Public Monuments in Changing Societies and Political Orders

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Public Monuments in Changing Societies and Political Orders

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Abstract

This thesis looks at the ongoing issues and debates involving monuments and more specifically Confederate monuments. This issue picked up steam in 2015-2017 with events such as Dylan Roof’s church shooting and the Charlottesville rally and fatal car-ramming. In these times, society and leaders have turned their eyes to monuments. A conversation developed on whether these monuments are necessary and if it is appropriate to celebrate figures who fought for the cause of slavery. Proponents argued that it was a celebration of Southern heritage, the Lost Cause, and the right of self-determination and seceding from an unjust government. Others saw it differently and believed that public space should not be occupied by Confederate memorials and that it was time to move on.

One city that took this issue to heart was the city of New Orleans. The mayor, Mitch Landrieu declared that it was time that these monuments came down. The four monuments in question were of Robert E. Lee, Jefferson Davis, P. G. T. Beauregard, and The Battle of Liberty Place. This paper will spend the majority of its analysis looking at the Liberty Place memorial. The 35-foot tall obelisk was located in New Orleans and erected in 1891 and placed on the prestigious Canal Street. The monument celebrates the “Battle of Liberty Place” which took place on September 14th, 1874. The Battle of Liberty Place Monument was created to honor the members of the White League who lost their lives.

Since its unveiling, the monument has faced controversy and undergone several changes. A handful of major events for the monument will be analyzed and looked at through the concept of dramatism and the work of Sanford Levinson on monuments. This paper hopes to answer the question of how monuments and their image change rhetorically as political orders shift.
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I. Introduction

On September 8th, 2021 The Robert E. Lee statue on Monument Ave in Richmond, Virginia was taken down (Deliso, 2021). Virginia Governor Ralph Northam ordered the removal of the statue in June 2020, during a period of nationwide protests in response to the murder of George Floyd (Deliso, 2021). The Lee statue was the sixth and final Confederate statue removed from the iconic Monument Ave (Deliso, 2021). Speaking about the removal, Richmond Mayor Levar Stoney said, “we are taking an important step this week to embrace the righteous cause and put the 'Lost Cause' behind us, Richmond is no longer the capital of the Confederacy. We are a diverse, open, and welcoming city, and our symbols need to reflect this reality.” (Deliso, 2021).

A similar set of events occurred in New Orleans. In 2015, white supremacist Dylann Roof opened fire in a black church in Charleston, South Carolina, killing 9 parishioners (Adelson, 2017). After this tragedy, New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu called for the removal of four Confederate monuments featuring Robert E. Lee, Jefferson Davis, P. G. T. Beauregard, and The Battle of Liberty Place (Adelson, 2017). Following his statement, sixth months of public debate ensued and

culminated in a 6-1 City Council vote to declare the monuments ‘nuisances’ that promoted racial discord because of their ties to a movement known as the Lost Cause, which sought to rehabilitate the image of the Confederacy after the Civil War and to reestablish white dominance in Southern states (Adelson, 2017).

The first monument to go was The Battle of Liberty Place which was taken down on April 24, 2017. The removal was done under the cover of night with unmarked and masked construction crews (Adelson, 2017; see Figure 1). Interestingly, this date is Confederate
Memorial Day for both Alabama and Mississippi (Adelson, 2017). After the removal, Mayor Landrieu said that with these removals the city can move to a “place of healing” and that Liberty Place was the most offensive to the values of New Orleans (Adelson, 2017). Speaking about the monuments, Landrieu proclaimed that “we will no longer allow the Confederacy to literally be put in the heart of our city. The removal of these statues sends a clear message, an unequivocal message to the people of our nation that our city celebrates our diversity” (Adelson, 2017).

In recent years, monument removal has become a nationwide debate. The United States is in a period of reckoning and coming to terms with its past, and Confederate memorials are right in the bullseye. In these current times, officials are finally taking acting. Being removed are monuments that are ingrained in American society. With these removals emerges intense debates with two ideologically opposed sides. There are those who deem the monuments offensive and that they should have been removed a long time ago. Then, on the other hand, some say the monuments represent our history and more specifically southern history, and to take them down is a form of oppression.

An interesting monument to look at in this debate is The Battle of Liberty Place. This monument stands out because it does not honor a specific person like many others. The monument celebrates the “Battle of Liberty Place” which took place on September 14th, 1874 (Roadside America, n.d.). In the battle, the White League attempted to overthrow the racially mixed Reconstructionist Government (Powell, 1990). Fred Ogden led 8,400 men down towards Canal Street and was met by former Confederate General James Longstreet who led the Metropolitan Police force (Powell, 1990). At the end of the battle the dead included sixteen members of the White League, thirteen from the Metropolitan Police, six bystanders, while over 60 people were wounded (Nystrom, 2011). The White League briefly took control until President
Grant sent the army in to restore the government. Although the White League lost, it represented a turning point that led to the end of Reconstruction and led to the growth of the White League and the white supremacy movement in New Orleans.

