

Pedagogy on the National Landscape: Using Counter-Monuments in Kelly Ingram Park to Challenge the Master Narrative

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RECENTLY, TENNESSEE GOVERNOR Bill Lee upheld a decades-old law requiring the commemoration of Nathan Bedford Forrest Day in the state. Forrest was an infamous Confederate general who later became the first grand wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, which during his time terrorized Black citizens with horrendous lynchings and violence.¹ In addition to the holiday commemoration, Forrest's image has been set in stone in many public spaces. The Tennessee holiday proclamation states that "the governor encourages 'all citizens to join (him) in this worthy observance.'" ² While Governor Lee later "asked the state Senate to prioritize a bill that would release him from having to proclaim the occasion," ³ the controversy over the state holiday exemplifies the continued fight over the collective memory of the Civil War and the Confederacy. After Reconstruction, there has been a concerted effort for white Southerners to control the narrative of the Civil War and to claim the honoring of ancestral heritage and states' rights instead of reckoning with the racist beliefs and policies inseparable from the Confederate cause.⁴ Throughout our nation's landscape, there are a multitude of monuments and memorials fighting for the collective memory of United States history.

In fact, monuments and memorials portraying the United States' excellence, victories, and dominant cultural values populate the landscape with the mission to preserve a master narrative of the nation's history. For instance, similar to individuals desiring to commemorate the Confederacy as a group of honorable men, other people desire to point to the "progress" of freedom and equality when remembering the Civil Rights Movement—without remembering the legislated racism that caused the movement in the first place. Monuments and memorials often uphold a heroification of certain well-known individuals, creating one-dimensional figures.⁵ The harm of heroification is two-fold: (1) individuals become messianic figures whose actions seem unattainable by "everyday" citizens,⁶ which then dismisses the numerous people required to make a social impact, and (2) it allows for a "discourse of undetectability"⁷ in which white individuals are recognized as those excelling in all aspects of civil society and culture, yet disappear when they are contributors to any type of oppression being remembered.

The United States' collective memory focuses on the nation's story as one of progress and freedom, yet the experiences of many citizens, particularly citizens of color, are in contradiction to this collective memory. Today, there is a small yet growing collection of counter-monument installations around the country that tell a counter-story to remember the nation's past. In this paper, we discuss how teachers can use counter-monuments to teach the marginalized histories often left out of the standard history curriculum. We focus the content on a set of counter-monuments at Kelly Ingram Park in Birmingham, Alabama that give voice to the experiences of youth during the Children's Crusade of the Civil Rights Movement.

Sites of Public Pedagogy

The ways a nation builds and maintains a collective memory comes through a variety of means, such as media, textbooks, and art. James V. Wertsch explained how "schematic narrative templates" are general structures based more on abstraction than on specific events, and are used to tell desired truths about certain people and events.⁸ Individuals use schematic narrative templates without even realizing, as they tell and retell the collective memories of historical events and people, focusing on victories, progress, and heroic actions. For instance,

there is a collective memory expressed in Confederate monuments and memorials that focuses solely on bravery and instilling a master narrative of fighting for states' rights and defending freedom. Left out of the schematic narrative template are the experiences of those oppressed in our history, such as the stories of enslaved Africans and terrorized Black Southerners after Emancipation.

In particular, monuments and memorials propagate schematic narratives. Monuments are sites of memory,⁹ and they often are constructed to highlight a nation's victories, to affirm their accomplishments, to naturalize their values,¹⁰ and to promote a desired identity.¹¹ In essence, they are sites of public pedagogy. Roger I. Simon defined pedagogy as any process "through which we are encouraged to know, to form a particular way of ordering the world, giving and making sense of it."¹² The messages transmitted through monuments and memorials consciously and unconsciously teach visitors a particular way in which to "make sense of" and remember the past.

