2024

Calhoun's Shadow: Memory, Identity and the Commemorative Landscape in Charleston, South Carolina

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94 Pages

This thesis probes the nature of Southern identity from the perspective of the commemorative landscape that embodies and perpetuates it. By examining one of South Carolina's oldest monuments, a statue of John C. Calhoun formerly located in the symbolic center of Charleston, I aim to elucidate the role it played in amplifying the social, political, cultural and historical forces which conspired to define Southern civic identity. I also seek to understand the counterforces that continually resisted the monument and what it stood for, ultimately leading to its downfall.

KEYWORDS: John C. Calhoun, Calhoun monument, Charleston, Civil War, commemorative landscape, race relations

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Department of History

ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

2024

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As a reader, I typically skip over the acknowledgments. As a writer, I am now in a tricky spot. Let me try to make this short and sweet: Thank you to my professors and the entire history department at Illinois State University. In particular, thank you to Andrew Hartman, who managed to impart almost exclusively positive, encouraging, nurturing and insightful feedback — all while demonstrating, truly, the patience of Job. Thanks also goes to my committee members Ron Gifford and Richard Hughes, as well as to Kali Gordon, who provided invaluable assistance at navigating one of my foremost vulnerabilities — bureaucratic and administrative hurdles. And thanks additionally to Nathan Kapoor, Doug Cutter and Kyle Ciani. Thank you for educating me and thank you for caring about me.

Thanks eternally to my friends and family: Niamh, Satski, Koi, Cory, Shoty, David, Xavi, Terragan, Austin, Marycynthia, İsmail, Tahsina, Don and Olive. It takes a village to write a thesis, and you all helped me in ways I cannot put into words. Thanks as well to Jean, Taki and Taro for graciously inviting me into your home. Finally, thank you, Mom and Dad, I could not have done any of this without you, but I am more grateful for the laughter and the joy. I love you.

A. S.

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INTRODUCTION

I was born 127 years after the Civil War, and grew up a 3-hour drive from Charleston. For much of my life the Civil War was something akin to gravity. I didn't think too much about it. I couldn't hear it or see it or smell it. But it was there. I could feel its pull.

When I was in the third grade, the Confederate battle flag —- one of the most infamous and enduring symbols of the war — was removed from the top of the State House and relocated beside a Confederate memorial nearby. It is a testament to the pervasive notoriety of that flag, that I never knew it was moved. It wasn't until I began preparing for this thesis, that I finally learned from where the flag was lowered in 2015. For years I only knew that the Confederate flag flew at the State House, and that knowledge alone, was enough to confound me. This combination of two would be, or should be, mutually-exclusive symbols in the same space — one of state power, the other of state resistance, one aspirational of a pluralistic multi-racial society, the other inexorably tied to the disastrous campaign to maintain a system of race-based chattel slavery — spurred within me an uneasy curiosity.

Personal fascination with the discrepancy at the center of my state's government led to inescapable questions of what it means to be a Southerner today. Namely, what has informed Southern identity over time, how have these forces intersected with race,

and to what extent have all the various flags and monuments — a network of icons I know now as the "commemorative landscape" — aided in this constructed identity?

This thesis probes the problem of Southern identity from the perspective of the commemorative landscape that embodies and perpetuates it. By examining one of my state's oldest monuments, a statue of John C. Calhoun formerly located in the symbolic center of Charleston, a short walk from where the first shots of the war were fired, I aim to elucidate the role it played in amplifying the social, political, cultural and historical forces which conspired to define Charlestonian, and by extension, Southern civic identity. At the same time, I seek to understand the counterforces which resisted and undermined it. To tell a story about historical identity in the American South is to inevitably tell a story about race. As such, I have endeavored to involve the voices of black Americans, including those of the enslaved and the marginalized, whenever possible.

The following story has been pieced together from several dozen newspaper clippings from Charleston papers, as well as from other outlets across the state and the nation. Internal documents from relevant civic organizations, collated in the form of a legacy reprint, were also consulted. Additional primary materials were occasionally borrowed from other historians, such as Thomas J. Brown, whose invaluable work paved the way for this thesis. The following chapters attempt to capture the lifespan of the Calhoun monument, reconstructing the circumstances in which the various

iterations of it were proposed, planned, financed, constructed, celebrated, resisted, replaced, vandalized, protested and finally, removed.

The first chapter traces the early attempts to commemorate Calhoun, identifying how these aspirations coincided with intentional efforts to cultivate an identity distinct to South Carolinians. The chapter also introduces the single most important entity in actualizing the Calhoun monument: the Ladies Calhoun Monument Association. The second chapter examines how Calhoun's legacy operated during the war, how it soured after the war, and how it rebounded with the creation of Calhoun Day. This chapter covers the installation of two separate monuments on the square, identifying the factors that led to the first's replacement. The final chapter observes the statue's fall, contextualizing its removal within the volatile years of 2012 - 2020, while also linking the removal to the broader effort of black intervention in the commemorative landscape that renewed at the turn of the twentieth century. Combined, the chapters endeavor to investigate Charlestonian civic identity, as it materialized underneath Calhoun's shadow.

CHAPTER I: THE LADIES SPRANG UP LIKE FLOWERS

The battle over Civil War memory began shortly after the bullets stopped flying. As early as 1884 — less than twenty years after Robert E. Lee surrendered at Appomattox — Union veteran Albion W. Tourgée implored observers to remember "not the battles, the marches, the conflicts, not the courage, the suffering, the blood, but only the causes that underlay the struggle and the results that followed from it."[1] Tourgée, who suffered paralysis after the Battle of Manassas and spent four months as a prisoner of war, had a gruesome understanding of the war and its genesis. Nevertheless, just four years after his plea, he resigned himself to the bleak reality; lamenting the emergence of Lost Cause apologetics in late-nineteenth century fiction, Tourgée admitted that "the Confederate soldier is the popular hero. Our literature has become not only Southern in type, but distinctly Confederate in sympathy."[2] So it was in writing, it became in film. By the semi-centennial of the war in 1915, *The Birth of a Nation,* the technological and artistic culmination of Lost Cause ideology, became the first film screened in the White House, stirring President Woodrow Wilson to supposedly remark that the film was "like writing history with lighting…"[3]

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[1] James M. McPherson, review of *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*, by David W. Blight, *Civil War History* 47, no. 4 (2001): 347-348.

[2] Otto H. Olsen, *Albion Winegar Tourgee, 1838-1905*, https://docsouth.unc.edu/church/tourgee/bio.html.

[3] Mark E. Benbow, "Birth of a Quotation: Woodrow Wilson and 'Like Writing History with Lightning,'" *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 9, no. 4 (October 2010): 1-16. https://www.jstor.org/stable/20799409.

The Civil War remains one of the most significant events shaping modern American identity and yet, despite this abundantly furtive ground, memory did not become a major area of historical inquiry until the 1980s. The late-twentieth century saw the overdue publications of Gaines M. Foster's *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865 to 1913* in 1987, as well as David Blight's *Frederick Douglass' Civil War* in 1989. These efforts were quickly joined by Michael Kammen's *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* in 1991 and Kirk Savage's *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* in 1997. Momentum around Civil War memory apexed with Blight's seminal *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory.* Released in 2001, the meticulous study of postbellum reconciliation deftly explains how eagerness for reunification permitted the wide-scale adoption of Lost Cause memorialization. Blight's work quickly became the foundational text of Civil War memory and one that "[a]ll future studies of Civil War memory must reckon with…"[4]

Historians have primarily reckoned with Blight by furthering his analysis or extending his scope. Karen Cox identified the crucial role played by the United Daughters of the Confederacy in fostering Lost Cause mythology in her 2003 *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture*, while Erin Thompson's *Smashing Statues: The Rise and Fall of American*

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[4] Michael Vorenberg, review of *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*, by David W. Blight, *Reviews in American History* 29, no. 4 (2001): 550-558.

Monuments, took a different approach by applying an overlooked class-based analysis to Confederate memorialization. Thompson argues that the proliferation of monuments to unnamed Confederate foot soldiers, were intended less to enforce Jim Crow racial hierarchies than to glorify the archetype of an obedient working class, installed as labor activists agitated for collective bargaining power in the American South. Blain Roberts, Ethan J. Kytle, and Thomas J. Brown furthered Blight's approach by focusing on Charleston, South Carolina to uncover how Confederate memory was baked into the city's landscape, woven into its tourism industry, and codified into its communal notion of civic responsibility. Their work was instrumental in my research and vital to my own approach to the Calhoun monument, formerly located in Charleston's Marion Square.[5] In this thesis, I have built upon their work by reinterpreting their conclusions and by adding an essential epilogue to their records of the statue: its removal. In doing so, I hope to contribute to this vital conversation of Charlestonian legacy, documenting both the city's enduring Lost Cause sympathies as well as its evolving tolerance for discussions of slavery and considerations of racial violence. Understanding what this statue meant to generations of Charlestonians — of how it contributed to local, state,

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[5] See Ethan J. Kytle and Blain Roberts, *Denmark Vesey's Garden: Slavery and Memory in the Cradle of the Confederacy* (New York: The New Press, 2018); Roberts and Kytle, *Looking the Thing in the Face: Slavery, Race, and the Commemorative Landscape in Charleston, South Carolina, 1865*-2010, *The Journal of Southern History* 78, no.3 (August 2012): 639-684; Thomas J. Brown, *Civil War Canon: Sites of Confederate Memory in South Carolina and Monumental Legacy of Calhoun* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

and regional conceptions of civic identity as well as to gendered notions of urban modernity and instances of racial division — requires a thorough chronology of its shifting context, from its conception, to its installation, to its replacement, to its presence, to its demolition. Like any good story, it starts with a death.

John Caldwell Calhoun died from tuberculosis on March 31, 1850. Calhoun was and continues to be many different things to many different people. His legacy is contentious, offensive, and undeniably important. His political career was defined by his dedication to states' rights, as well as his vociferous defense of slavery as a "positive good." His characterization of plantation life as a "little community, with the master at its head, who concentrates in himself the united interested of capital and labor, of which he is the common representative," neatly encompasses his worldview.[6] Having served as the tenth secretary of war, seventh vice-president, and sixteenth secretary of state, Calhoun cast a lengthy shadow across the state and the nation well before any monument was erected. Yale historian, Rollin G. Osterweis, compared Calhoun and his significance to South Carolina with that of Beethoven to Germany. In 1848, when Calhoun served in the United States Senate, a Republican colleague explained Calhoun's political dominance by joking that after "Mr. Calhoun took snuff yesterday…

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[6] Quoted in Thomas J. Brown, *Civil War Canon: Sites of Confederate Memory in South Carolina* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 59.

129 members of the South Carolina Legislature *sneezed*."[7] Calhoun's cultural notoriety was so pervasive that it manifested in wild, bizarre rumors. (Judge Felix E. Alley claimed that Calhoun was the true progenitor of Abraham Lincoln, underscoring the Nullifier's allure.[8]) On March 28, 1850, a contributor to the *New York Herald* recorded only as "Alfred" warned that "should Mr. Calhoun, the Senator from South Carolina, die, the entire South [would] cave in."[9] Two days later, Alfred's prophecy was put to the test.

"Mr. Calhoun breathed his last [breath] about half past seven o'clock this morning," the *Baltimore Sun*'s D.C. correspondent reported on March 31, 1850.[10] On the same day, the *New York Herald* conveyed the same news with a sentiment of "universal regret."[11] His burial and his burial site quickly became issues of regional significance. Although Calhoun's daughter expressed an interest in burying her father at their family plot in their upcountry Fort Hill plantation, she agreed to set her wishes aside. Her

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[7] "Legislative Sneezing," *Sangamo Journal / Illinois State Journal*, December 6, 1848, https://idnc.library.illinois.edu/?a=d&d=SJO18481206.2.92&srpos=1&e=-------en-20-SJO-1--img-txIN-%22Calhoun+took+snuff%22---------, emphasis original.

[8] "HEROES: Nancy Hanks's Son," *Time*, October 7, 1941, https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,849526,00.html.

[9] Alfred, "Southern Speeches – The Position of Mr. Calhoun," *New York Herald*, March 28, 1850.

[10] "Death of Hon. John C. Calhoun," *Tarboro Press*, April 6, 1850.

[11] Margaret L. Coit, *John C. Calhoun, American Portrait*, (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1950), 511.

acquiescence allowed state politicians to position Calhoun's funeral as a political and civic spectacle.[12] What a spectacle it was.

Six U.S. senators, accompanied by a delegation of twenty-five South Carolinians, escorted the Nullifier's body from D.C. back to Charleston, where "the grandest civic procession in the city's history," had been staged. As his iron coffin arrived at the city limits, it was greeted with a mile-long procession consisting of "every white man in the city."[13] The *Rock Hill Herald* recalled some thirty-seven years later that the "entire city [was] shrouded with the emblems of mourning, whilst uncounted thousands preserved for hours a continuous and profound silence."[14] Calhoun's body then became the first one to lie in state at the Charleston City Hall. The body was interred the following day.

Naturally, the procession was attended by more than just white men. The *Charleston Mercury*, a mouthpiece for the radical fire-eater Robert Barnwell Rhett, reported that black Charlestonians "embraced… with considerable numbers" the opportunity to visit Calhoun's coffin. Fredrika Bremer, a Scandinavian writer dubbed the "Swedish Jane Austin," observed a more complex scene. "During the procession a whole crowd of negroes leaped about the streets, looking quite entertained," she observed. One participant made their feelings explicit, admitting that "Calhoun was indeed a wicked man, for he wished that we might remain slaves." This sentiment was

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[12] Brown, *Civil War Canon*, 40.

[13] Brown, *Civil War Canon,* 40.

[14] Untitled, *Rock Hill Herald*, May 5, 1887.

shared by Elijah Green, one of the former slaves who helped dig Calhoun's grave: "I never did like Calhoun 'cause he hated the Negro; no man was ever hated as much as him by a group of people."[15] These responses reveal a level of racial resentment and black resistance from the earliest memorialization of Calhoun. But for the city's white population, Calhoun's burial projected unity, an attempt to codify the racial hierarchies of their slavocracy.