For years after the battle, members of the White League honored those who had fallen and had a “September Fourteenth Monument Allocation Fund” that sought to build a monument (Powell, 1990). Over time, the fund received enough money and on September 14th, 1891, the Battle of Liberty Place monument was unveiled. From the moment of its dedication, the monument stood as an explicit symbol of white supremacy, and white politicians and groups would use the site as a rallying point (Maxson, 2019). The memorial has dealt with a plethora of controversies and has undergone several changes.

This analysis will look at the complete timeline of Liberty Place from the original battle to its removal in 2017. Featured in the analysis are four significant moments in the monument’s transformation. These moments include the unveiling of the monument in 1891; a plaque added in 1932, as well as additional alterations to the memorial, the March 3rd, 1991 rededication ceremony, and the removal of the monument on April 24th of 2017. To support and guide the analysis will be Sanford Levinson’s work on memorials as it relates to political regimes, Michael Butterworth’s work on rituals, and Burke’s dramatism. In this analysis, I argue that the Battle of Liberty Place is a story of rhetorical adjustments in changing political orders that resulted in the removal of the memorial altogether.

II. Timeline of Liberty Place:

IIa. The Battle of Liberty Place

The battle of Liberty Place was caused in part due to a mixed-race government as well as a disputed state election in 1872 (Powell, 1990). Although the Democrats originally were
declared the winner, with widespread fraud it was difficult to determine a winner (Nystrom, 2011). The matter was taken to federal court where a judge ruled in favor of the Republicans and certified the results (Nystrom, 2011). A Reconstructionist Republican government was put into power with William Pitt Kellogg as governor of the state (Levinson, 1999).

One factor leading to the battle that angered the White League was the proposed “Unification Movement” (Powell, 1990). This movement involved political offices being evenly split between black and white people (Powell, 1990). Although this proposal did not go through, it further angered Democrats and more specifically the rich white upper class (Powell, 1990). In response to the government, upper-class citizens formed what became known as The White League (Levinson, 1999). The White League wanted to take back control of the government through violent resistance and to restore white power and its values (Powell, 1990). The ideas of the league represented racism and white supremacy with their league platform in 1874 saying:

Having solely in view the maintenance of our hereditary civilization and Christianity…

Menaced by a stupid Africanization, we appeal to the men of our race … to unite with us against that supreme danger … in an earnest effort to re-establish a white man's government in the city and the State (Powell, 1990, pg. 41).

Tensions boiled over on September 14th, 1874, when 8,400 members of the White League marched down Canal Street to take back the government and restore white power (Powell, 1999). These White Leaguers were met with resistance by 3,600 metropolitan policemen prepared to defend the government (Powell, 1999). Thousands of citizens watched from, “balconies, rooftops, and the decks of steamboats” (Maxson, 2019, pg. 56). The ensuing battle lasted merely fifteen minutes and resulted in a White League victory (Nystrom, 2011). That short battle resulted in 32 deaths, 79 people wounded, and the White League seizing control of the
government (Powell, 1999). Although the White League was able to reclaim power for the Democrats, it proved to be short-lived. The events outraged President Grant, who sent federal troops down to New Orleans (Powell, 1990). Unprepared for conflict with the federal government, three days after the events, the White League handed the government back over to Kellogg and the Republicans (Nystrom, 2011).

IIb. Erection of Monument

This battle had long-lasting effects on the city of New Orleans. The Battle of Liberty Place shifted political power in the city, with Democrats taking back power (Nystrom, 2011). The Metropolitan Police lost power, the black militia faded away, and the White League grew in power and became more dangerous (Nystrom, 2011). This battle is known as marking the beginning of the end of Reconstruction and its policies in New Orleans (Nystrom, 2011). The historic Battle of Liberty Place and the monument symbolized the beginnings of the Jim Crow era, when black citizens would watch many of their rights disappear.

This battle left a deep cultural impact on New Orleans and created a divisive line. Some viewed the battle as a point of pride. They believed that the White Leaguers were heroes who exercised self-determination and took back power from a corrupt government (Maxson, 2019). Fighting in the battle or having ancestors who were involved became a point of pride in the city. Many of these White League fighters came from the upper-class of New Orleans and the battle led to, “a dramaturgical assertion of the right of the white upper class to rule at home” (Maxson, 2019, pg. 56).

