Friedrich Nietzsche's Three Kinds of History: Confronting the Confederate Past

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In the year 2020, countless memes circulated the internet to depict the world's trials and tribulations. Ranging from the COVID-19 pandemic to the Black Lives Matter movement to the U.S. presidential election, people have used humor to cope with their pain, trauma, and loss. Humor is deeply personal and individual, but it also brings people together to share a laugh or exchange a smile. Now more than ever people need humor to remind them that they are all in this life together as history unfolds before their eyes; moreover, they can use humor as a tool to confront and engage with the past. Thus, the power of history is not to be taken lightly, and Friedrich Nietzsche attests to this in his text *On the Utility and Liability of History for Life*. He discusses three kinds of history: monumental, antiquarian, and critical,[1] and he asserts that both he and other people should "only wish to serve history to the extent that it serves life."[2] This paper will examine the removal of statues commemorating the Confederacy in the context of three kinds of history, and it will argue that the removal of Confederate statues best aligns with Nietzsche's critical history and is the best way for history to serve life.

The issue of the removal of statues commemorating the Confederacy experienced a resurgence in the national media and on a local level in 2020 amidst a visible increase of racism in the United States. Prior to the Black Lives Matter movement and protests against racism toward Black people in the U.S. and around the world, the COVID-19 pandemic also sparked an increase of racism toward Chinese and Asian people. Racism directed toward different people should not be compared, but an underlying connector in both events is former U.S. President Donald Trump and his hateful rhetoric toward Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC).[3] During his term, he encouraged white supremacy and xenophobia to run rampant, and the debate about whether to remove statues commemorating the Confederacy has re-entered the U.S. mainstream alongside these harmful ideas. This debate is a matter of Nietzsche's three kinds of history, and the background of these three important U.S. and worldwide events sets the stage for its examination. These events show that history is an ongoing process through which one has lived and continues to live, and that demands constant working and reworking via critical inquiry and thought.

This paper will address the removal of Confederate statues, but it is important to note that the secondary sources it will analyze primarily use the term "monuments". According to Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, a statue is "a three-dimensional representation usually of a person, animal, or mythical being that is produced by sculpturing, modeling, or casting."[4] A monument, meanwhile, has multiple definitions, three of which are applicable to this paper: "a lasting evidence, reminder, or example of someone or something notable or great," "a distinguished person," and "a memorial stone or a building erected in remembrance of a person or event."[5] Therefore, I classify 'statue' as a subcategory of the broader three 'monument' definitions because depending on the statue, it can embody the meaning of one definition, all three, or a combination of them. I will use both terms separately and interchangeably throughout this paper because 'statue' is the wording from the paper prompt and 'monument' is the wording used in most of my sources.

Finally, before this paper begins to analyze Nietzsche's three kinds of history as they relate to the removal of statues commemorating the Confederacy, I will offer basic context about the history of Confederate statues and monuments. The Confederacy began when eleven states seceded from the United States in 1860, and the Confederacy ended when it lost the Civil War against the Union in 1865.[6] Though its existence was short-lived, its legacy lives on in Confederate statues and monuments. The building and erection of these statues and monuments occurred "within a few years after the Civil War" and "as late as 1980."[7] John Winberry considers a variety of reasons for the construction of Confederate statues and monuments, including the thought to preserve the memories of those who died fighting for Confederate armies;[8] to recognize the revival of people's lives and livelihoods in the South as an integrated and equal part of the United States;[9] to amplify the 'Lost Cause' theme that swept the South;[10] and to react to the fleeting wave of Radical Populism with the reinvigoration and reassertion of the 'Lost Cause' theme.[11] Despite these reasons, Confederate statues and monuments are a testament to the past of the Confederacy which was rooted in the enslavement of Black people. As a result, they do not serve *all* life but instead serve history and thus require thorough analysis via Nietzsche's three kinds of history.

In his text, *On the Utility and Liability of History for Life*, Nietzsche describes the three kinds of history in this order, monumental, antiquarian, and critical. This paper, however, will attend to them out of order and begin with antiquarian history. Antiquarian history "pertains to the living person … as one who preserves and venerates."[12] It is focused on the preservation of one's origins and personal history as well as collective history.[13] Antiquarian history serves life because it passes on the knowledge of one's native land and customs to new generations, and it helps people acclimate themselves as well as avoid the conflict that accompanies one's sense of curiosity to explore foreign places and obtain better things.[14] For all its positive aspects, though, antiquarian history also has its drawbacks. It has a limited scope of view and struggles to situate a single thing within a greater context; in other words, "it regards everything to be equally important, and consequently the individual thing to be too important."[15] The revered past is the measure against which objects are valued, and the introduction of new things or ideas is seen as an affront to antiquarian history.[16] Hence, "antiquarian history understands only how to *preserve* life, not how to create it,"[17] and the possibility that looms resembles a world in which antiquarian people cling onto the past while refusing to change and grow to better themselves and their society.