Shortly after the funeral, Boundary Street, where the procession had begun, was renamed Calhoun Street. Then, in December of the following year, upon the groundbreaking of a new capitol building in Columbia, Calhoun's valedictory senate speech became the only document to be placed underneath the cornerstone.[16] These symbolic, commemorative gestures indicate the degree with which Calhoun's memory was leveraged in the construction of modern South Carolina identity, a project which roughly coincided with the formation of the South Carolina Historical Society in 1855 and the Carolina Art Association in 1857. All that appeared to be missing from this endeavor was a statue, but as it would happen, one was already on the way.

Hiram Powers's statue, commissioned in 1844 in anticipation of Calhoun's bid for the Democratic presidential nomination, arrived in the city after some unexpected fanfare. Shipped from the sculptor's studio in Italy, the statue was briefly lost in the

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[15] Quoted in Blain Roberts and Ethan J. Kytle, "Looking the thing in the Face."

[16] Brown, *Civil War Canon*, 41-43.

Atlantic when the shipping vessel capsized off Fire Island in July. Divers managed to retrieve the statue, breaking an arm in the process, but otherwise preserving the piece. The re-armed effigy finally arrived in the city in November. Taking after Horatio Greenough's *Enthroned Washington*, Powers's Calhoun was fashioned in a neoclassical style; cast wearing a toga, slumped against a palmetto tree, clenching a scroll bearing the words "Truth, Justice, and the Constitution."[17] Grandiosity aside, the choice of dress proved to be a mistake. The toga was deeply unpopular among Charlestonians, who derided the dress for its disconnected sense of place, and even mocked it for the visual similarity to Calhoun emerging from a bath, draped in a towel. "We have asked for our statesman, and have received a Roman Senator… We have asked for our Calhoun, the Carolina planter, and have received an elaborately carved stone," Frederick A. Porcher, professor of history at the College of Charleston, wrote in the *Southern Quarterly Review*.[18] These comments underscored the gap in understanding between Powers and his audience. More important than classical aesthetics was adherence to Southern, especially South Carolinian, identity. Calhoun's legacy as a Southern genius was paramount to the project of emerging, proto-Confederate civic identity. This project had

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[17] Horatio's *Enthroned Washington* is an eleven-foot tall, bare-chested and sandal-clad figure inspired by a sculpture of Zeus from antiquity. Calhoun's would-be son Abraham Lincoln was also depicted in neoclassical style, draped in Greco-Roman garb. See "Abraham Lincoln – Item #44," Caproni Collection, https://www.capronicollection.com/products/abraham-lincoln-item-44.

[18] Brown, *Civil War Canon*, 43-44.

little use for a Roman senator. It needed a Southern secessionist. What remained to be decided was the kind of secessionist.

In June 1852, a Calhoun Monument Association was organized by radical fire-eaters in what Brown refers to as the "separatist stronghold" of St. John's Colleton Parish. To these extremists, South Carolina should secede separately, even if it must do so by itself. Their radical membership proved problematic in eliciting support from the more measured cooperationists who advocated for secession as a coordinated Southern bloc. Despite tepid endorsement that "here [was] a matter upon which there surely cannot arise divisions among us," the project nevertheless stalled, remaining siloed among the staunchest fire-eaters. Eventually, the association was forced to concede to the "apathy and indifference which prevails in many parts of the State." The organization course-corrected by reorienting their campaign around cooperationist Charleston and regrouping as the Calhoun Monument Association of the Military and Fire Departments of Charleston (CMAC). As this rebranding concretized the city of Charleston as the site of the future monument, it enticed support from cooperationists, and remarkably, even some Unionists within the city. Take for example, Richard Yeadon, a newspaper owner who published Unionist and Whiggish pieces in his *Charleston Daily Courier*, who even began to advocate for the statue. His support, despite being an ideological advisory to both the separatist cause as well as Calhoun's nullification legacy, indicated the extent to which the project gained popular appeal. Yeadon's

Courier proudly proclaimed that "all citizens" should want to "see for themselves" a monument to Calhoun. In addition to linking the project with civic responsibly, the paper also positioned the project in supremacist terms.[19] "We are fast advancing towards the monumental age of civilization—towards that stage of progress at which monuments become necessary to any free, intelligent people, who have had a past worth commemorating, or whose condition affords guarantees for a future." Calhoun's statue was presented as the solution to this crisis of culture. The installation of the proposed monument would be an enduring symbol of modernization, marking the "epoch to which coming inquirers would turn, as the origin or an indigenous culture of art in our State…"[20]

As excitement built, a competition was organized to stimulate engagement about the monument's design and location. The statue was originally planned to be situated across from City Hall, but was then proposed to be installed in White Point Garden, a fashionable waterfront promenade on the Battery. The lavish location looked out onto Charleston harbor, which advocates thought fitting as it ensured that "the great scene of commercial labor and wealth [would be] kept perpetually under the eye of him, who for

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[19] "Yeadon, Richard, 1802-1870," SNAC, https://snaccooperative.org/ark:/99166/w6612kv1; Brown, *Civil War Canon*.

[20] "The Calhoun Monument," *Charleston Daily Courier*, July 27, 1854; Brown, *Civil War Canon*.

many long years was the acknowledged master-spirit of the free trade policy."[21] As for the design, the *Courier* grouped the proposals into two camps "those in which the shaft or column is adopted as a leading feature,—and those which dispense with it."[22] Brown also notes that several proposed designs intended to include a crypt.[23] The winning design, submitted by Edward C. Jones and his partner Francis D. Lee, envisioned an 150-foot-tall Doric column, with a 20-foot-tall larger than life Calhoun effigy on top. Female personifications of four virtues (Wisdom, Justice, Truth, and Firmness) would flank the base as decorative ornamentations. With cost estimates ranging from $80,000 to $100,000 — some three million dollars today — the hefty price tag must have raised some eyebrows.

In response, John W. R. Pope, the Chairman of the Calhoun Monument Association, penned a lengthy justification of the monument's price and design in the August 10th, 1854 edition of the *Daily Courier*. Pope, the scion of a plantation owner from St. Helena Parish, was clearly concerned for his project's viability, but nevertheless touted it as an existential imperative. After admitting that the monument could be scaled down to compensate for lack of funds, he reiterated that "the scale of one hundred and seventy feet is that which would give the fullest meaning and effect to the

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[21] John W. R. Pope, "An Appeal to the Planters of Carolina in Behalf of the Calhoun Monument," *Charleston Daily Courier*, August 10, 1854.

[22] "The Calhoun Monument," *Charleston Daily Courier*, July 27, 1854.

[23] Brown, *Civil War Canon*, 49.

structure…" His "Appeal to the planters of Carolina" spanned some 3200 words, and included references to Virgil, Memnon, and Caesar. (Calhoun "was our Caesar. Nay! he was more.") Pope's wide-ranging address invoked notions of patriotism, Southern pride, honor, masculinity, and modernity in defense of the project. If the "devoted energies" of his Calhoun Monument Association couldn't raise the necessary funds, then it would be "because there is no virtue left in the land that gave birth to Calhoun," he decried, before placing South Carolina in direct competition with Massachusetts and Kentucky, which already completed memorializations of Daniel Webster and Henry Clay. Pope simultaneously positioned the Palmetto State alongside empires past: "What were Greece without her temples and her ruins, and what martial Rome… without her pillars and grave marks…?" He aligned South Carolina with contemporary imperial powers as well, by urging his readers to remember that England and France "have for centuries piled costly and chiseled stone o'er their dead monarchs, crowned and uncrowned." These connections serve to reveal Pope's ambitious intent, as well as his perception of the statue as a modernization project. Pope lastly appealed to a sense of embattled Western, white superiority. "[A] people without these memorials, are a most unnatural race," he lectured his audience, comparing a monument-less Carolinian to "the wild Arab [who has] no Mecca…" At the close of his appeal, Pope mentions, almost in passing, that he is "sometimes told ladies will build this Monument, whilst [he and

his fellow men] are hustling our fellow to no purpose."[24] Presciently, that is exactly what happened.

The Ladies Calhoun Monument Association (LCMA), as the *Charleston Mercury* would later recall, "sprung up among us like the flowers of our gardens, noiseless, beautiful and irresistible, before the public were aware of its existence."[25] In contrast to the CMAC, the women's organization demonstrated an adept ability to manage social, political, and financial responsibilities from the start. Chartered on January 23, 1854, by thirty-four-year-old Mary Yates Snowden; the well-known philanthropist had been a close personal friend of Calhoun. Much of the LCMA's success can be traced back to the fact that it was effectively a distinct entity from the CMAC. None of its members were married or related to members of the CMAC; it was instead something of a spiritual successor to an earlier charity organization, the Ladies Benevolent Society. The LCMA's emergence out of the earlier philanthropic organization marked what Brown adroitly observed as a "shift from charity to commemoration." This shift was triggered, at least in part, by the decline of Mount Vernon.[26]

On Friday, December 2nd, 1853, Ann Pamela Cunningham, the wealthy daughter of two South Carolinian aristocrats, issued a call "To the Ladies of the South." Her call,

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[24] "The Calhoun Monument," *Charleston Daily Courier*, August 10, 1854; John W. R. Pope, "An Appeal to the Planters of Carolina in Behalf of the Calhoun Monument," *Charleston Daily Courier*, August 10, 1854.

[25] "Calhoun Monument Association," *Charleston Mercury*, April 25, 1856.

[26] Brown, *Civil War Canon*, 52.

delivered as a "daughter of Carolina" and "A Southern Matron" marked the explosion of female-led civic activism into the American consciousness. Lamenting the impotence of Congress and the destructive, irreverent "noise and smoke" from unchecked "Northern capital," Cunningham turned to her fellow women to preserve Washington's home estate through "a *monument* of love and gratitude." She constructed her imagined sisterhood as a rebirth of the Vestal priestesses, noting that "even the 'fire of liberty' may need the care of [a woman's] devotion, and the purity of her guardianship."[27]

But it wasn't George Washington's legacy that catalyzed Charlestonians. Barely two months after the publication of "To the Ladies of the South," the *Courier* published a similarly-styled column addressed "To the Women of Carolina." In it, Esther B. Cheesborough, a local poet and author, mimicked Cunningham's approach to announce the formation of the LCMA "for the purpose of aiding" the CMAC in its memorialization of Calhoun. Her language was likely an understatement. The paper's editors prefaced her column by expressing their relief to these "patriotic ladies" who had taken the "lagging enterprise" of the Calhoun statue into their own hands, and admitted their hope that the ladies' efforts would sufficiently "prick the lazy sides of masculine intent." Like Cunningham, Cheesborough addressed her readers as women and as patriots, appealing to their maternal instinct and feminine virtue in addition to their regional sense of shame over the state's failure to memorialize Thomas Sumter and

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[27] A Southern Matron, "To the Ladies of the South," *Charleston Mercury*, December 2, 1853, 2, emphasis original.

Francis Marion. "Let the woman of Carolina rally in this cause" so that one day "the mothers of Carolina [can gather] at its base, and proudly pointing their sons to the honored name of Calhoun, shall bid them learn a lesson of Truth, Justice and Virtue," she wrote. By explaining how any "daughter of the State" could gain entrance into the organization for the cost of a dollar, Cheesborough sought to construct her own sisterhood, one that fostered nascent Confederate ideology as opposed to the common ground of revolutionary nationhood proposed by Cunningham's endeavor.[28]

The LCMA demonstrated an early model for Southern women's activism. While the group often adopted a posture of submissiveness toward the CMAC, they nevertheless remained at arm's length from the men's organization, ensuring a sense of independence and agency. While Cheesborough later acknowledged that "there was no active opposition from 'old fogyism,'" her explanation for this lack of pushback is worth noting. The author and former secretary for the organization explained that "it was perfectly understood that [the monument project] was no 'strong-minded' movement on the part of the women of the State, but was simply the outcome of a feeling of reverence for genius." The LCMA was thus careful to present their project as a reinforcement of gender roles rather than a usurping of them. Even so, Cheesborough admits that the LCMA still had to contend with the burden of history: "it was something new in the annals of the women of the State to attempt to raise a monument to a public

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[28] E. C. "To the Women of Carolina," *Charleston Daily Courier*, February 1, 1854.

man**.** Our grandmothers had confined their monumental efforts to the family graveyard, and some thought that their granddaughters had better do the same."[29]

Regarding fundraising, the LCMA was wildly more successful than their male counterpart. They pivoted from CMAC's fixation on the planter class, choosing to focus instead on eliciting contributions from local residents via membership dues and donation drives. They also deliberately sought participation from children, inviting "the Young of Carolina" to contribute their name and fifty cents to the project, thereby linking notions of parenting and youth activism with their constructed concept of Carolina citizenship. By 1856 the CMAC was preparing to transfer their funds to the women's group which had been explicitly deemed "the more successful Society."[30]

The LCMA raised the bulk of their money by hosting a series of benefits, concerts, and floral fairs, in which the creation of the monument was presented as a cultural event and a modernizing project. Thousands of people gathered at the South Carolina Institute Hall to see the lavish decorations of floral bouquets and eclectic goods on display. The LCMA offered myriad souvenirs, including cakes, perfume, shell-work, hand sewn afghans, and even artwork fashioned from the "full variety of lives and flowers from the grave of Calhoun, arranged like Mosaics."[31] The centerpiece of the

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[29] E. B. Cheesborough, "The Calhoun Monument: An Arduous Work of Patriotism and Love," *Charleston News and Courier*, April 29, 1882.

[30] "Calhoun Monument Association," *Charleston Mercury*, April 25, 1856.

[31] "The Floral Fair," *Charleston Daily Courier*, May 13, 1859.

arrangement was a bust of a saint-like Calhoun flanked by a "pyramid of cherub faces… surrounded and surmounted at every stage by a linked circle of bright little boys and girls, in charmingly picturesque array, while at the topmost elevation appears one, who drops a chaplet on the bust."[32]

As part of the LCMA's public assurance that the women's organization wouldn't subvert established gender roles, they had deferred their most significant decisions (about the monuments design and location, among other things) to an advisory council of fifteen businessmen and statesmen. Newspaper coverage of the floral fair proceedings often ended with a list of names and sponsors. These lists were not acknowledging the LCMA members who planned and organized the event, but rather a spotlight for the men on the Special Committee and Honorary and Advisory Committee who presided over them. Even so, the LCMA's selection of who served on these committees—older, largely cooperationist Charlestonians—reveals a subtle act of agency in positioning Calhoun's monument, and thereby his legacy, as a cooperationist one.[33]

By the end of the May floral fair, the LCMA had raised enough funds to begin investing in city and state stocks to generate interest which they could then reinvest. "It is sufficiently evident," the *Charleston Mercury* declared less than a month later, "that the

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[32] "The Calhoun Monument Fair," *Charleston Daily Courier*, May 11, 1859.