In recent decades, there has been a global movement to challenge the schematic master narratives represented within traditional monuments and memorials through acts of counter-monumentality, practices that challenge a monument's intended purpose.¹³ In this paper, we propose that teachers use counter-monuments as pedagogy to teach counter-narratives of U.S. history, particularly with the counter-monuments in Kelly Ingram Park in Birmingham, Alabama, which depict citizens and events from the 1963 Birmingham Campaign, especially the Children's Crusade, during the modern Civil Rights Movement. The use of counter-monuments as pedagogy provides teachers with a new instructional strategy to incorporate anti-racist social studies teaching in the classroom, not only by highlighting the marginalized Black voices from these events, but also by clearly placing responsibility on the white oppressors, both individually and within larger oppressive state systems.

Counter-Monuments

Counter-monuments originated in Germany as artists wrestled with how to design monuments and memorials to victims of the Holocaust without using the same medium the Nazi regime used in disseminating their nationalistic, Fascist narrative.¹⁴ As Natalia

Krzyżanowska explained, counter-monuments “re-enact discourses of memory that were rejected, omitted or outright silenced by the collectivity.”¹⁵ There are two main types of counter-monuments: dialogic and anti-monumental.¹⁶ Dialogic counter-monuments are new monuments created to be in a “dialogue” challenging the message of a specific, existing, traditional monument. On the other hand, anti-monumental counter-monuments have five main characteristics in opposition to most traditional monument attributes:¹⁷

- 1) Subject: The subject of the counter-monument often portrays “darker events” of the past. The subject recognizes the suffering of victims and holds oppressors accountable.
- 2) Form: The counter-monument is designed using a form not common in traditional monuments. For example, artists may use inversion and void space to counter the prominence of traditional monuments.
- 3) Location: Counter-monuments are located at sites that are not commonly visited by tourists, where passersby may encounter the monument by chance.
- 4) Visitor Experience: Counter-monuments are designed to encourage interaction or a response by visitors.
- 5) Meaning: The purpose or meaning of the counter-monument is not explicitly stated, recognizing that there are no easy answers to explain an event or person being remembered.¹⁸

The characteristics of counter-monuments encourage a tension with visitors as a counter-memory of a historical figure or event confronts the schematic master narrative (which has been presented as “common sense”). The pedagogy of these counter-monuments strip away master narrative attempts to oversimplify, glorify, or sanitize “hard history” that has been situated within an arc of progress. Instead, they require visitors to face the ugly truths of the past while reconceptualizing new ways of remembering.

Kelly Ingram Park

There are a few examples of counter-monuments dotting the United States’ landscape, including the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. and the new National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama. Our focus is on a collection of counter-monuments erected in Kelly Ingram Park in Birmingham,

Alabama. These counter-monuments portray the counter-memory of those fighting for racial equity (particularly children and youth activists) in Birmingham, a hub of resistance during the modern Civil Rights Movement.

History of the Park

Kelly Ingram Park, formerly known as West Park, was a relatively innocuous park located in the heart of Birmingham. In 1932, the park was renamed after Osmond Kelly Ingram, a local firefighter who was the first sailor to be killed in World War I. In 1963, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and key leaders Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth chose Birmingham as a site for mass protest and boycotts to end segregation policies. The targeted effort focused mainly on the downtown area, where Kelly Ingram Park is located, and what ensued was one of the darkest, yet galvanizing, periods of the Civil Rights Movement.