In the case of the removal of Confederate statues, many people who do not support the removal express the view of antiquarian history. For example, a journal article written for *Sculpture Review* claims "to look at the subject [the removal of Confederate monuments] from an objective and non-biased point of view," but in the same sentence, also states that its "core belief [is] that a work of art merits preservation."[18] It is highly likely that such a journal would support the antiquarian view of history despite its assertions of objectivity because it considers sculptures and other forms of art (like statues and monuments) to be tangible pieces of history. They should not be removed because they are remnants of the past and offer insight into the venerable Confederate lifestyle and beliefs. Although the article offers ways to preserve the monuments such as relocation to a museum or a park,[19] it does not explicitly address the racism, oppression, and enslavement of Black people and its intimate ties to white supremacy as the

ideology that is preserved and venerated. Instead, the article regards the monuments as "record[s] [of] individuals or events which, at the time, were thought to be important in the growth and development of this country."[20] It reduces the oppression and enslavement of Black people to aspects that were 'important in the growth and development of this country,' without acknowledging the violence, pain, and harm that white people perpetuated; as such, it invalidates the experiences of many Black Americans while validating the experiences of many white Americans. The history of the Confederacy is served, but the Black American life is not.

The relocation option that the journal article from *Sculpture Review* proposed, however, is not the only method of antiquarian history as it relates to the debate about the removal of Confederate statues. Alteration and reinterpretation are two other approaches that an article from *History News* suggests coincide with antiquarian history. The two are actually quite similar because they both endeavor to create a space for dialogue and consideration of complex viewpoints. The means of alteration and reinterpretation include "the simple listing of names"[21] and the inclusion of "rails or plaques," respectively.[22] Alteration is a bit more straightforward, but the success of reinterpretation hinges on many factors. There must be a willingness of people who are memorialized, both the oppressed and the oppressors, to come together in dialogue and seek a consensus about the historical effects, scars, and new interpretation/reinterpretation.[23] It can often be too painful or simply not physically possible for this to happen. Additionally, both methods still preserve the past despite these additions and changes to the statues and monuments. Even though this article discusses the enslavement of Black people as the reason for secession and civil war, this contextualization does not make its antiquarian view of history acceptable. In fact, alteration and reinterpretation still perpetuate harm against Black Americans because as long as statues that commemorate the Confederacy still exist, they are reminders of the old and stifle the creation of the new. A list, rail, or plaque may add complexity to the statue, but the essence of it as a symbol of racism, oppression, enslavement, and white supremacy remains. Therefore, Confederate statues and monuments must be removed in accordance with critical history.

The preservation and veneration of this remaining essence and symbol of the past, a core feature of antiquarian history, segues well into the discussion of Nietzsche's monumental kind of history. Monumental history "pertains to the living person … as one who acts and strives."[24] One who follows monumental history "is involved in a great struggle and … needs exemplars, teachers, and comforters"[25] to help them achieve their goals. In order to find these people, however, one must pivot from present-day contemporaries to consult great people of the past.[26] The "monumental person" is a person of action, and they strive to accomplish their goals, attain fame, and serve as a great past figure to whom future generations can aspire.[27] One of the greatest appeals of monumental history is the way it links together "the great moments in the struggles of individuals … in one single chain."[28] It inspires people to pursue greatness because they see that greatness was "at least *possible* at one time."[29] This pursuit of greatness, however, is not without its shortcomings. Notably, it tends to ignore the individuality of past events and the particular historical context in which causes and effects occurred.[30] As a result, the past, in an attempt to promote itself "as exemplary and worthy of emulation"[31] in the present, may become generalized, decontextualized, and distorted.[32] The framing of the past as it is contextualized in monumental history, then, lends itself to the possibility that monumental people choose to look *only* to the past for guidance about how to achieve greatness and ignore present-day particulars.

The secondary source this paper will analyze in respect to monumental history is the same source that it will analyze in respect to critical history. Therefore, I have decided to pair

monumental history and critical history together. This pairing is also relevant because the two are closely connected in terms of the year 2020, the events that unfolded, and the accompanying attitude shifts. In *On the Utility and Liability of History for Life*, Nietzsche uses a plant analogy to describe how each kind of history—monumental, antiquarian, and critical—thrives and "is valid in only one soil and in one climate."[33] Thus, different ages require the implementation of different kinds of history. This paper argues that critical history should be employed to address the issue of the removal of statues commemorating the Confederacy. Of course, critical history, like the other two kinds of history, also has its pros and cons, but overall, it is best suited to serve life in the year 2020.