[33] Brown, *Civil War Canon*, 53.

Ladies, and they only, can now raise the remaining sum necessary to complete the Monument."[34] But with this fundraising success came unanticipated problems.

In addition to navigating the delicate role of women's civic activism, the LCMA also had to contend with utilitarian critiques of their project — and of monuments in general. What was the practical benefit of an obelisk or statue to the citizens of Charleston? Just as the Astor Library, Dudley Observatory, and Nightingale Hospital continued their namesakes' legacies while simultaneously functioning as critical facilities for the public good, critics proposed creating a school or institute in the name of Calhoun. To these skeptics, a living monument was superior to the "tameness and monotony" of the "merely obituary monument" which was critiqued as "more form than substance."[35] These proposals stressed the importance of spreading Calhoun's doctrine to younger generations, and sought a more explicitly overt method of doing so.

The LCMA, remained focused on a literal monument, and busied themselves with determining a prospective location. The group ultimately moved away from earlier plans favoring White Point Garden. Concerned about the "deleterious effects of the salt air," as well as the optics of placing Calhoun's monument "in the midst of a mere pleasure promenade," the LCMA advocated for building the monument on a parade ground across from the Military College of South Carolina. The institution,

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[34] "The Ladies and the Calhoun Monument, *Charleston Mercury*, June 04, 1855.

[35] Institute, "The Calhoun Monument," *Charleston Daily Courier*, April 10, 1858.

colloquially known as the Citadel, offered symbolic and practical advantages for the monumental project.

Built in 1842, the Citadel was conceived as a projection of state power in the aftermath of the Denmark Vesey conspiracy in 1822 and intended as a bulwark against the threat of future slave insurrection. The arsenal took on additional significance when the South Carolina militia replaced the federal garrison during the tariff crisis of 1832, solidifying the link between the arsenal and Calhoun. This bastion for the pro-slavery, proto-Confederate society, was thus to many a fitting location for a Calhoun monument. The Citadel Green, renamed Marion Square in the 1880's in honor of Francis Marion, had the added benefits of being close in proximity to the College of Charleston as well as the male and female high schools of Charleston, making it a convenient location for Calhoun to indoctrinate. As the LCMA hoped, the location would allow the posthumous politician to "speak eloquently to the youths of the Citadel, prompting them to emulate the virtues of the great statesmen whose memory it was intended to keep forever green."[36] Once the location was decided, a ceremony was planned to break ground.

The cornerstone, a two foot eight inch by one foot two inch stone block, was laid fifty feet from the gate of the Citadel on June 28, 1858.[37] The occasion for the event

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[36] E. B. Cheesborough, "The Calhoun Monument: An Arduous Work of Patriotism and Love," *Charleston News and Courier*, April 29, 1882.

[37] "The Calhoun Monument," *Charleston Daily Courier*, May 04, 1858.

coincided with Palmetto Day. First recognized in 1777, the anniversary commemorates the Battle of Sullivan's Island, when South Carolinian soldiers stationed at an incomplete Fort Moultrie, successfully fought off the British invasion of the city.[38] This choice for the day of groundbreaking is worth considering. Despite having significant regional significance, the holiday bears no explicit connection to Calhoun. In the LCMA's own account, the day was chosen for its "dear and sacred [place in] the heart of each and every Carolinian," but it's likely that more thought was given to the decision.[39] By holding the cornerstone ceremony on a day of revolutionary significance, the LCMA effectively linked Calhoun memorialization with the American revolution, supplanting the revolutionary unity as proposed by Cunningham, with a sectional interpretation. By breaking ground on Palmetto Day, the LCMA positioned Southern secession as an extension and fulfillment of American revolutionary principles. The *Charleston Daily Courier* winked at this connection by remarking how fitting it was for Palmetto Day, a day "so dearly and indissolubly associated with the political individuality and distinctive duties… of our State, should witness the formal inception of this monumental tribute."[40]

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[38] https://sullivansisland.sc.gov/community-connections/carolina-day#:~:text=The%20anniversary%20of%20the%20victory,victory%20over%20the%20British%20troops.

[39] Ladies Calhoun Monument Association, *A History of the Calhoun Monument*, comp. Clarence Cuningham (Charleston, SC: Lucas, Richardson & Co., 1888), 10-11.

[40] "The Calhoun Monument," *Charleston Daily Courier*, May 28, 1858.

The ceremony began with a procession of soldiers, Masons, and civic leaders moving from the Battery to Marion Square, reversing the path that Calhoun's body traveled eight years earlier. Another important group made up the procession: women. In an uncharacteristically visible act, the members of the LCMA led the charge in carriages, giving Charleston something that Cheesborough noted in 1882 "it had never seen before and what it has never seen since—a women's procession."[41] When the procession concluded, Laurence M. Keitt, South Carolina congressman and rabid fire-eater who abetted the caning of abolitionist Republican Charles Sumner two years earlier, delivered remarks, indicating a resurgence of separatist sentiment within the organization. After the oration, ceremonial tokens were placed under the stone, including: a cannon ball retrieved from the battle of Sullivan's Island, a marching banner used in Calhoun's funeral procession, one hundred dollars in continental currency, and a lock of Calhoun's hair.[42]

Two days later the LCMA hosted another fundraising event. The Calhoun Promenade Concert took place from June 30 to July 1, 1858 at the South Carolina Institute. The Fort Moultrie military band played music and attendees were greeted with tables "laden with choice viands and refreshments in profuse variety."[43] This

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[41] E. B. Cheesborough, "The Calhoun Monument: An Arduous Work of Patriotism and Love," *Charleston News and Courier*, April 29, 1882.

[42] Ladies Calhoun Monument Association, *A History of the Calhoun Monument*, comp. Clarence Cuningham (Charleston, SC: Lucas, Richardson & Co., 1888), 10-11.

[43] "The Calhoun Promenade Concert," *Charleston Daily Courier*, July 1, 1858.

would be the last such event for a number of years. As Keitt observed at the groundbreaking ceremony, the South was "wandering to the goal of her destiny, and she should look only to the eternal landmarks which beacon her onward."[44] The monumental project had to be sidelined, but the outbreak of war was to many a suitable proxy for a statue. The *Daily Courier* voiced this sentiment explicitly by asking: "What nobler monument to Calhoun could any wish, however, than a Southern league or Confederacy of independent, equal states?"[45]

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[44] "Oration by Hon. Laurence M. Keitt, Delivered at the Laying the Corner Stone of the Calhoun Monument, on Citadel Green, Charleston, S.C.," *Charleston Mercury*, June 29, 1858, 2.

[45] "The Calhoun Monument," *Charleston Daily Courier*, November 12, 1860.

CHAPTER II: A MONUMENTAL MISTAKE

During the war, Calhoun's name and likeness were often leveraged to bolster Confederate morale. Numerous Confederate counties, dozens of military regiments, Confederate currency, bonds, an unissued penny stamp, and even a gunboat bore his name or image in service of the Confederacy.[46] The LCMA, which had suspended its monumental aspirations, channeled its efforts into modeling Confederate womanhood by supporting the Confederacy through the Soldiers' Relief Association of Charleston. In this new association, Mary Yates Snowden and her sisterhood mobilized their civic networks to collect supplies and elicit clothing donations for soldiers. They even hosted a Ladies' Gunboat Fair in Charleston in May 1862, an obvious corollary to their Floral Fairs from before the war. At least one member of the LCMA wanted to do more, and even took the eyebrow-raising step of writing to the *Charleston Mercury* to suggest that the monument fund be repurposed for the creation of an iron-sheathed steamer.[47] However, most contemporaries appeared satisfied with the LCMA's war-time activities. The *Charleston Daily Courier* even framed the women's work as a continuation of their original mission by "contributing towards the best and most enviable monument" —

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[46] Brown, *Canon*, 63.

[47] A Member of the Ladies' Calhoun Monument Association, "The Iron-Sheathed War Steamer," Charleston *Mercury*, March 24, 1862.

one that envisioned the Confederacy itself as "the crowning result of the teaching and utterances of Calhoun."[48]

The Union also deployed Calhoun's legacy, albeit in a predictably less hagiographic sense. The Confederacy's interpretation of the Constitution was frequently dubbed "the Calhoun school" of thought, and Anna Ella Carroll, the granddaughter of Charles Carroll, signatory of the Declaration of Independence, rejected Calhoun apologists by arguing that "indignant scorn… must attach to the name of Calhoun throughout the ages of posterity, for it is the treasonable doctrine he strove to propagate and fissure which is drenching the nation today in fraternal blood."[49] This rhetorical contest over Calhoun's legacy trickled into wartime rituals.

As Northern sentiment crystallized into resentment, Charlestonians responded by proactively safeguarding Calhoun's tangible legacy. Hiram Power's city hall statue was evacuated to the statehouse in Columbia, while Calhoun's remains were reburied in a separate plot to prevent looting. These measures proved prescient when Union forces retook the city in February 1865, and Calhoun's iconography indeed became a target for retribution. His gravesite became something of an odd pilgrimage site where "[s]everal pieces of the large marble slab [were] battered off by curiosity seekers."[50] Additionally, a bust of the statesmen housed in the offices of the Charleston *Mercury*

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[48] "Calhoun," *Charleston Daily Courier*, March 18, 1862.

[49] Anna Ella Carroll, "John C. Calhoun a Secessionist," *New York Times*, July 23, 1861.

[50] "Calhoun's Grave," *New York Times*, May 7, 1865.

was intentionally destroyed. In fact, a war correspondent for the *New York Tribune*, while reporting on the destruction of Charleston, acknowledged complicity in the act of vandalism. The reporter explicitly referred to Calhoun as the "great enemy" of black Americans and admitted to encouraging a black family taking shelter on the premises to "break his bust."[51]

This war-time anecdote, later adapted into a poem in *Harper's Weekly*, indicates the consensus between Northern observers and Southern blacks regarding the legacy of Calhoun and his politics, as well as a real-time glimpse of Union memorialization efforts. The same article which referred to Washington as "The Father" referenced Calhoun and his idealogical proxies as mere "torpedoes in trowsers [*sic*]."[52] These efforts were buoyed by none other than Walt Whitman, whose transcribed conversation between injured veterans in *Specimen Days* asserted that Calhoun's monument was not some gravestone or planned statue but was instead: "the desolated, ruined south; nearly the whole generation of young men between seventeen and thirty [who had] been destroyed or maim'd; all the old families used up — the rich impoverish'd, the plantations cover'd with weeds, the slaves unloos'd and become the masters, and the

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[51] "The Fall of Charleston: A Negro Image-Breaker," *New York Tribune*, March 2, 1865; Brown, *Canon*, 66.

[52] "The Fall of Charleston," *New York Tribune*.

name of southerner blacken'd with every shame — all that is Calhoun's real monument."[53]

Meanwhile, the engine built by Mary Yates Snowden and her allies kept on churning. In late January and early February 1865, after Charleston had already been evacuated by the Rebels, the LCMA arranged another elaborate fundraising event, one of the most ambitious such efforts attempted in support of the Confederacy. Held in Columbia, South Carolina, the Great Bazaar was described as a "terrific *maelstrom*" where a "fearful whirlpool of human beings" converged on the state's Representative Hall and Senate Chamber. Lasting for four days and three nights, the event raised $150,000 from the sell of "articles rich, tasteful, and endless in variety."[54] The bazaar demanded an enormous sacrifice from Snowden, whose own mother lamented the reality that "between looking after Calhoun money, hospital stores and the Bazaar," her daughter "took no time to look after her children, and her own affairs."[55]

Despite Snowden's sacrifices and the LCMA's efforts, the war was rapidly reaching its conclusion. The three-day period from February 17 to February 20, 1865 saw remarkable tumult visited upon Columbia. Sherman's army marched into the city

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[53] Walt Whitman, *Complete Prose Works: Specimen Days and Collect, November Boughs and Goodbye My Fancy*, September 2005, The Project Gutenberg, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/8813/8813-h/8813-h.htm.

[54] "Columbia and the Bazaar," *Edgefield Advertiser*, February 1, 1865.

[55] Thomas J. Brown, "The Monumental Legacy of Calhoun," in *The Memory of the Civil War in American Culture*, eds. Alice Fahs and Joan Waugh, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 140.

from Savannah after siphoning it away from Confederate control. As Columbia had served as one of the Confederacy's final rail links and supply centers, its seizure was a particularly devastating death knell to the Rebel cause. The event was also a traumatic experience to the city's residents for another reason. A combination of factors — the Confederate decision to burn cotton to mitigate the overturning of resources, the breakdown of communication lines among Confederate troops, the gale-force winds that surged into the city from the north — quickly transformed the city into a tinder box. The materiality of Columbia's cotton economy — long the lifeblood of the city's industrial might — suddenly accelerated its downfall. As burning bales of cotton ruptured, flaming tufts were disseminated by the wind, making Columbia "illuminated with burning cotton," and engulfed by flame. By the time Sherman's troops departed, a third of the city lay in ashes and thousands were left homeless.[56]

The burning of Columbia became an important event in the canon of Southern suffering, but it also served as an inflection point for the LCMA. During the conflagration, Mary Yates Snowden fled the state capital, smuggling her organization's stockpiled assets with her. These assets included securities in municipal, state and railroad bonds, as well as bank stock. All together, they represented the organization's tangible progress in their decades-long project to realize a Calhoun monument.

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[56] Thom Bassett, "Was the Burning of Columbia, S.C. a War Crime?" *New York Times*, March 10, 2015, https://archive.nytimes.com/opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/03/10/was-the-burning-of-columbia-s-c-a-war-crime/?searchResultPosition=1.

