland as a small Southern town resisting the national progression toward equalization to Cleveland as a leader to moving racial relations forward in a positive direction and as such would increase Cleveland's desirability to companies that are considering bringing facilities to Cleveland.

This concept would avoid most if not all the legal complications that currently make it problematic to move the Confederate monument. Further, while this would not be an inexpensive project there is potential to attract significant donations from within the community, regionally, and even nationally.

Most importantly though, this is an opportunity for Cleveland to do what is right. It is a chance for this city to take the moral high ground and lead the nation in this conversation.

About Rondall Reynoso

I came to Cleveland, TN in 2019 to teach at Lee University. As a newcomer to this community presenting a new concept it may be helpful to provide some of my personal context.

I am an artist and scholar living in the tension of studio practice, art history, philosophy, and religious studies. I hold three degrees including two master's degrees, one terminal, from Pratt Institute in Brooklyn New York and am working on my Ph.D. in art & religion from the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, CA. My work, which focuses on issues of social groupings, individual identity, and memory, has been exhibited in over ninety solo and group exhibitions across North America.

My mother was from Scott County, Tennessee in the Appalachian hills north of Knoxville. Our Tennessee family has its roots in the rural Tennessee life of the 19th century. My father is Mexican American raised in the rural barrios of southern California. Despite being a U.S. citizen, he was inappropriately repatriated with his family as part of Mexican repatriation efforts in the early 1930s. He attended a segregated school and faced racism from many angles and also as a farmworker when he was a child. Eventually, he became a Civil Rights leader in the Chicano Civil Rights movement. He was the first Latino on the California Supreme Court, served as Vice-Chair of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission, and received the Presidential Medal of Freedom from Bill Clinton in 2000.

This proud mixed Appalachian and Chicano heritage has influenced my life and work. My artwork has often dealt with social groupings and the relationship of the individual to the community. My own history though, has led me primarily to focus on the beauty that can be found without denying the problematic realities. This is the sensibility I bring to this concept paper—as well as an understanding of the problems and racial tensions with an eye on beauty and hope.

Digital illustrations by Jordan Holt.