      Critical history is the third kind of history that Nietzsche details, so it is fitting as the final type of history that this paper will cover. Critical history "pertains to the living person … as one who suffers and is in need of liberation."[34] Its main concern is "the strength to shatter and dissolve a past" because "every past is worthy of being condemned" as it is a product of "human affairs: human violence and weakness."[35] Humans are flawed beings, so "everything that comes into being is *worthy* of perishing."[36] At the same time, Nietzsche cautions against "passing judgement on and destroying a past."[37] One should approach condemnation of the past warily because it may give people an inflated or false sense of their place in history. After all, judgment, condemnation, and destruction of a past "does not alter the fact that we are descended from them [historical aberrations]."[38] Hence, the past, present, and future continue to be deeply linked to one another. In order to successfully execute critical history in the service of life, one must "cultivate a new habit, a new instinct, a second nature, so that the first nature withers away."[39] The critical person must be open to the possibility "that every victorious second nature will become a first nature"[40] to work toward and champion present-day liberation.

      Erin Linn-Tynen's book section is the secondary source which will be examined in the context of monumental and critical history. It identifies heritage and identity as key factors in the power structures of oppression and empowerment.[41] Heritage "is a representation of the past," but it only gains value and meaning via acknowledgement by society.[42] It is not a static thing, and it can change as society and the narratives it wishes to embrace change.[43] Identity "is formed through the process of defining and differentiating oneself with and from others."[44] The tool by which identity can be oppressed, empowered, or affirmed is heritage.[45] Linn-Tynen situates heritage and identity as they relate to monumental history within the context of a 2015 shooting carried out by a white supremacist. She then later explains how heritage and identity can be used to support critical history and the quest for social justice in the United States.

      Regarding monumental history, Linn-Tynen uses the example of white supremacist Dylann Roof who committed a shooting on June 17, 2015 at Emanuel A.M.E. Church in Charleston, South Carolina. Major news outlets confirmed that Roof targeted the church because of its high number of Black worshippers.[46] He also ran a website that displayed a racist manifesto and images of himself at various Confederate heritage sites and slavery museums.[47] Roof used monumental history not to serve life but to destroy it. He identified past examples of greatness as the time of the Confederacy and the enslavement of Black people, as well as used racism to justify his violence. Horrifically, Roof is just one example of white supremacist hate crime shootings. Other events similar to this have sparked outrage and fueled the debate about the removal of statues and monuments commemorating the Confederacy. The statues and monuments are symbols of Confederate heritage, but they are complicated because some people

still associate Confederate heritage with southern heritage. Therefore, this debate challenges and unsettles the identity of some white southerners. Although heritage and identity instill in people a sense of belonging, they also risk perpetuating harm toward others and thus must be reconsidered and positively reworked.

This reconsidering and reworking can be done using Nietzsche's critical history. Linn-Tynen pinpoints the vast number of Confederate statues and monuments and the lack of Black American representation in either domain as evidence of the "overwhelmingly imbalanced and skewed … narrative"[48] that still exists today. She suggests that altering the way in which heritage is recognized is an essential step toward the inclusion of diverse identities, especially those who have been historically oppressed and excluded from national and local conversations around heritage and identity, such as Black Americans.[49] Therefore, the removal of Confederate statues and monuments is critical because it judges, condemns, and shatters a past that valorizes white supremacy, racism, and enslavement of Black people. The removal is also critical because in the pursuit of liberation and social justice, it fosters a second nature to replace a first nature shrouded in racism, oppression, and white supremacy. The first nature is the ideology upon which the Confederacy was founded and from which Confederate statues and monuments gain power and legitimacy. The second nature, then, must be rooted in equality, equity, and shared humanity that identifies only one race—the human race. The U.S. can only begin to heal from its past Confederate wounds by remembering its history and endeavoring to serve not history but *all* life instead.

As Nietzsche mentions, each kind of history flourishes in a certain soil and climate. This paper demonstrates that the soil and climate of 2020, in which the issue of the removal of statues commemorating the Confederacy grew tremendously, demands critical history. The 2016 election of U.S. President Donald Trump ushered in a time of monumental history which lauded xenophobia, white supremacy, and racism. In the years following, particularly 2020 and 2021, major events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the BLM movement, and the U.S. presidential election, have demanded a switch to critical history. Critical history aligns with the ideology behind the removal of statues commemorating the Confederacy: healing and growth cannot occur while a violent and hate-filled past persists in the present age and into the future. Confederate statues and monuments must be removed; those who advocate critical history will help create a world in which all life is served and is able to blossom.