Snowden's successful protection of the nest egg became a source of pride for the LCMA. In an echo of Dolly Madison's celebrated preservation of Washington's presidential portrait in 1812, Snowden's actions were mythologized by the LCMA as a model for Southern femininity. Numerous versions of the escape exist, but the crux of the story is that, driven by "her sacred trust"and aided by her sister, Snowden "stitched [the bonds] in the folds of her dress" thereby concealing them from sight and preventing the funds from falling into Union hands. In some versions of the escape, a loyal domestic slave (the "incorruptible… daughter of African descent") watches on in secret, supporting the sisters' effort in silence. The inclusion of the loyal slave trope connotes familiar Lost Cause apologia, an indication of the versatility and the potency of the LCMA's triumphant narrative. In another iteration, also emphasizing the complicity of unlikely actors, Snowden alleges personal protection from Sherman, himself.[57] In every known version, the sensational escape is dramatized by the implicit threat of frisking, exposure and sexual assault — an embellishment that contributed to existing sentiment which "imagined the war as an encounter between Northern military advantage and loyal, resourceful Southern women who appealed to the restraints of morality."[58]

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[57] Ladies Calhoun Monument Association, *A History of the Calhoun Monument at Charleston, South Carolina*, Kessinger's Legacy Reprints, (Charleston: Lucas, Richardson and Co., 1888) 14-15; Brown, "Monumental Legacy," 140 - 142.

[58] Brown, "Monumental Legacy," 142.

Though the LCMA's securities survived the war, much of Columbia lay in ruins. The old statehouse was leveled. Hiram Powers's statue, which had been housed within, was "dissolved into a quicklime puddle." While his neoclassical work had never been popular, the loss of a tangible piece of Calhoun's legacy was enough to jumpstart the LCMA's postwar commemorative efforts. Further invigorated by the salvage of their stockpiled reserves, the LCMA participated in a coordinated Southern effort that effectively fashioned victory from defeat. The organization concluded that their proposed monument's design "should consist of a pedestal of native granite, surmounted by a bronze statue of Calhoun, *similar to that of Powers's*, which formerly stood in the city-hall…"[59] Despite renewed enthusiasm among the state's civic elite, the LCMA had to confront the reality that Calhoun's legacy — his immaterial one — had also tarnished during the war.

"[T]he misfortunes of the war and the sufferings that have followed in its train have dulled in the minds of *the many* the admiration once universally felt for Mr. Calhoun," Yates Snowden admitted in a letter to Calhoun's son-in-law, Thomas Green Clemson, the eventual founder of Clemson University. Curiously, Snowden even began to exhibit some of this ambivalence herself. In fact, Calhouns's reputational malaise

[59] Brown, "Monumental Legacy," 142, emphasis added.

allowed Snowden to consider merging the LCMA's surviving funds with her other post-war philanthropic projects, including her more progressive ones.[60]

As president of the Ladies' Memorial Association of Charleston (not to be confused with the LCMA), Snowden applied her characteristic vigor by overseeing the organization of Memorial Day celebrations across the state, negotiating the repatriation and reinterment of Confederate remains in South Carolina, and even managing a home for widows, daughters, and mothers of fallen Confederate soldiers. This last commitment was the most consuming for Snowden, who shouldered the project with her sister, both women having been recently widowed themselves. The Confederate Home acted as a boarding house but also as a school for young women. In November 1869, the Confederate Home announced in its semi-annual report that it accommodated seventy-two women, thirty of whom had been placed in various schools or academies in the city. Over time, the home shifted in scope from primarily housing women to prioritizing the education of its younger members by founding a school of its own. This pivot from shelter to schooling created an opportunity for repurposing the Calhoun funds.[61]

In October 1873, perhaps in remembrance of the criticism of wasteful monuments from fifteen years earlier, Snowden began floating the notion of using LCMA funds to further develop the girls' school. Her plan essentially involved dedicating the school to

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[60] Brown, *Civil War Cannon*, 67 - 69, emphasis original.

[61] Brown, 70.

Calhoun as a monument of learning. The *Abbeville Press and Banner* strongly endorsed her proposal, urging a moratorium on "the building of costly piles of brass or stone." The paper doubled down, arguing that South Carolinians "owe[d] a higher duty to the living than to the dead," especially to the "widow and orphan [who] have higher claims upon us." The op-ed specifically invoked motherhood as a justification for the women's Calhoun school. In fact, as the paper's editorial board saw it, it was the women's capacity as "future mothers" that made them so valuable in "the restoration of our shattered Lares" and therefore worthy of subsidized education. The paper recognized the women less as students than as vessels to safeguard Southern heritage by producing and molding future generations of leaders and politicians. "It is *in* them," the paper proclaimed, "as *within* a holy shrine, that, in these days of dark and wide spread corruption, the flame of our pristine virtues must be cherished, to come forth at fitting time to purify our atmosphere and bid us rise again."[62]

But consensus regarding women's role in the reconstructed American South was sharply divided. In February 1874, "A Protest from Pendleton" was published in the *News and Courier*. The op-ep, supported by multiple signatories, disputed the notion that Calhoun's wife Floride would have supported the investment in women's education. Moreover, the protest letter claimed that while Calhoun's daughter and only surviving child, Anna Clemson, supported women's education *in general*, she "did not

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[62] "The Calhoun Monument Home," *Abbeville Press and Banner* via *Edgefield Advertiser*, October 30, 1873, emphasis added.

consider such an investment an appropriate monument" to her father.[63] Her husband, Thomas Green Clemson, was even more vehement in his opposition to the project. Although he firmly supported the white supremacist project of "cultivating to its utmost *our* superior intellectual faculties," he took offense at the deployment of Calhoun's name for a women's school. For Clemson, "Calhoun was peculiarly *manly,"* so applying Calhoun's name without special attention to his gender was simply a bridge too far for the "quintessential nineteenth-century Renaissance man."[64] "I must confess," Clemson wrote, "that there is something inappropriate attached in my mind, to the idea of making a *female* school a memorial to his memory." Clemson's blatant admission that public centers of learning were needed to perpetuate the Calhoun doctrine, but that women were unfit to benefit from such centers (even at a school planned and funded by a women's civic organization), reveals, as Brown notes, the "limits [and the tension surrounding] women's citizenship in the shadow nation of the Lost Cause."[65]

The *News and Courier* weighed in to the fray by reframing the debate through paternalism. The paper opined, rather awkwardly that, "all the boys in the State are not girls, the more the pity… In time the boys, also, may find there an education and a

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[63] "The Calhoun Monument: A Protest from Pendleton," *News and Courier*, February 11, 1874.

[64] Alma Bennett, *Thomas Green Clemson* (Clemson: Clemson University Press, 2009).

[65] Brown, *Canon*, 69, emphasis added.

support; but if the choice must be made… the girls have the first claim upon our care."[66] Despite supporters' attempts, the scholastic project had itself become a bit of a lost cause. When the women tried to push forward with the educational endowment, the LCMA's male advisory board stepped in by determining that the organization's founding charter stipulated for the creation of a literal monument instead, thus binding the LCMA to the creation of a costly pile of brass.

The project progressed in fits and starts over the next decade, but a few specific developments merit consideration. In 1876 the project accelerated with the formation of a contest to choose the sculptor. Observers quickly noted that "it would make Calhoun stir in his grave if he were sculptured by a Northern chisel." Moreover, observers felt that European artists could only design the monument "in a conventional or commercial way without any interest or spirit,"as "Europe… knows little of Calhoun, and cares less."[67] Despite this public sentiment, a coterie of backers from Philadelphia, Boston and New York — including Caroline Carson, the daughter of James Louis Petigru — ultimately guided the LCMA to select Albert E. Harnisch, a Philadelphia born and trained sculptor living in Rome.[68] (The involvement of Petigru's descendent signals a curious rebound to Calhoun's reputation as well as an early example of his use

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[66] "The Calhoun Memorial Fund," *News and Courier*, October 23, 1873.

[67] Fair Play, "The Calhoun Monument," *News and Courier*, August 17, 1877; Ladies Calhoun Monument Association, *History of the Monument*, 23.

[68] "Mercury and Turtle," The Met, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/11000.

for the sake of reconciliation.) In any case, Harnisch's design closely mimicked the proposal from twenty-two years earlier. The details of the design will be covered later in this chapter, but in short, Calhoun was to be placed atop a pedestal and encircled by allegorical figures in an arrangement of aesthetic and political grandeur.

However, before the project could proceed any further, it was derailed again by crisis. On August 31, 1886, at approximately 9:50 pm, the largest seismic event to ever hit the Eastern Seaboard rocked the Charleston area for roughly forty-five seconds. The initial rupture was followed by recurring waves of aftershocks, some of which lasted for years afterward.[69] Early shocks were felt as far afield as Boston, Chicago, Bermuda and Cuba. In the city itself, sixty people were killed by the earthquake and over 2000 buildings were damaged including: the Charleston City Hall, the College of Charleston's main building and library, the parapet of the *News and Courier* building, the copula of Mount Zion A. M. E. Church, the Bennett School, St. Michaels Church, the Charleston Orphan House, and White Point Garden. Property damages totaled between five and six million dollars, some 179 million dollars when accounting for

[69] Bruce Smith, "Charleston Still Shaking with Memories of 1886 Earthquake," *Los Angeles Times*, August 31, 1986, https://web.archive.org/web/20211130204710/https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1986-08-31-mn-14984-story.html.

inflation. Miraculously, and to some fatefully, “the unfinished base and pedestal of the [Calhoun] monument were not in the smallest degree hurt.”[70]

For the month after the earthquake, Marion Square played host to a different kind of communal experience. As roughly a third of the buildings in Charleston had been leveled, frightened Charlestonians congregated in Marion Square in search of safety and solidarity. Free from the threat of collapsing debris, the survivors constructed a tent village “made out of sheets, blankets, carpets, clothing and whatever else could be impressed into the service…” including, for the poorer residents, barrels. Both black and white Charlestonians sought refuge in the square, but were nevertheless segregated into different camps. From the earliest newspaper coverage of the catastrophe, the experiences of white and black survivors were catalogued separately, and oftentimes coded with both racial resentment and paternalism. While white residents were “impressed with the very serious nature of the situation,” black Charlestonians were "crazed with fear” or “were unrestrained and committed all manner of riotous and frenzied excesses.” Whenever racial harmony prevailed, it was credited to the “kind and loving regard between master and servant, mistress and maid…” rather than to the shared humanity of a traumatized town. However, to the credit of a battered, bruised,

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[70] LCMA, *History of the Monument*, 36; Katherine Harmon, “Observations: Top 10 Biggest East Coast Quakes on Record,” *Scientific American*, August 23, 2011, https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/observations/top-10-biggest-east-coast-quakes-on-record; “Historic Earthquakes,” U.S. Geological Survey, accessed on January 3, 2024 via waybackmachine, https://web.archive.org/web/20161225120612/http://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/states/events/1886_09_01.php.

and deeply unjust society, little instance of extreme violence in the aftermath of the earthquake has been noted.[71] In any case, the communal, yet segregated, experience in the square must have emphasized the location's significance to the LCMA. The following year, work on the monumental project resumed with expediency.

On March 18, 1887, as the state prepared for the "monster excursion" planned for the unveiling of Harnisch's statue, the LCMA's newly elected president, Mary J. Robertson, announced that the project's "end really seem[ed] in view." Palmetto trees still needed to be planted, and the ornamental figure of Justice, the only one of the quartet to be completed on time, would need to be installed before the ceremony, but a principal speaker had be chosen. Judge L. Q. C. Lamar, the first white Southerner to serve in a presidential cabinet since the war, had agreed to give the benediction. The fact that the LCMA chose him as speaker and invited "all within the limits of our State [and] all without its limits" to join in the celebration of an individual legacy that they now advertised as one "illustrious in the annals of our *whole country*," indicates a degree of national unity and reconciliation that had not been present twenty-nine years earlier at the groundbreaking ceremony.[72]

But it was not entirely smooth sailing. As the consecration day steadily approached, concern mounted over whether sufficient crowds would turn out. Critics

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[71] "After the Shock," *News and Courier*, September 3, 1886, 1.

[72] "Calhoun Day for Carolina," *News and Courier*, March 17, 1887; "The Noblest of Them All," *News and Courier*, March 19, 1887, emphasis added.

called for the addition of a soldier's parade to the festivities as a remedy. This development, sparked by the necessity of "infusing new enthusiasm" into the proceedings, further suggests a diminishment in the star power of Calhoun's legacy. When Calhoun's funeral parade marched through the streets of Charleston, his reputation alone was sufficient to trigger mass turnout, but suddenly observers doubted the same would happen again. This development put the LCMA in a difficult position. The organization had long been praised for its meticulous management of funds, but the well had finally run dry. When the ladies organization admitted that they lacked the additional funding necessarily to arrange the soldier's parade — and had chosen to resist the calls to raise more — local business leaders reacted forcefully. Deriding the decision as a misstep that "acted very much like a wet blanket," the city's business class decided to bypass the women's organization entirely.

"If the committee can't see its way to helping us get up a boom on Calhoun Day," lamented one King Street merchant, then "we've got to do it ourselves." Business leaders rallied around a petition to raise funds to amortize the cost of a soldier parade, and the Silcox building offered its space as free quarters to the visiting soldiers. Railroad companies even advertised reduced rates for soldiers of one to two pennies per mile each way, as well as special increased schedules. The combined strategy worked, and Calhoun day saw the arrival of soldiers in "solid phalanx." These collective efforts underscore how economic interests facilitated the construction of civic Southern

identity — and indeed supplanted motivations of regional memorialization. Evidently impressed by the coordinated influence of the post-war business class, the *News and Courier* quipped that "[t]here are, perhaps, no classes of the citizens who are more interested in the forth coming festivities than the merchant and industrial people of Charleston."[73]

Thanks to the attraction of parading soldiers, the event was back on track. Thirty-seven years after hosting his funeral procession, the city of Charleston assembled once again to cement the legacy of its "favorite son." Harnisch's statue was unveiled on Calhoun Day, April 27, 1887. Whether due to Calhoun's underestimated appeal or from the excitement spurred by the successfully crowdsourced military parade, the event was, by all available records, a complete success. The "immense throngs" of people were apparently packed so densely around the stage in Marion Square that individuals "could not possibly have escaped from their position of high privilege by any means short of a balloon, or a battery of artillery." Spillover crowds supposedly "looked out from behind the chimney tops [of buildings] or peered [out from] over the edges of the roofs…"[74]

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[73] "The Soldiers Not Wanted," *News and Courier*, March 29, 1887; "The Soldiers Are Coming!" *News and Courier*, April 6, 1887; "The Soldiers Will Come," *News and Courier*, March 31, 1887.