The boycotts of local businesses and department stores, protests, and organization of sit-ins and marches began in the first week of May 1963. Local police, under the direction of the notorious Public Safety Commissioner Eugene “Bull” Connor quickly arrested many of the protestors. The SCLC then called on the city’s African American children (some as young as six years old) to join the protests, and over a two-day period, the police violently arrested over 1,000 children. Local police brutally used firehoses and police dogs in an attempt to disperse these children, who were peacefully protesting for an end to segregation. Fortunately, national news coverage of the events led to a greater collective awareness of how vicious, cruel, and unjust racism played out against African Americans living in the Jim Crow South. When President John F. Kennedy received reports of the violence in Birmingham, he dispatched 3,000 army troops to the outskirts of the city and famously commented, “the civil rights movement should thank God for Bull Connor. He’s helped it as much as Abraham Lincoln.”¹⁹

Unfortunately, the racially charged violence in Birmingham did not stop there. In September of 1963, the Ku Klux Klan bombed the 16th Street Baptist Church, killing four young African American girls. National news coverage again led to public outcry and a call for change, as Dr. King spoke at the funeral service for three of the

young girls, drawing a crowd of over 8,000 people. This despicable act of racial terror is remembered at Kelly Ingram Park with the *Four Spirits* memorial, dedicated to the four young African American girls who lost their lives in this attack.

The contemporary version of Kelly Ingram Park that we see today was conceptualized during the early 1990s, when the city was in the beginning stages of planning the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute and a larger “Civil Rights District,” which would include monuments and memorials in Kelly Ingram Park. It is important to note that this was just a decade after the introduction of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on the National Mall. Designed by visionary artist Maya Lin, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial changed the conversation surrounding design, expectations, and interactions with monuments and memorials to difficult histories represented on the public landscape.

Building on the bold and provocative nature of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the plan for Kelly Ingram Park called for the inclusion of confrontational memorial designs that would create “A Place of Revolution and Reconciliation” with the difficult memories of Birmingham’s past. Today, Kelly Ingram Park represents one of the most concentrated examples of counter-monuments in the United States, boasting several monuments that force visitors to grapple with the horrid history of racial violence that occurred during the 1960s. It should also be noted that there is a free audio tour available to visitors of the park that provides background and context to the monuments. The audio tour is available to anyone with a mobile phone and can be reached by dialing (205) 307-5455.

Counter-Monument Descriptions

Kelly Ingram Park takes up a city block, with an entrance to the park at each corner. One entrance displays a plaque honoring Osmond Kelly Ingram, for whom the park is named. On the opposite corner sits several small traditional monuments recognizing African American men and women who have made historical contributions to the community and state. A prominent monument, *Three Ministers Kneeling*, stands in the center of the third entrance as a remembrance of the sympathy march on Palm Sunday in 1963 for jailed civil rights leaders; violent police met the sympathy marchers at Kelly Ingram Park, and in the midst of the terror, three ministers knelt to pray.



Figure 1: Traditional-style monument honoring Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in Kelly Ingram Park. Photograph by Carol M. Highsmith (image cropped). Library of Congress, <<https://www.loc.gov/item/2010636983/>>.

Finally, the *Four Spirits* counter-monument (described below) stands across from the 16th Street Baptist Church, the most well-known corner of the park. Once visitors enter one corner, they begin on a circular path called the “Freedom Walk,” where counter-monuments bear the stories of the difficult history that took place in this historical square. Throughout the Freedom Walk, visitors physically walk inside the counter-monuments, causing one to reflectively empathize with the emotions of experiencing this racist terror, while simultaneously being forced to consider which side one stands on today—the side with the activists standing up to racial injustice, or the side passively watching systemic and institutionalized racism continuing in U.S. society today.

Freedom Walk. Set along a circular path following the perimeter of the park, the Freedom Walk includes three counter-monument installations by James Drake. Each monument illustrates common experiences of the African American children who participated in the Children’s Crusade.



Figure 2: *Water Cannons* counter-monument in Kelly Ingram Park. Photograph by Sara B. Demoigny.

Water Cannons. The youth activists taking part in the Children's Crusade marched peacefully through downtown Birmingham. Once in the vicinity of Kelly Ingram Park, Bull Connor ordered violence against the children. One tactic the police used was blasting high-pressure fire hoses on the children. Drake displays this scene through a metal wall facade where a teenage boy is kneeling down and a young girl is standing facing the wall. Water cannons nearby are pointed toward these two children.