Notes

1. Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Utility and Liability of History for Life," in Unfashionable Observations, trans. Richard T. Gray (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 96.
2. Nietzsche, 85.
3. The BIPOC Project, 2021, https://www.thebipocproject.org/.
4. "Statue," in *Merriam-Webster.Com Dictionary* (Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2020), https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/statue.
5. "Monument," in *Merriam-Webster.Com Dictionary* (Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2020), https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/monument.
6. History.com Editors, "Confederate States of America," *History.com*, August 21, 2018, https://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/confederate-states-of-america.
7. John J. Winberry, "'Lest We Forget': The Confederate Monument and the Southern Townscape," Southeastern Geographer 55, no. 1 (2015), 20. For the former quote, "as late as 1980," I would also like to add that I found an even more recent installation of Confederate monuments. This CNN.com article was published in 2017: https://www.cnn.com/2017/08/18/us/new-confederate-monuments/index.html.
8. Winberry, 26.
9. Winberry 26, 27.
10. Winberry, 27. The 'Lost Cause' theme was a response to the changes the New South experienced and its subsequent economic depression. It was founded on the nostalgic belief that it was better to return to the past and memorialize the Southern cause and identity because the present and future seemed dire and unfulfilling. The idea that people in the South highly lauded was that although they lost the Civil War ('Lost Cause'), it was a just effort.
11. Winberry, 28. The 'Lost Cause' theme resurfaces as a way to divide white and Black people, while reuniting white people—regardless of socioeconomic status—under a common white experience dating back to the Confederacy. Confederate monuments served as reminders of the past and were erected at courthouses. Poll taxes, literacy tests, and white primaries were all tools of oppression that white people used to politically target and harm Black people.
12. Nietzsche, "On the Utility and Liability of History for Life," 96.
13. Nietzsche, 102, 103. Personal history refers to one's own life, family, and lineage, while collective history refers to one's place in a larger societal, cultural, and social context like one's city or even one's country.
14. Nietzsche, 103-104.
15. Nietzsche, 104-105.
16. Nietzsche, 105.
17. Nietzsche, 106.
18. Carol Dauber, "Confederate Monuments: Removal, Defacing, or Destruction," Sculpture Review 69, no. 3 (September 1, 2020), 18-19.
19. Dauber, "Confederate Monuments: Removal, Defacing, or Destruction," 21. I think relocation to a park could be a potentially decent idea, but I understand why many museums refuse to integrate Confederate statues and monuments into their existing collections or refuse to curate a collection solely for Confederate statues and monuments.

Both options present a myriad of challenges, and I imagine the backlash from opposing sides to be particularly harsh.

20. Dauber, 19.
21. Modupe Labode and Kevin M. Levin, "Reconsideration of Memorials and Monuments," *History News* 71, no. 4 (2016), 9. The example for this method entailed listing the names of those who fought for the United States Colored Troops and those who fought for the Union to show people's different motivations for fighting in the Civil War.
22. Labode and Levin, 9. This method emphasizes that memorialization is a complex process. Furthermore, the opportunity to engage in discussion may lay the foundation for greater mutual understanding moving forward.
23. Labode and Levin, 9.
24. Nietzsche, "On the Utility and Liability of History for Life," 96.
25. Nietzsche, 96.
26. Nietzsche, 96-97.
27. Nietzsche, 97.
28. Nietzsche, 97.
29. Nietzsche, 98.
30. Nietzsche, 99.
31. Nietzsche, 99.
32. Nietzsche, 99, 100.
33. Nietzsche, "On the Utility and Liability of History for Life," 102.
34. Nietzsche, 96.
35. Nietzsche, 106.
36. Nietzsche, 107.
37. Nietzsche, 107.
38. Nietzsche, 107.
39. Nietzsche, 107.
40. Nietzsche, 108.
41. Erin Linn-Tynen, "Reclaiming the Past as a Matter of Social Justice: African American Heritage, Representation and Identity in the United States," in Critical Perspectives on Cultural Memory and Heritage: Construction, Transformation and Destruction, ed. Veysel Apaydin (London: UCL Press, 2020), 263.
42. Linn-Tynen, 261.
43. Linn-Tynen, 261.
44. Linn-Tynen, 261.
45. Linn-Tynen, 263.
46. Linn-Tynen, 255, 256.
47. Linn-Tynen, 255, 256.
48. Linn-Tynen, 258.
49. Linn-Tynen, 263.

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