[74] "Calhoun Unveiled," *Pickens Sentinel*, May 5, 1887.

While no known evidence speaks to the contrary, it is certainly imaginable that the newspaper may have exaggerated the crowds. After all, the *News and Courier* was hardly an impartial actor in the event, having for days before the unveiling used its offices as an improvised will call where VIP's collected badges and tickets for the event. Moreover, while the newspaper had long reported on the developments of the LCMA for the sake of newsworthiness, many of these write-ups blurred into the realm of advertisements, hyping the project as well as reporting on it. The intimate coverage illuminates the role that Southern newspapers like the *News and Courier* played in fostering and propagating Southern civic identity in tandem with the creation of the Calhoun monument.

In any case, the *News and Courier* dutifully reported the unveiling ceremony in unprecedented detail, seemingly devoting the entirety of its April 27 cover page, above and below the fold, some six columns of text, to record the proceedings.[75] The front-page coverage even received some press of its own. "The issue of the *News and Courier* on the next day after the unveiling of the Calhoun monument was the finest specimen of newspaper enterprise that we have seen," the *Abbeville Press and Banner* gushed.[76] In fact, the front-page spread was even reprinted in part or in full by at least seven papers across the state, from the *Aiken Recorder* to the *Rock Hill Herald*, in a coordinated display

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[75] "Calhoun Unveiled," *News and Courier*, April 27, 1887.

[76] "The News and Courier," *Abbeville Press and Banner*, May 4, 1887.

of state-wide cohesion.[77] The coverage reveals that in addition to economic factors, multiple parallel threads regarding Southern (and American) civic and political identity, as well as gendered expectations and generational legacy, all converged during the proceedings, which were frequently and explicitly framed as a "tribute of Carolina's daughters."[78]

Repeatedly the LCMA was celebrated for its feminine (often motherly) membership whose dedication to civic engagement represented the apogee of Southern womanhood. The event also provided multiple opportunities for regional and racial pride, such as the moment just before the unveiling when the band played "Dixie," the satirical hymn born out of minstrelsy that served as the Confederacy's de facto national anthem. The music, "which the vast multitude [of the crowd] instantly recognized," was clearly intended to emphasize a common bond among the throngs of people in attendance.[79]

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[77] "Calhoun, Unveiling of the Monument," Condensed from the *News and Courier*, April 27, 1887; *Aiken Recorder*, May 3, 1887; "Calhoun Unveiled," *Barnwell People*, May 5, 1887; "Calhoun Unveiled," *Fairfield News and Herald*, May 4, 1887; "Calhoun Unveiled," *Laurens Advertiser*, May 4, 1887; "Calhoun Unveiled," *Manning Times*, May 4, 1887; "Calhoun Unveiled," *Pickens Sentinel*, May 5, 1887; "Calhoun Unveiled," *Rock Hill Herald*, May 5, 1887.

[78] "Calhoun Unveiled," *Pickens Sentinel*.

[79] Bilal Qureshi, "How 'Dixie' Became and Endured as an Anthem," *NPR*, January 6, 2019, https://www.npr.org/2019/01/06/682608032/how-dixie-became-and-endured-as-an-anthem; "Calhoun Unveiled," *Pickens Sentinel*.

While there is some discrepancy in the programing, the statue was at one point intended to be revealed with the help of four "baby unveilers," all descents of Calhoun who would have been held up by their fathers in a show of Southern parenthood. Whether or not this detail was included in the final ceremony, it is nevertheless evidence of the LCMA's effort to remind the audience of the necessity of safeguarding and transmitting their ideological aims to future generations.[80]

After the mayoral address, an ode by Esther Cheesborough, the LCMA's resident author, was delivered. The composition echoed many of the above themes; it also flatly curtailed women's ambition. Cheesborough's lyric poem reminded the audience that the LCMA's project was to be interpreted solely as an investment in masculine achievement rather than as an exercise of female influence. This message was articulated poignantly and explicitly in Cheesborough's final two stanzas: "We women ask no brighter fate / We seek no loftier fame / Than thus to link our memories / With his immortal name // While History weaves for him her crown / The fairest ever seen / Carolina's daughters long will strive / To keep the garland green." Despite having activated municipal and regional enthusiasm, despite having raised, invested, and safeguarded amble capital, despite having navigated numerous bureaucratic and administrative hurdles, the role of these women, as proudly articulated by their resident poet during the LCMA's crowning moment, was to tend to the garland, playing the

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[80] "The Eve of the Event," *News and Courier*, April 25, 1887, page one.

dutiful groundskeepers. Cheesborough's poem underscores that while the tension between women as civic leaders and women as submissive second-class citizens could not be resolved, it could be obscured under Calhoun's shadow. The same could not be said for Snowden's rejected institute for young women.[81]

The tension around female citizenship was not the only instance of competing interests at the unveiling. Strains of sectional and national identity also collided during the event, which closed ceremoniously with a nineteen-gun salute, fired in the direction of White Point Garden. Each of the gunmen, directed by Major George Bell, were "veteran members of the corps, all of whom paraded at the Calhoun funeral [procession] thirty-seven years ago." The above would suggest a continuity of confederate sectionalism, but Brown takes pains to stress that the political and military makeup of the event, while not in rejection of Confederate apologia, nevertheless strove to convey a sense of national reconciliation. Jefferson Davis and P. G. T. Beauregard, the Confederate general who had ignited the Civil War by attacking Fort Sumter, were both invited to the dedication, but so too was President Grover Cleveland, members of his cabinet, and even Clara Barton, the prominent Union activist and nurse. (Cleveland declined to attend the unveiling, but commended the LCMA for "the complete success of their efforts to fittingly commemorate the virtues and the services of their loved and honored son…") The diverse range of invitations reflects the murky reality of

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[81] "Calhoun Unveiled," *Pickens Sentinel*.

postbellum Southern identity, stuck between wistfulness for the Confederacy and the necessity of reconciliation.[82]

The selection of Lucius Q. C. Lamar as principal orator further signaled the LCMA's intersectional efforts. At the time of his speech, the Confederate veteran was actively serving as Grover Cleveland's Secretary of the Interior. His selection by the LCMA revealed a strong endorsement of reconciliation.[83] Lamar used the opportunity to share his vision for unity, one that characterized Calhoun as a fierce protector of both the people of South Carolina but also of the Union. "He was taken from us like a summer-dried fountain," Lamar lamented, "when our need was greatest, when his intellectual power, his administrative talent, his love of peace, his devotion to the Constitution, might have averted collision."[84] And yet, as mentioned above, Lamar delivered his speech after his audience's communal rendition of "Dixie", an indication that this tension at the heart of postbellum Southern identity was never totally resolved.

Moreover, the effort to reposition Calhoun as a national figure contrasted with his popular legacy — or as the *News and Courier* put it — the revisionism had upset "the eternal order of things." In fact, days before the ceremony, the newspaper had described Calhoun as "a great man [who] was not a man of the nation. He was a man of the State,

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[82] LCMA, *History of the Monument*, 126.

[83] Brown, *Canon*, 78.

[84] LCMA, *History of the Monument*, 73.

of the State of South Carolina."[85] These differing visions of Calhoun — those recalled by Lamar, depicted by Harnisch, memorialized by the press, and represented by the marching veterans — each existed in a separate plane, and all of them collided together on Calhoun Day. Perhaps this incongruity within the statue would have festered over time, but it was not kept around long enough for anyone to find out.

Despite the apparent triumph of the LCMA, Harnisch's statue remained for less than a decade. Not even seven years after their triumphant consecration, the LCMA commissioned a new statue; Harnisch's work was melted into scrap metal. The reason Harnisch's statue was decommissioned is both complex and elusive to trace, but much of the criticism of his work appears to have stemmed from its seemingly innocuous design. Harnisch sculpted Calhoun rising from his seat — the chair a nod to the authority and grandeur of state power — as "the cloak he usually wore" trailed behind him in a suggestion of movement and dynamism. His right index finger was outstretched in a gesture meant to convey "the act of addressing the Senate."[86] This transitory moment was intentional, representative of Calhoun "both as a man of thought, conventionally seated, and a man of action, customarily standing."[87] The fifteen-foot likeness was scaled "of heroic size," resting on a thirty-six-foot pedestal of native Carolina granite. Promoters of the statue initially insisted that the artist could

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[85] "Calhoun Day," *News and Courier*, March 18, 1887, page 4.

[86] "Calhoun Unveiled," *Pickens Sentinel*.

[87] Brown, *Canon*, 81.

"afford to rest his reputation on this work, and South Carolina can equally afford to be proud of the good taste in the selection of this artist for this work."[88]

As noted earlier, Harnisch's statue also evoked earlier design proposals. Just like the design presented twenty years earlier, Calhoun was intended to be flanked by four supplemental allegorical figures, though Harnisch had modified the roster. While Truth and Justice remained in his lineup, Wisdom and Firmness had been cut in favor of adding statues symbolizing the Constitution and History. Harnisch drew inspiration from Antonio Tantardini and Odoardo Tabacchi's statue of Camillo Benso in Milan, perhaps intimating a parallel between the two statesmen in the historical canon. "As Cavour had expanded the small kingdom of Piedmont into a unified Italy, Calhoun's defense of South Carolina's sovereignty provided the foundation of the Confederacy," Brown surmises.[89] Design-wise, the Cavour statue is also adorned with an allegorical figure. Pheme, the Greek goddess of fame, sits on the base of the pedestal, carving Cavour's name into the stone.[90]

Despite this seemingly inoffensive design, public opinion soured quickly, settling primarily on Harnisch's execution. LCMA records indicate that critics found fault with nearly everything. Deeming it "heavy and without animation," these critics specifically

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[88] "Statue to John C. Calhoun," *Anderson Intelligencer*, January 3, 1884.

[89] Brown, *Canon*, 81.

[90] "Monument to Camillo Benso, conte di Cavour (Milan)," Wikimedia Commons, accessed on January 3, 2024, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Monument_to_Camillo_Benso,_conte_ di_Cavour_(Milan).

excoriated the statue's pointing finger gesture as an eyesore that "amounted to a deformity." Additionally the chair, from which Calhoun was depicted rising, was an aesthetic misstep that dominated the display and resulted in "a statue of an arm-chair, with a tall gentleman standing beside it."[91] Finally, the coat slumped on the chair, while advertised as "the cloak he usually wore," was in fact an anachronism, as Prince Albert coats hadn't come into fashion until after Calhoun's death, which evidently offended many observers' historical sensibilities.[92]

Certainly these critiques damaged the statue's public reputation, but perhaps more insightful into the decision to replace the statue is the criticism and ridicule generated from the black Charlestonian community. While their voices are expectedly difficult to reconstruct, there exists a handful of second-hand accounts in the *News and Courier.* One in particular, serves as an astonishing, if limited, barometer of black perspective. On July 5, 1889, after making a "matutinal visit to the police station," an unnamed male reporter boarded a bobtail canary streetcar bound for Broad Street. Sharing the car with him were two black women, one referred to as a "country cousin" by the reporter and the other rather harshly deemed "an antiquated Manma." When the streetcar turned onto Calhoun street, the women began remarking on the Calhoun

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[91] Quoted in Brown, *Canon*, 83.

[92] Karen Fields, "What One Cannot Remember Mistakenly," in *History and Memory in African-American Culture*, eds. Genevieve Fabre and Robert O'Meally, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 157.

monument while the reporter eavesdropped. The remarkable conversation offers a fascinating glimpse into their outlook on the statue.[93]

"Wha' da n**ger stanning up on da rock pile," asked the younger woman, evidently identifying Calhoun's monument as a black person. "Goway chile," her companion corrected, "enty yer know daman ain' no n**ger?" The older woman explained onboard the streetcar, in front of the reporter, that the monument was of "ole Caalhune [who had] dun cum back from de debbil."[94]

This older black woman then recited an alternate origin story for the monument, one that addressed Calhoun's legacy within the evocative context of African-American folklore. Describing how Calhoun had "sojourn[ed] een hell awhile," the woman noted that the former statesmen had been "bunt so much da he body tun inter brass." Then, after his body had been metallized by the fires of hell, it had been discovered "een da phosphate field" and quickly brought "een da city an' put… up dar ter skeer de po n**gers." The woman also recalled the Calhoun Day celebration when "[d]e buckra sojers cam out ter zaad de corpse." While the white spectators, or "buckra," had been eager to get in line to "kiss [Calhoun's] feet," the black observers had gotten "skeered

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[93] "The Man on the Monument: A Country Cousin Listens to the Tale of Woe of an Antiquated Manma and the History of the Calhoun Monument — Slavery and Freedom Compared by an Experienced Person," *News and Courier*, July 6, 1889, 8.

[94] "Man on the Monument," *News and Courier*.

an' [tried to] run away een a hurry." Their fear was apparently warranted, according to the older women, as "tree n**gers [had] drop[ped] dead," after the unveiling.[95]

As the tram navigated the city streets, the elder continued educating her ward, even offering an interpretation of the monuments design. According to the quasi griot, Calhoun was standing rather than sitting because after "ole man Lemar" had finished his benediction, the statue had momentarily come back to life in order to "shake hans wid de crowd." The revival had cost him though, as Calhoun had "got[ten] paralysis een he… couldn't set [back] down."[96]

In addition to the empty chair, Calhoun's gesture, the extended finger, held particular significance in her analysis of the statue's design. It was a gesture "pintin' down ter hell tellin' de white buckra ter sen' de n**ger down dar." Alternatively, the woman considered that the pointed finger could also be a message to white Southerns that they should "hole de n**ger down an' put he een slabery agin." But either way, it was an explicitly racist vulgarity that needed to be addressed. "[H]e finger gwinne cum off," she directly announced to her companion. "Ef he finger stay ds much longer dis here chile, dis same ole Delialah Seabrook gwine ter tek it down wid er brick." The clarity of this conviction is astonishing. Even more so upon reflection that the woman had described the statue as the actual embodiment of Calhoun — indeed one that could

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[95] "Man on the Monument," *News and Courier*.