The Children's Crusade. On May 2, 1963, more than 1,000 students chose to stay home from school to participate in the peaceful march downtown. Bull Connor arrested and jailed over 600 of these children, with more arrests the following day. Drake poignantly portrays the children's bold and courageous activism in this two-piece counter-monument. On one side of the walkway, there is a steel structure with a sculpture of a young African American boy and girl standing atop steps inscribed with the message, "I ain't afraid of your jail." Opposite of this is an upside-down reflected structure with bars in the place of the children and the inscription,



Figure 3: *The Children's Crusade* counter-monument in Kelly Ingram Park. Photograph by Sara B. Demoigny.



Figure 4: *Attack Dogs* counter-monument in Kelly Ingram Park. Photograph by Sara B. Demoiny.

“Segregation is a sin.” The structures align in such a way that visitors standing on one side of the counter-monument will seem to look through a jail cell to see the children.

Attack Dogs. One of the most terrifying tactics Bull Connor and his police force used on the children was the deployment of police dogs. The dogs were supposed to scare the children into dispersing, yet they were also allowed to physically attack the young activists. This counter-monument is Drake’s most interactive work, as visitors must maneuver through three-dimensional police dogs that are jumping out of the steel walls on both sides of the pathway.

The Foot Soldier. This counter-monument depicts the imagery of the iconic photograph of a fifteen-year-old boy, Walter Gadsden, being attacked by a police dog during the Children’s Crusade in 1963. This image jolted many white Americans awake to the magnitude of Jim Crow South racism. Ronald S. McDowell created the sculpture, which was dedicated in Kelly Ingram Park—the very site where the photograph was taken—in May 1995.²⁰



Figure 5: *The Foot Soldier* counter-monument in Kelly Ingram Park. Photograph by Sara B. Demoigny.



Figure 6: *Four Spirits* counter-monument in Kelly Ingram Park. Photograph by Sara B. Demoigny.

Four Spirits. Located at the northwest entrance of the park, the *Four Spirits* counter-monument is a moving tribute to the four African American girls murdered in the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing on September 15, 1963. The sculpture portrays the innocence of the young girls, as they seem to be gathering to talk and dance. One girl stands atop a bench with her hands raised, setting doves free. The counter-monument embodies the contradiction of the girls' innocence and the racialized hatred that led to their death. Artist Elizabeth MacQueen created the sculpture for the 50th anniversary of the church bombing in 2013.

Each of these counter-monuments display anti-monumental characteristics. In contrast to the tall, traditional, light-colored stone monuments in the park of Martin Luther King Jr., the kneeling ministers, and the various honorees, the counter-monuments described above were made from dark metal, mostly steel. They do not stand out in terms of their size or traditional hegemonic conceptualizations of beauty, but the intimacy of each sculpture draws visitors closer. In addition, the Kelly Ingram Park sculptures represent “hard history”

within the United States. Although the Civil Rights Movement is a common topic taught in U.S. schools, these counter-monuments amplify the experiences and voices of those often depicted through a white lens and narration. Visitors are not passing through and simply remembering these events from the Birmingham Campaign; they are forced to see these events through the eyes of the children involved in the campaign. The counter-monuments require a response of recognition, at minimum, and a call to action as one considers the continued legacy of the historical events today.

Social Studies Inquiry with Kelly Ingram Park Counter-Monuments

The Kelly Ingram Park counter-monuments encompass an anti-racist pedagogy that teachers can use to teach the Civil Rights Movement. In 2013, the National Council for the Social Studies put forth the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework as a guide for incorporating inquiry-based instruction into the social studies. S. G. Grant, Kathy Swan, and John Lee developed the Inquiry Design Model (IDM) as a unit-planning blueprint for developing social studies inquiries built with the main elements of questions, sources, and tasks.²¹ Later, a group of teachers and scholars used the IDM to develop social studies inquiry units focused specifically on race and racism.²² Following these models, we provide a modified version of an IDM to explore using counter-monuments as anti-racist pedagogy in the teaching of race in the social studies (see **Figure 7**).