[96] "Man on the Monument," *News and Courier*.

conceivably reanimate at any moment — rather than as a mere representation of him. With this line of thinking, the removal of the statue's finger held the same emotional and symbolic weight as severing the former Vice President's index finger — a potent threat for a morning tram commute.[97]

Would an elderly black woman really endorse vandalism toward a statue of South Carolina's "great apostle" in broad daylight, on a public streetcar, in full view of a white male reporter in 1889? No explicit records for Delialah (or Delilah) Seabrook appear to exist. Her name is not included among lists of enslaved people on William Seabrook's Edisto Island plantation or his John's Island estate — however, a Delia Seabrook does appear to have lived and worked on White Point Plantation.[98] More importantly, for what reason, and to what end, would this anecdote serve the *News and Courier* if it were not broadly-speaking true? While the column closes with Delilah Seabrook's dubious condemnation of "'mancipation times [as] wussen dan slabery time," the rest of her testimony is unmistakably critical of Lost Cause paternalism as well as Calhoun memorialization.[99] Seabrook hates the statue because she hates Calhoun, and she is profoundly unafraid to acknowledge this in public. It is difficult to

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[97] "Man on the Monument," *News and Courier*.

[98] "Slaves at the Edisto Island Plantation of William Seabrook, 1860," Fold3, accessed January 4, 2024, https://www.fold3.com/memorial/111581445/slaves-in-the-estate-of-william-seabrook-edisto-island-sc-1860/stories; "Delia Seabrook (bef. 1837)," WikiTree, accessed January 4, 2024, https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Seabrook-1246.

[99] "The Man on the Monument," *News and Courier*.

ascertain what ulterior motive the *News and Courier* could have in publishing this account. Thus, while the record may not be entirely free of suspicion, it nevertheless acts as a crucial example of black resistance to Calhoun's statue. Moreover, it is not the only one.

"We used to carry something with us, if we knew we would be passing that way, in order to deface the statue — scratch up the coat, break the watch chain, try to knock off the nose — because he looked like he was telling you there was a place for 'n**ger' and 'n**gers' must stay there," writes Mamie Garvin Fields in her memoir *Lemon Swamp*. According to Fields, the vandalism was a deliberate and successful act of resistance: "Children and adults beat up John C. Calhoun so badly that the whites had to come back and put him way up high, so we couldn't get to him." Fields boldly contends that the decades-long project of the LCMA — to codify and concretize white dominion through the installation of Harnisch's Calhoun monument — was ultimately undone by the persistence and effectiveness of black vandalism.[100]

Fields' recollection is typically viewed with some degree of well-intentioned skepticism — even by her granddaughter, who authored an article exploring the tension between ruthlessly evaluating memory as an exercise in scientific specificity versus probing memory as an artistic endeavor. After all, Fields was recording memories some ninety years removed, recalling a forty-seven-foot-tall statue that had been replaced by

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[100] Quoted in Fields, "What One Cannot Remember Mistakenly."

the time she was eight years old. Nevertheless, her claim of forceful resistance, often presented as unverified or uncorroborated, fits nicely together with Delialah Seabrook's testimony, and the two might be grouped together for future historical inquiry.[101]

In addition to these physical manifestations of black resistance, there was also an informal campaign to undermine the symbolic significance of the statue. This subtle effort is much more clearly established in the archive. "The suburban and city colored citizen is much perplexed by the state of Justice lately placed on the base of the Calhoun monument," the *News and Courier* reported. "In fact," the paper admitted that "the impression prevails generally among the non-reading colored population that the statue of Justice is that of Mrs. Calhoun."[102] While it's difficult to attribute intentionality retroactively, the cleverness of this particular gibe should be recognized. As Brown contends, the "LCMA leaders proud of their efforts to advance white women's commemorative citizenship could only have been appalled at the female subservience implicit in the caricatured interpretation of the woman at Calhoun's feet.[103] Moreover, the moniker of "Calhoun and he wife" reinforced the incompleteness of the design. By forging a link between the standing Calhoun and the seated personification of Justice beneath him, the joke acted as a mockery that emphasized the three allegorical figures that were still missing — as well as the failure of the LCMA to see the design through to

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[101] Fields, "What One Cannot Remember."

[102] Untitled, *News and Courier*, June, 2, 1887.

[103] Brown, *Canon*, 85.

completion. But perhaps the most impressive aspect of the ridicule is the plausible deniability built into the seemingly innocent observation of Calhoun's marriage. In any case, "the nickname greatly distressed the ladies of Charleston."[104] Not long after these reports of black Charlestonians "perplexity" regarding the statue of lady Justice emerged, the statue was abruptly replaced.

On November 25, 1894, the *New York Times* reported that "[a] new monument to the memory of the great Southern statesman, John C. Calhoun, [was] to be erected in Charleston, S. C., to take the place of the one unveiled with elaborate exercises in that city seven years ago." Noting only that the Harnisch's statue had been the subject of "considerable dissatisfaction," the article announced the selection of New York sculpture artist, J. Massey Rhind, as part of a last-ditch effort to rectify the LCMA's beleaguered project. Rhind's new design would take a different approach, resting the new sculpture atop a "tall, graceful column," some ninety feet in height.[105]

The news was announced in the South a bit more cheerfully but nonetheless opaquely. A followup to the *Times* article was penned in the *News and Courier* three days later that welcomed the arrival of such "pleasant news." Under the headline of "A Good

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[104] Fields, "What One Cannot Remember," 157.

[105] "In Memory of Calhoun," *New York Times*, November 25, 1894. It should be noted that the revised design adds circumstantial weight to Field's claim. As Fields remarks, "He is so far away now until you can hardly tell what he looks like." Indeed, as Field continues, "[n]o explanation is offered for the remarkable disproportion of line that the pillar creates nor for the fact that if you want to study Calhoun's features with your eye, or with that of a camera, you are interfered with by the sun and sky." (Fields, 156-158).

Riddance," the paper basked in the knowledge that the city's "unsightly and unfinished" monument would soon be replaced, but never bothered to elaborate as to why the previous statue had become so stigmatized. The LCMA was largely omitted from the column, only receiving a passing mention as the entity "bearing the cost of the [replacement] monument."[106]

Rhind's statue was properly installed in June 1896. When the new statue usurped its predecessor, there was a "great deal of favorable comment" but otherwise no other fanfare or consecration ceremony to mark the occasion — an indication of the embarrassment and perhaps also the exhaustion felt by the LCMA. True to the end, the LCMA successfully and skillfully managed their funds, partially by withholding payment to Harnisch for the uncompleted allegorical figures and partially by liquidating the disgraced work to offset the expense of the new statue. Inexplicably and ironically, the only known part of the despised statue to somehow survive the purging — other than the granite pedestal base — is the much derided finger.[107]

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[106] "A Good Riddance," *News and Courier*, November 27, 1894, page 8.

[107] Robert Behre, "Behre: The Long, strange odyssey of Charleston's John C. Calhoun monument," *Post and Courier*, June 13, 2020, https://www.postandcourier.com/opinion/commentary/behre-the-long-strange-odyssey-of-charlestons-john-c-calhoun-monument/article_ad97a374-ab60-11ea-80fa-d748c4a41dff.html.

CHAPTER III: CALHOUN-FALL[108]

In the twentieth century, as so much of the world burned, life in Charleston was comparatively quiet, especially in regards to the Calhoun monument. This is not to say that life was entirely uneventful in the Holy City. The potent winds of change that were sweeping across the nation swept through Charleston all the same.[109] Post-Reconstruction racial tension reared its ugly head during the race riots of 1919, in which at least three black men were killed.[110] Two decades later, as the burgeoning civil rights movement was beginning to take shape, 1,000 factory workers at the American Tobacco Company's Charleston cigar factory, the majority of whom where black women, went on strike to protest harsh working conditions and racial discrimination.[111] (Reportedly, "We Shall Overcome" was even used as a protest anthem, emphasizing the racial dynamic at play.[112]) This labor strike was elegantly mirrored twenty years later as some

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[108] What I wouldn't give to claim this title as my own. Alas, see: Peter H. Wood, "Calhoun-Fall: The rise and fall of Charleston's John C. Calhoun statue, a monument to white supremacy," *Harvard Magazine*, June 29, 2020, https://www.harvardmagazine.com/2020/06/calhoun-fall.

[109] These changes provide crucial context for understanding Charlestonians' shifting perspectives on Calhoun, the Confederacy, the Civil War, and of course, slavery.

[110] "Few Charleston Men Participated in Race Rioting," *New York Tribune*, May 13, 1919, 9.

[111] "Union Announces 900 Negroes Return to Cigar Plant Today," *News and Courier*, October 5, 1945.

[112] Ted Mellnik, "The remarkable history of Charleston's racial divide, as told by the city's silent statues," *Washington Post*, June 24, 2015.

500 hospital workers, again mostly black women, walked off the job to protest racially discriminatory policies at two of the city's major hospitals.[113] (This time, "remember Denmark Vesey" was chanted.[114]) The two strikes operate as historical bookends, symbolically demarcating the city's primary period of civil rights activism.

In-between the bookends, a spattering of notable, if largely forgotten, protest events unfolded in the city. From coordinated boycotts to a nonviolent sit-in organized by high-school students, the city even hosted a speech by Martin Luther King Jr. as well as a march led by his wife, Coretta Scott King.[115] The diligent activism paid off in the final quarter of the century, which saw the elections of Joseph P. Riley Jr. and Herbert Fielding. Fielding became the state's first black state legislator since Reconstruction, while Riley would serve an unprecedented ten terms as the city's mayor, and is widely credited for a number of meaningful social justice initiatives during his forty-year

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[113] George W. Hopkins, "Charleston hospital workers' strike," *South Carolina Encyclopedia*, https://www.scencyclopedia.org/sce/entries/charleston-hospital-workers-strike/; Harlan Green, "A City-Shaking Strike," *Charleston Magazine*, March 2019, https://charlestonmag.com/features/a_city_shaking_strike; James T. Wooten, "Racial Overtones Mark Strike of Charleston Hospital Workers," *New York Times*, April 5, 1969.

[114] Quoted in Blain Roberts and Ethan J. Kytle, "Looking the Thing in the Face: Slavery, Race, and the Commemorative Landscape in Charleston, South Carolina, 1865-2010," *The Journal of Southern History* 78, no.3 (August 2012): 639-684.

[115] Adam Parker, "The sit-in that changed Charleston," *Post and Courier*, August 2, 2013; Kat Chow, "Denmark Vesey and the History of Charleston's 'Mother Emanuel' Church," NPR, June 18, 2015, https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2015/06/18/415465656/denmark-vesey-and-the-history-of-charleston-s-mother-emanuel-church.

tenure. In 1982, Riley appointed the city's first black police chief, and in 2000, while wearing a bulletproof vest, he lead a five-day march to Columbia to protest the statehouse's flying of the Confederate battle flag.[116]

All the while, Marion Square, under the watchful eye of Rhind's Calhoun column, had its status cemented as the city's foremost community cultural space. Over the course of the century, the six-and-a-half acre square hosted events as varied as presidential speeches, industrial fairs, religious revivals, military parades, anti-abortion marches, anti-drug rallies, AIDS commemorations, farmers markets, MLK memorials, and even a brief "hover over" exhibition performed by Amelia Earhart in 1931.[117] The heavy traffic eventually took its toll on the terrain. A 1998 article lamenting the square's

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[116] Richard Fausset, "Charleston Mayor, Champion for Integration, Prepares to Bow Out," *New York Times*, November 15, 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/16/us/charleston-mayor-champion-for-integration-prepares-to-bow-out.html?searchResultPosition=1.

[117] "Taft to Address the Children. He Will Speak on Citadel Green and in Colored School," *News and Courier*, November 6, 1910; "Liberty Parade This Afternoon, Soldiers, Marines and Bluejackets will March from Marion Square, Ladies will use Tents, Those on Marion Square Near Calhoun Monument for the Liberty Loan," *News and Courier*, October 25, 1917, 12; "400 Persons Attend God, Country Rally," *Rock Hill Herald*, July 6, 1970, 9; "Anti-Abortion Groups to March," *Rock Hill Herald*, January 20, 1979; Eric Frazier, "King celebration to open Sunday," *Post and Courier,* January 7, 1995, 3; Robert Behre, "Civil War Week to expand with an event for everyone," *Post and Courier*, March 15, 1995, 18; Nadine Parks, "Thousands rally against drugs Red Ribbon Week tries to pull in more parents," *Post and Courier*, October 22, 1995, 23; Lynne Langley, "'Innocent victims' focus of AIDS day," *Post and Courier,* November 30, 1997.

poor condition and growing need for maintenance, concluded that the square had simply been "loved to death."[118]

Although Marion Square acted as the beating heart of Charlestonian life during an era that saw unprecedented levels of social justice activation, Rhind's Calhoun statue — the de facto centerpiece of the square as well as the city — received surprisingly little pushback. Aside from minor reports from the first quarter of the century decrying the "practice of small boys throwing pebbles at the [column's base]" as well as some brief concern that certain vandals may have been "maliciously inclined," nothing significant presents in the historical record. Indeed, all available information indicates that Rhind's monolith managed to remain — both physically and metaphorically — above the fray.[119]

Then again, perhaps it was simply a matter of time. Considering the civil rights movement primarily contested against, and secured victories over, the Jim Crow regime of systemic racial segregation, the arena of historical memory was necessarily and understandably vacated. Historians Blain Roberts and Ethan Kytle characterize this portion of the twentieth century, in which black Charlestonians prioritized tangible legal gains over protests aimed at the commemorative landscape, as the "long silence" from Reconstruction to the post-civil rights era.[120] This long silence came to a deafening

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[118] Robert Behre, "Marion Square simply loved to death by city," *Post and Courier*, June 8, 1998.

[119] Roberts and Kytle, "Looking the Thing," 661.

[120] Roberts and Kytle, 671.

end in the last decade of the twenty century, setting the stage for contentious battles over memory and memorialization in the twenty-first century.

The 1990's saw a tonal shift in the battle over historical memory in the Old South as demonstrated by the concurrent campaigns to memorialize Arthur Ashe on Richmond's Monument Avenue, to remove the Confederate battle flag from the South Carolina State House in Columbia, and to erect a monument in Marion Square to Denmark Vesey, Charleston's most controversial symbol of black resistance to slavery. While the Calhoun statue remained largely unchallenged — an indication that either the statue figured lower in the priorities of activists, or its removal was frankly unimaginable — these milestones nevertheless paved the way for its eventual dismantling. Most pertinent is the campaign to memorialize Denmark Vesey.

Vesey, a freedman and carpenter, was accused, convicted and executed for plotting a slave revolt in Charleston — a la Toussaint L'Ouverture — in the spring of 1822. Although the veracity of the "Denmark Vesey Slave Conspiracy" has since come into question, the event nevertheless instigated a fierce backlash from the city's white ruling class. In addition to "shattering white confidence in the docility of the enslaved, giving evidence of slaves' desire for freedom and inspiring newly prohibitive regulations…" the incident spurred the formation of an arsenal to prevent further slave

revolts, now known as the Citadel.[121] Vesey's legacy remains complex, a polarizing figure in contemporary Charlestonian memory, as the campaign to memorialize him revealed.

This campaign began in the late 1990's, when Henry Darby, a community activist and future high school principal, organized the Spirit of Freedom Committee (SFC) to spearhead the creation of a Denmark Vesey memorial. Vesey was of particular significance to Darby and his committee because, as Charles S. Johnson has observed, "Vesey represent[ed] the spirit of independence for which the founding fathers of America are praised." However, unlike the founders, Vesey was "too violent to be acceptable to the white community… [leaving] little chance for Negro youth to know about him at all."[122] Indeed, Darby, a proud Charlestonian, hadn't been introduced to Vesey's legacy until studying at Morris College, a historically black school in Sumter, South Carolina — over 100 miles away from the scene of Vesey's resistance. Thus, Darby was partially motivated by his own embarrassment of being found "ignorant of what this man had done in the very place I was born and raised."[123]

Much in the way that Mary Yates Snowden sought to channel Calhoun's legacy as a vehicle for interpreting history and defining citizenship, Darby ventured to do the

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[121] James O'Neil Spady, "Power and Confession: On the Credibility of the Earliest Reports of the Denmark Vesey Slave Conspiracy," *William and Mary Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (April 2011): 287-288. doi: 10.5309/willmaryquar.68.2.0287; *Looking the Thing*, 677.

[122] Quoted in Roberts and Kytle, "Looking the Thing."

[123] Roberts and Kytle, 639.

same for Vesey. Unlike the LCMA, which spent years deciding on a location for their monument, Darby and the SFC knew immediately where to break ground: Marion Square. The close proximity to the city's increasingly renown historic district, coupled with the symbolism of situating Vesey near his parish, while also placing him in the vicinity of both Calhoun as well as the Citadel that was founded as a direct result of his plans, made Marion Square "the most profound place" for Vesey's legacy to be concretized.[124] While the project enjoyed the endorsement of Mayor Riley, it was met with a groundswell of resistance from other corners of the city, evidenced by a letter to the editor of the *Post and Courier* that emphasized Vesey's endorsement of violent resistance. The letter claimed that Vesey's "grand scheme" was "for nothing less than a Holocaust."[125] The situation was further complicated by the fact that, the owners of Marion Square are not the city, but instead two militias, both dating to the nineteenth century. Ultimately, the square's owners offered Darby a compromise. Vesey could be memorialized in Marion Square, but only if he was included among other historical figures in a general monument to slavery and Native Americas. The SFC declined the proposal, interpreting the ensemble design as a ploy to "blunt the impact of Vesey."[126] This exchange reveals a begrudging but real willingness of the city to diversify its

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[124] Roberts and Kytle, 677.

[125] Quoted in Roberts and Kytle, 680.

[126] Roberts and Kytle, 678.

commemorative landscape, so long as the unvarnished, horrific realities of American slavery remained muted.

By the turn of the century, the SFC had selected a backup location, at Hampton Park, another site of contentious debate over historical memory. The former mass gravesite for Union soldiers had been repurposed in 1904 as Hampton Park, in honor of former governor and Confederate General, Wade Hampton. The securement of the park as an alternate location for the statue was a victory for Darby and the SFC, even though the location sat outside the epicenter of the city's historical landscape. However, the process also reveals how the bureaucratic and political system often resulted in incrementalism. Vesey could be included as part of a broader ensemble monument or placed in a secondary location. In a similar fashion, the Confederate battle flag may have — after intense pressure campaigns and boycotts — been removed from the State House in the summer of 2000, but it remained on the Capitol grounds, flying beside a Confederate monument. Moreover, this arrangement had hinged on the passage of the South Carolina Heritage Act, a remarkably expansive protection against the removal of additional vestiges of the Confederacy. Critics later observed that the Heritage Act became something of a Faustian bargain as it "helped shield numerous symbols of white supremacy from removal."[127] Nevertheless, at the turn of the century,

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[127] Roberts and Kytle; Ehren Foley, "The historical preservation law that obscures history," *Washington Post*, August 12, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2021/08/12/historic-preservation-law-that-obscures-history/.

Charlestonians were indeed grappling with the equity of their commemorative landscape, even if it was gradual.

Reexaminations of American national storytelling were forestalled the following year by the September 11 attacks, an event so cataclysmic to the American psyche that roughly a third of Americans reported difficulty sleeping in the days after the attacks. Perhaps more salient to the topic at hand, nearly eighty percent of Americans acknowledged displaying an American flag by October 2001, an extraordinary show of patriotism.[128] (Data on the display of Confederate flags in the wake of 9/11 as a sign of solidarity is regrettably, unavailable.) Much like the Cold War, the War on Terror precipitated a remarkably resolute consensus of what America represented by casting the American identity in opposition to an enemy, dubbed by the Bush Administration five months after the attacks as the "axis of evil." In the aftermath of the deadliest terrorist attack on American soil, the effects of which, in the words of the Pew Research Center, "transcended age, gender, geographic and even political differences," critiques of the national narrative and commemorative landscape were put on hold.

The post-9/11 consensus thawed gradually and then all at once, as a series of polarizing, incendiary and tragic events kept race relations in the forefront of modern American discourse. In 2008, the election of Barack Hussein Obama, the nation's first

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[128] Hannah Hartig and Carroll Doherty, "Two Decades Later, the Enduring Legacy of 9/11," Pew Research Center, September 2, 2021, https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2021/09/02/two-decades-later-the-enduring-legacy-of-9-11/.

black president, hinted at the possibility of a post-racial future while ushering in a barrage of revolving controversies pertaining to race, xenophobia, and citizenship. Four years later, as Obama neared the end of his first term, these forces combusted after a deadly altercation in Sanford, Florida.

On February 26, 2012, George Zimmerman, a 28-year old Hispanic American and neighborhood watchman, shot and killed 17-year-old Trayvon Martin inside the gated community where Martin was staying. The killing of Martin was compared by many, explicitly and intentionally, to the lynching of Emmett Till in 1955.[129] President Obama himself situated the moment within the struggle for civil rights, saying that "it's important to recognize that the African American community is looking at this issue through a set of experiences and a history that doesn't go away."[130] In the wake of Zimmerman's acquittal, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement emerged to confront white supremacy and systemic racism in the justice system, marking a new chapter of the civil rights era.[131]

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[129] John Blake, "Trayvon's Death: Echoes of Emmett Till?" CNN, March 24, 2012, https://www.cnn.com/2012/03/24/us/trayvons-death-echoes-of-emmett-till/index.html.

[130] "Remarks by the President on Trayvon Martin," White House, July 19, 2013, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/07/19/remarks-president-trayvon-martin.

[131] Suzanne Gamboa, "Florida shooter's race a complicated matter," *Associated Press*, March 29, 2012, archived at: https://archive.sltrib.com/article.php?id=53818460&itype=CMSID.

This new era quickly saw the Supreme Court strike down two provisions of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the mandates for preclearance, which prompted Representative John Lewis to accuse the Court of putting "a dagger in the heart of the Voting Rights Act of 1965," by enabling areas of the country to "go back to another period."[132] This decision was followed a year later by the tragic deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner, two black men both killed by white police officers, resulting in increased national recognition of BLM.

Then in 2015, the world turned to Charleston when Dylann Storm Roof, a 21-year-old white supremacist and neo-Nazi, entered a Bible study at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, the same church that Denmark Vesey helped found, and opened fire with a .45-caliber Glock pistol.[133] Roof shot ten people, all of them black, and killed nine of them. The Emanuel Nine massacre was the deadliest mass shooting in South Carolina history and, as Jamelle Bouie wrote in *Slate*, a result of centuries-long racist tropes and fears.[134]

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[132] Jeff Zeleny, "John Lewis: Court's Decision Puts 'Dagger in Heart of Voting Rights Act,'" ABC News, June 25, 2013, https://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2013/06/courts-decision-puts-dagger-in-heart-of-voting-rights-act/.

[133] Joshua Eaton, "Charleston mass murderer got his gun because of background check gaps, internal report shows," Roll Call, October 10, 2019, https://rollcall.com/2019/10/10/charleston-mass-murderer-got-his-gun-because-of-background-check-gaps-internal-report-shows/.

[134] Jamelle Bouie, "The Deadly History of 'They're Raping Our Women,'" *Slate*, June 18, 2015, https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2015/06/the-deadly-history-of-theyre-raping-our-women-racists-have-long-defended-their-worst-crimes-in-the-name-of-defending-white-womens-honor.html.

Roof explained the murderous rampage as a consequence of Zimmerman's trial. According to Roof, the media attention resulting from Martin's death three years prior was the catalyst leading to his own radicalization. "The event that truly awakened me was the Trayvon Martin case," he declared in his digital manifesto. "It was obvious that Zimmerman was in the right. But more importantly this prompted me to type in the words 'black on White crime' into Google, and I have never been the same since that day."[135]

Roof's website, *The Last Rhodesian* — a thinly veiled endorsement of white minority rule in present day Zimbabwe — also noted that Charleston had been chosen for the attack because "it is [the] most historic city in my state." This romanticization of historicity indicates that Roof not only sought to return to an earlier era of racial subjugation, but that he recognized the importance of controlling the commemorative landscape. Photos of Roof on his website, waving a Confederate battle flag and brandishing a handgun — presumably the .45-caliber Glock — reenforce this notion that Roof imagined himself as a crusader for the Confederacy.[136]

The audacious brutality of the attack, coupled with Roof's avowed white supremacy and proud adoption of Confederate and antebellum iconography,

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[135] Frances Robles, "Dylann Roof Photos and a Manifesto Are Posted on Website," *New York Times*, June 20, 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/21/us/dylann-storm-roof-photos-website-charleston-church-shooting.html.

[136] Robles, "Dylann Roof Photos."

precipitated a profound reevaluation of the commemorative landscape. Support for, and crucially tolerance of, Confederate memorialization suddenly collapsed, as Roof's actions pointedly invalidated the "heritage not hate" position that many Confederate apologists trumpeted.[137] The bloodshed prompted Governor Nikki Haley to reverse years of prevarication concerning the Confederate battle flag flying on the statehouse grounds to assert five days after the massacre that she would not "allow this symbol to divide us any longer. The fact that people are choosing to use it as a sign of hate is something we cannot stand."[138]

Removing the battle flag burned up most of the oxygen in the political discourse. Consequently, the Calhoun statue was largely ignored — though not entirely. In fact, the monument was notably vandalized with three words spray painted onto the base of the column. A recessed plaque reading "Truth Justice and the Constitution" was edited with

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[137] Rebecca Klar, "Poll: Majority supports removing Confederate statues from public places," *The Hill*, June 17, 2020, https://thehill.com/homenews/news/503226-poll-majority-supports-removing-confederate-statues-from-public-places/.

[138] Jeremy Borden and Mark Berman, "S.C. Gov. Haley calls for removal of Confederate flag near the state Capitol," *Washington Post*, June 22, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2015/06/22/south-carolina-officials-and-activists-call-for-removal-of-confederate-flag-near-the-state-capitol/; Aaron Blake, "The story of Nikki Haley and the Confederate flag," *Washington Post*, February 15, 2023, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2023/02/15/nikki-haley-confederate-flag-timeline/.

the words "AND SLAVERY," while Calhoun's nameplate was amended with the word "RACIST."[139]

The Heritage Act prevented more radical revisions to the commemorative landscape in South Carolina, but a ripple effect nevertheless radiated from Charleston across the country.[140] Haley's actions were joined by her counterpart in Alabama, Governor Robert Bentley, who one week after the attack, removed a series of confederate flags and banners from the Montgomery Capitol grounds.[141] In New Haven, Calhoun canonization came under fire as protests against the naming of Calhoun College, a residential undergraduate college at Yale University, picked up steam. These activists even acknowledged being "galvanized by the massacre in Charleston and the removal of the Confederate battle flag outside the South Carolina State House."[142]

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[139] Philip Weiss, "John C. Calhoun statue vandalized in downtown Charleston," Live 5 News, June 23, 2015, https://www.live5news.com/story/29386563/john-c-calhoun-statue-vandalized-in-downtown-charleston/.

[140] Ehren Foley, "The historical preservation law that obscures history," *Washington Post*, August 12, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2021/08/12/historic-preservation-law-that-obscures-history/.

[141] Charles J. Dean, "Alabama Gov. Bentley removes Confederate flags from Capitol grounds," AL.com, June 24, 2015, https://www.al.com/news/2015/06/confederate_flag_removed_from.html.

[142] Noah Remnick, "Yale Grapples With Ties to Slavery in Debate Over a College's Name," *New York Times*, September 11, 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/12/nyregion/yale-in-debate-over-calhoun-college-grapples-with-ties-to-slavery.html?searchResultPosition=5.

Meanwhile, in a nearly thematic piece of foreshadowing, a statue of Robert E. Lee, located in the center of a small park in Charlottesville, Virginia, was vandalized with three words of its own: "Black Lives Matter."[143] Two years later, the same statue was the subject of a city council hearing in which a packed house of over a hundred community members determined the statue's future. After listening to testimony, the Charlottesville City Council decided by a margin of 3-2 to remove the monument and thereby prevent "the harm that the statue's presence would continue to inflict on [the Charlottesville community] well into the future."[144] Sadly, that harm was not entirely prevented.