To begin the social studies inquiry, teachers could pose the compelling question, “Are counter-monuments needed on the national landscape?” Teachers could provide background knowledge to students about counter-monuments by showing an interview clip with the Vietnam Veterans Memorial designer Maya Lin,²³ and then giving a brief introduction on the characteristics of counter-monuments.

Once students have a grasp of the concept of counter-monuments, teachers can begin to provide context within the United States. The controversy of Confederate monuments has been amplified in recent years, as citizens are questioning the collective memory these monuments tell. Why should we be honoring and memorializing people who fought a war to uphold the dehumanization of people

Compelling Question: Are counter-monuments needed on the national landscape?		
Supporting Question 1: How does the history and legacy of Confederate monuments connect to the Civil Rights Movement?	Supporting Question 2: How has the Civil Rights Movement traditionally been told on the national landscape?	Supporting Question 3: How do the counter-monuments at Kelly Ingram Park tell the Civil Rights Movement history differently, and why may this be important?
Sources: United Daughters of the Confederacy, "Statement from the President General" ²⁴ https://hqudc.org/ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examine history of the organization, as well as position statements. Southern Poverty Law Center, "Whose Heritage? Public Symbols of the Confederacy" ²⁵ https://www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/whose_heritage.pdf <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examine the executive summary and key findings. 	Sources: <i>The Root</i> , "The MLK Memorial's Complicated History" ²⁶ https://www.theroot.com/the-mlk-memorials-complicated-history-1790865442 National Park Service, "Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial: Quotations" ²⁷ https://www.nps.gov/mlkm/learn/quotations.htm <i>IndyStar</i> , "Indy Park Where Robert Kennedy Gave Famous MLK Speech Up for National Landmark Status" ²⁸ https://www.indystar.com/story/news/2018/01/24/indy-park-where-robert-kennedy-gave-famous-mlk-speech-up-national-landmark-status/1062132001/ NBC 5 Dallas-Fort Worth, "Rosa Parks Statue Unveiled in Dallas" ²⁹ https://www.nbcdfw.com/news/local/Rosa-Parks-Statue-Unveiled-in-Dallas.html <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Critically analyze the collective memories encouraged through these traditional monuments. 	Sources: Ingram Park Counter-Monuments (Images provided by instructor) Library of Congress, "Freeman A. Hrabowski Oral History Interview" ³⁰ https://www.loc.gov/item/2015669131/ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Watch 37:15-39:50. Discuss the training Hrabowski did to lead a group of children at the age of 12 and his experience with a police officer. Cynthia Levinson, "Points for Progress, Birmingham Alabama" ³¹ http://www.cynthialevinson.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Points-for-Progress-2.pdf <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyze the demands citizens were protesting for during the Birmingham Campaign, 1963.

Formative Task: As a class or in small groups, create a public service announcement video shedding light on the controversy of Confederate monuments on the national landscape.	Formative Task: Make a list of characteristics common among the traditional Civil Rights Movement monuments on the national landscape.	Formative Task: Create an advertisement explaining why people should visit this particular set of Civil Rights Movement monuments.
Taking Informed Action: Students will research a difficult history within the local or state area. Then, students will create a design for a counter-monument to express the marginalized narrative of this historical event or person. Students will write a letter and send a proposed counter-monument design to local city council or appropriate state administrative offices to share their ideas on the need for a counter-monument in their area.		