In response to the Richmond City Council's decision, and in recognition of the ongoing shift in commemorative sensibilities across the Old South, a reactionary group of far right-wing neo-Nazis, white supremacists, and Ku Klux Klan members poured into the city in August 2017 to protest the monument's removal. Participants in the "Unite the Right" rally carried tiki torches while chanting "Sieg hail," "blood and soil,"

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[143] "Robert E. Lee monument in Va. vandalized with 'black lives matter,'" ABC7 Chicago, July 1, 2015, https://abc7chicago.com/robert-e-lee-statue-charlottesville-vandalized/820850/.

[144] Maggie Servais, "City Council votes to remove Robert E. Lee statue," *Cavalier Daily*, February 7, 2017, https://www.cavalierdaily.com/article/2017/02/city-council-votes-to-remove-robert-e-lee-statue.

and "Jews will not replace us." At one point, they even gave the Nazi salute.[145] The vulgar rally quickly descended into violence as rallygoers and counterprotestors clashed with pepper spray, urine-soaked balloons, and clubs, among other weapons. Tensions tragically climaxed when James Fields Jr., a 20-year-old bipolar and schizoid neo-Nazi, drove his Dodge Challenger into the crowd of counterprotestors injuring 19 people and killing 32-year-old counterprotestor Heather Heyer.[146]

The "Unite the Right" rally, like the Emmanuel Nine massacre, had a galvanizing effect in the rethinking of Confederate memorialization. The explicit white supremacy and overt hatred on display revealed an undeniable danger lurking behind the commemorative landscape, and prompted a renewed push from activists across the country. In Charleston, where the Heritage Act continued to deter more substantial efforts, a compromise emerged in the form of annotation. For Rhind's Calhoun statue in Charleston, this meant adding an explanatory plaque not unlike the graffiti from two years earlier. The Historical Commission of Charleston, tasked with composing the

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[145] Dara Lind, "Nazi slogans and violence at a right-wing march in Charlottesville on Friday night," *Vox*, August 12, 2017, https://www.vox.com/2017/8/12/16138132/charlottesville-rally-brawl-nazi; Dara Lind, "Unite the Right, the violent white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, explained," *Vox*, August 14, 2017, https://www.vox.com/2017/8/12/16138246/charlottesville-nazi-rally-right-uva.

[146] Neil MacFarquhar, "The Charlottesville Rally Civil Trial, Explained," *New York Times*, October 25, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/charlottesville-rally-trial-explained; Hawes Spencer, "A Far-Right Gathering Bursts Into Brawls," *New York Times*, August 13, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/13/us/charlottesville-protests-unite-the-right.html.

supplementary language by Riley's successor, Mayor Tecklenburg, suggested contextualizing the statue as "a relic of the crime against humanity… [which] remains standing today as a grave reminder that many South Carolinian's once viewed Calhoun as worthy of memorialization even though his political career was defined by his support of race-based slavery."[147]

As typical with compromises, the language essentially satisfied no one. Critics from the left and right found fault with the caption, with some arguing that no words could justify its continued existence, while others found the language condescending for not conceding that "slavery was technically legal at the time" and for effectively "issuing an indictment against the white population of 19th century South Carolina" who "are long since dead and unable to speak for themselves." Still others criticized the project for wasting tax dollars, for "taking history out of context," for attempting to "put lipstick on a pig," or for "assum[ing] that the architecture and opulence of the monument itself [was] not the problem." Crucially, the loaded text also overlooked the reality that many South Carolinian's continued to view Calhoun as worthy of memorialization. These critics demanded a new inscription that aimed to "denounce his white supremacist views while also describing his background as a distinguished

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[147] Abigail Darlington, "Charleston committee to cinder new Calhoun statue plaque: 'relic of the crime against humanity,'" *Post and Courier*, November 1, 2017.

politician who served as a prominent U.S. Senator and Vice President of the United States."[148]

Revised language was proposed, edited, re-contested, and then seemingly shelved. An article published in the *Post and Courier* some seventeen months later noted in passing that a "formal plaque ha[d] not been voted on, and discussion at the City Council level ha[d] stalled." Although city officials appeared to punt any further decision on the revised language plaque, community activists picked up the slack. The Make It Right Campaign, a collective of artists and counterculturists, maintained public pressure by hosting a series of demonstrations and rallies in Marion Square. These activists and community organizers protested the statue even when they saw their success as unlikely and their resistance as insufficient. "It's not going to be easy, because old ideas are hard to get rid of, especially in a place like Charleston," admitted one attendee. Campaign director Kali Holloway echoed this sentiment when she revealed

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[148] Abigail Darlington, "Charleston History Commission wrestles line by line with language for revisionist Calhoun plaque," *Post and Courier*, November 1, 2017; Noah Feit, "White supremacy wording proposed for Calhoun monument angers SC Secessionist Party," *The State*, January 11, 2018; Brian Hicks, "Charleston is in a no-win situation," *Post and Courier*, January 17, 2018; Ashleigh Lawrence-Sanders, "Black Charleston and the Battle over Confederate Statues," *Black Perspectives*, January 29, 2018.

that even she didn't anticipate a statue which had "been up for more than 100 years [to] come down in 100 days."[149] But the pace of history eludes us all.

In the summer of 2020, as anti-Trump animosity and pandemic anxiety festered in the background, racial tensions erupted in the foreground. Footage of George Floyd's death, another black man killed at the hands of a white police officer, went viral across social media platforms, reigniting the BLM movement. The disturbing circumstances of Floyd's murder — officer Derek Chauvin knelt on Floyd's neck for an uninterrupted nine minutes and twenty-nine seconds while Floyd repeatedly stated that he could not breathe and at one point even cried out for his mother who had passed two years prior — were compounded by their unambiguity. And while questions of nuance or context may have plagued previously recorded police killings, Floyd's death was categorically murder. This undeniable instance of police brutality tapped into a level of anger and resentment, triggering a degree of collective catharsis unprecedented in scale.

Somewhere between fifteen and twenty-six million Americans marched, protested, or rioted in the summer of 2020, and a record number espoused support for

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[149] Kalyn Oyer Koyer, "They helped bring down Silent Sam. Their new target: Charleston's Calhoun monument," *Post and Courier*, April 18, 2019; Mikaela Porter, "'It's art activism': Charleston artists gather at Calhoun monument, urge its removal," *Post and Courier*, May 17, 2019, updated September 14, 2020, https://www.postandcourier.com/news/its-art-activism-charleston-artists-gather-at-calhoun-monument-urge-its-removal/article_adc13c2a-7817-11e9-84f5-aba85f1a5ad9.html.

the BLM movement.[150] The *New York Times* noted that support for BLM ballooned more in the first two weeks of protests than it had in the previous two years. On June 13, the paper recognized the aftermath of Floyd's death as "one of the most explosive trials of American racism in modern times," one that extended to "rural, conservative and majority white communities."[151]

This included Charleston, where the *Post and Courier* chronicled "the worst rioting [the city had] seen in over a century."[152] The fallout was substantial enough to cut through the bureaucratic gridlock of the Heritage Act. Six days after Floyd's murder, an online petition calling from the removal of Rhind's Calhoun began circulating. By June 5, it had already amassed 6,400 plus signatures.[153] The petition argued that "[h]istory is important to remember, but not all history should be celebrated… We have

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[150] Larry Buchanan, Quoctrung Bui and Jugal K. Patel, "Black Lives Matter May Be the Largest Movement in U.S. History," *New York Times*, July 3, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/03/us/george-floyd-protests-crowd-size.html.

[151] Audra D. S. Burch, Weiyi Cai, Gabriel Gianordoli, Morrigan McCarthy and Jugal K. Patel, "How Black Lives Matter Reached Every Corner of America," *New York Times*, June 13, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/06/13/us/george-floyd-protests-cities-photos.html.

[152] Sara Coello, "Charleston police, SLED steer protesters away from King, Broad streets, arrest a few," *Post and Courier*, September 26, 2020, https://www.postandcourier.com/news/charleston-police-sled-steer-protesters-away-from-king-broad-streets-arrest-a-few/article_230178c2-0027-11eb-994a-3353f1129f9e.html.

[153] Fleming Smith, "Sparked by protests, campaigns renew to remove Calhoun Monument from Marion Square," *Post and Courier*, September 14, 2020, https://www.postandcourier.com/news/sparked-by-protests-campaigns-renew-to-remove-calhoun-monument-from-marion-square/article_09fb3ae0-a66b-11ea-a37e-3742194576e3.html.

felt this way for a long time, and the current national climate has inspired us to take action."[154] Twelve days later, on the five-year anniversary of the Mother Emmanuel massacre, Mayor Tecklenburg, after conveniently discovering a loop hole in the Heritage Act, called for the removal of Rhind's statue as part of "a new and more equitable chapter of [Charleston's] history."[155] On June 23, the Charleston City Council voted unanimously to dismantle the statute.[156] The following day, after 17 hours of sawing, cutting, chiseling and sluicing, the Calhoun statue was severed from its 115-foot-tall perch above the city and lowered to the ground by crane.[157] Reporters noted that in the midst of the demolition, as spectators sang songs and cheered, nearby church bells rang out over the commotion, playing to the tune of "Amazing Grace."[158]

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[154] Sloan Miler, "Peacefully replace Calhoun Monument & rename Calhoun Street," Change.org, https://www.change.org/p/mayor-tecklenburg-peacefully-replace-calhoun-monument-rename-calhoun-street. (accessed February 29, 2024) The petition collected a total of 18,843 signatures.

[155] Rick Rojas and Giulia McDonnell Nieto del Rio, "5 Years After Church Massacre, Charleston to Remove Symbol of Slavery," *New York Times*, June 19, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/17/us/charleston-sc-shooting-calhoun-statue.html.

[156] Ray Rivera, "City Council approves resolution to remove John C. Calhoun statue from Marion Square," Live 5 News, June 23, 2020, https://www.live5news.com/2020/06/23/charleston-city-council-expected-vote-removing-john-c-calhoun-statue-marion-square/.

[157] Gregory Yee, "Why taking Charleston's John C. Calhoun statue down took 17 hours," *Post and Courier*, June 26, 2020, https://www.postandcourier.com/news/why-taking-charlestons-john-c-calhoun-statue-down-took-17-hours/article_3d47ba54-b7e6-11ea-afba-47cadc3b626e.html.

[158] Grace Beahm Alford, "John C. Calhoun statute taken down from its perch above Charelston's Marion Square," *Post and Courier*, June 24, 2020.

CONCLUSION

The meandering, inchoate question that precipitated this study — the question of Southern identity as it pertains to the commemorative landscape — remains frustratingly elusive. The Marion Square Calhoun represented numerous, often explicitly contradictory ideas. In turn, it embodied the dream of an independent Southern slavocracy as well as the desire for harmonious national reconciliation. It was a display of white supremacist dogma and an opportunity for black resistance in the form of ridicule and vandalism. It symbolized the perseverance and ingenuity of a women's civic organization, while also undermining women's educational investment. It was a commitment to urban development and very basically, a show of pride in South Carolina's former statesmen. In short, identities were forged in conversation and in confrontation with the statue of Calhoun, complicating the effort of determining any single takeaway.

This complexity of meaning is not unique to Charleston's Calhoun statue. John M. Hartvigsen, president of the North American Vexillological Association, articulated this mutability with regards to the Gadsden ("DONT TREAD ON ME") flag. The historical American flag, which originated from Benjamin Franklin's "Join or Die" cartoon, has recently been appropriated by anti-government, alt-right and white supremacist groups. The association has tainted an otherwise unobjectionable piece of

Americana, because, as Hartvigsen surmises, "[f]lags very much have the meaning of the individual who is displaying it, or seeing it."[159]

No doubt, the same was also true of the Calhoun statue, which from the outset had a far more hateful association than the Gadsden flag. The statue's defenders often downplayed Calhoun's defense of slavery to focus on his broader political career. They might have argued that slavery was legal or even commonplace at his time, or that his Charleston monument, unlike many Confederate statues across the country, wasn't built *explicitly* or *intentionally* to resist Reconstruction policies or refute civil rights gains. Even so, it certainly transmitted those messages to countless black Charlestonians who lived under its shadow. After all, Calhoun stood for white supremacy, which indelibly linked his monument to the bloodshed caused by Dylann Roof, James Fields, and Derek Chauvin, providing the final push that activists needed to bring it down.

As for what its fall portends, it is a tricky endeavor to interpret the monumental concessions of the last 10 years. On one hand, as Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor writes in the *New Yorker*, "[r]emoving these artifacts is only an initial step in addressing the long-standing and substantively more consequential effects of systemic racism." However, while the removals of Calhoun, Robert E. Lee, the Confederate battle flag, etc., were all part of "the low-hanging fruit of symbolic transformation," they were still a meaningful

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[159] Rob Walker, "The Shifting Symbolism of the Gadsden Flag," *New Yorker*, October 2, 2016, https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-shifting-symbolism-of-the-gadsden-flag#:~:text=The Gadsden flag is one,backdrops; the Pine Tree flag.

"rejection of racist symbols [which had] become important tools for the white-supremacist fringe of the Republican Party, full of contemporary as well as historical meaning."[160] Indeed, changes to the commemorative landscape in Charleston remain limited in scope — the Confederate Defenders of Charleston monument is still standing on the Battery after all — but they have nevertheless signaled a profound shift in civic sensibilities.

Revealingly, the 1998 *Post and Courier* article that discussed upcoming maintenance to the square — the one that diagnosed the space of having been "loved to death" — also speculated on the status of the monuments in the square. While some areas of the park were at risk to be demolished, the paper concluded that the Calhoun monument "obviously will remain."[161] What a difference a few decades can make. In the span of twenty-two years, the prospect of the statue's removal went from inconceivable to actuality.

Thanks to the diligent efforts of centuries of activists, playing the long game while also sensing and seizing the political possibilities of the moment, Charleston is no longer a city with a monument of Calhoun; instead, it is a community with a statue of Denmark Vesey. And that, in its own right, is a kind of revolution.

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[160] Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, "Did Last Summer's Black Lives Matter Protests Change Anything?" *New Yorker*, August 6, 2021, https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/did-last-summers-protests-change-anything.

[161] Robert Behre, "Marion Square simply loved to death by city," *Post and Courier*, June 8, 1998.

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