Figure 7: Social studies inquiry for teaching anti-racism with counter-monuments.

through enslavement? Students will investigate three supporting questions within the inquiry. The first supporting question focuses upon the legacy of Confederate monuments in this country, and how the history of the monuments have been connected to the fight for civil rights. After establishing a foundation of the strong attachments and feelings citizens have to monuments and memorials, the next question prompts students to explore how the Civil Rights Movement traditionally has been portrayed on the national landscape. Through the primary source articles and photographs, students will analyze how the pedagogy of these traditional monuments teaches heroification³² rather than the collective action³³ that brought legislative change. Finally, the third question has students explore how the counter-monuments in Kelly Ingram Park tell the counter-memory of the Civil Rights Movement through the eyes of the young activists involved in the Children’s Crusade.

As students explore the primary and secondary sources for each supporting question, they should use historical analysis tools such as those available through the Library of Congress (<https://www.loc.gov/teachers/primary-source-analysis-tool/>) or the National Archives (<https://www.docsteach.org/resources/document-analysis>) to facilitate the use of disciplinary skills such as sourcing,

contextualization, close reading, and corroboration.³⁴ We have provided examples of formative assessment tasks that teachers may use to assess each supporting question.

Once students have explored the inquiry in depth, they should form an argument with supporting evidence to respond to the original compelling question, “Are counter-monuments needed on the national landscape?” The final inquiry component is to “take action.” As maturing citizens, students need opportunities to practice civic activism beyond common responsibilities like voting. For this inquiry, we suggest students research a counter-narrative or “hard history” in the local area. Then, students create a proposal for a counter-monument or counter-memorial to teach this history within the area. Students could send their proposal and rationale to the local city council for consideration.

Conclusion

The monuments and memorials on the national landscape not only tell a story, they also are a type of public pedagogy. They are erected to transmit a collective memory, which often teaches a master narrative of heroification and instills a discourse of undetectability. Unfortunately, most of the United States’ landscape remains populated with traditional monuments and memorials, which frequently silence the voices of historically oppressed groups in American society. Counter-monuments provide teachers a new pedagogy to teach anti-racist social studies, as they highlight counter-stories and call for action. While the purposeful inclusion of counter-monuments into the social studies curriculum will certainly not solve the myriad racist and discriminatory issues that face our country, perhaps they can serve as a catalyst for thoughtful, honest, and critical dialogue that will help future generations of citizens better understand the dark and ongoing history of racism in the United States and encourage them to take action against new forms of oppression today.

Notes

1. In following the lead of many critical scholars, we capitalize Black as a proper noun while not capitalizing white, as one small way to decenter whiteness within the writing. See, for example, Andrea M. Hawkman and Sarah B. Shear, eds., *Marking the "Invisible": Articulating Whiteness in Social Studies Education* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2020); Cheryl E. Matias, Kara Mitchell Viesca, Dorothy F. Garrison-Wade, Madhavi Tandon, and Rene Galindo, "'What is Critical Whiteness Doing in OUR Nice Field like Critical Race Theory?'" Applying CRT and CWS to Understand the White Imaginations of White Teacher Candidates," *Equity & Excellence in Education* 47, no. 3 (2014): 289-304; and Naomi W. Nishi, "'You Need to Do Love': Autoethnographic Mother-Writing in Applying ParentCrit," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 31, no. 1 (2018): 3-24.
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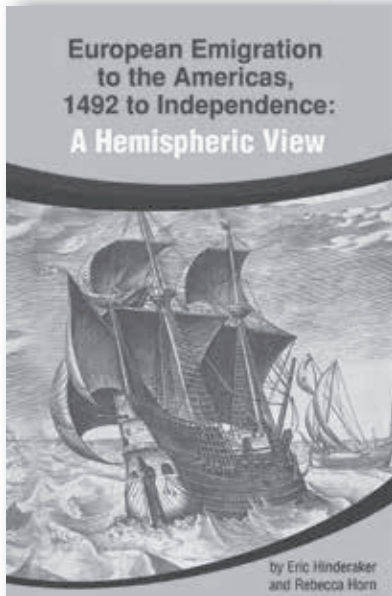
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