In the years following the battle, from 1877 to 1882 an anniversary day would be held on September 14th (Powell, 1990). This was a solemn occasion where citizens would go to the graves of the White Leaguers who died in 1874 and would re-walk the route that members took
on that day. This was a large event where “many businesses closed early for the celebration, and crowds surged through streets festooned with banners and bunting” (Powell, 1990, pg. 41). Although the tradition slowly lost its popularity, calls for a memorial dedicated to the white men who fought for the White League grew. The Fourteenth of September Monument Association and the Women’s Auxiliary Committee made efforts for a monument to be created (Chadwick, n.d.). In November of 1882, the New Orleans City Council officially renamed the area of the battle Liberty Place and stated that a monument would be created “in honor of those who fell in defense of liberty and home rule in that heroic struggle of the 14th of September, 1874” (Levinson, 1999, pg. 153).

Finally, on September 14th, 1891 The Battle of Liberty Place monument was installed on prominent Canal Street. The monument was a 35-foot limestone obelisk built by Charles A. Orleans (Chadwick). The monument was also erected on the 17th anniversary of the battle and contained the names of the White Leaguers who lost their lives as well as some of the leaders (Levinson, 1999). The newspaper the Daily Picayune, featured the monument on the front page of its paper the next day (Chadwick). The paper mentioned that there was a large number of people in attendance and that the event featured “the Louisiana militia and military bands as well as several speakers” (Chadwick). The monument revived the tradition and gave people a symbol and monument to rally around. Yearly ceremonies were held on September 14th at the site to honor the “heroes” that died (Levinson, 1999). The monument gave white supremacists a symbol to rally behind and a spot to hold rallies, which would lead to tensions and controversies.

Ilc. Revisions to the Monument

The Liberty Place monument underwent several changes through different eras. Two additional plaques were added to the monument in 1934. In the years between 1934 and its
unveiling, the Democrats and the White League grew in power which in turn increased the power of the Liberty Place monument (Maxson, 2019). The creation of the plaques began on September 27th, 1932 when “the Commission Council of the City of New Orleans called for the formation of the Board of Commissioners of Liberty Place” (Maxson, 2019, pg. 56). This Board of Commissioners was filled with people who took part in the Battle of Liberty Place (Maxson, 2019).

The Board of Commissioners was formed and received approval from Mayor T. Semmes Walmsley to add an inscription to the obelisk’s plinth (Maxson, 2019; see Figure 2). The first plaque added to the memorial on one side said:

“United States troops took over the state government and reinstated the usurpers but the national election in November 1876 recognized white supremacy and gave us our state” (Levinson, 1998).

On the other side a second plaque read:

“McEnery and Penn, having been elected governor and lieutenant governor by the white people, were duly installed by the overthrow of the carpetbag government, ousting the usurpers Gov. Kellogg (white) and Lt. Gov. Antoine (colored)” (Levinson, 1999).

These inscriptions were done with the support of the New Orleans government. To add the inscriptions the city used, “artisans supplied by the federally funded Works Progress Administration” (Levinson, 1999, pg. 153).

As the years went by and African-Americans in New Orleans gained more rights and political power the monument became more of a pressing issue in the city. The annual wreath-laying ceremonies had stopped in the ‘50s and rallies were not held as frequently
(Maxson, 2019). However, although white groups were not rallying around it, the monument itself and the additional plaques were an issue to many in New Orleans.

Issues began to emerge in the 1970s with protests by black political activists (Chadwick, 2012). The main catalyst for these protests was the NAACP Youth Council, which began to focus on the Liberty Place monument (Powell, 1990). The group achieved success when in 1974 at the 65th NAACP National Convention, a resolution was passed that supported the local movement to take the monument down (Powell, 1990).

This put increased pressure on the mayor of New Orleans, Moon Landrieu, who looked to address the issue and appease both sides (Levinson, 1998). A brass plaque was placed near the monument (Levinson, 1999). On this plaque, the battle was called an “insurrection” and stated that the controversial plaques of 1934 were not a part of the original monument (Levinson, 1999). The plaque included a message that stated: “Although the ‘Battle of Liberty Place’ and this monument are important parts of New Orleans history, the sentiments in favor of white supremacy expressed thereon are contrary to the philosophy and beliefs of present-day New Orleans” (Chadwick, 2012; see Figure 3). This half-measure by Landrieu avoided the issues of Liberty Place and did not cause conflict to cease.

Issues re-emerged in 1981 when the first black mayor of the city, Ernest Morial set his eyes on the monument (Levison, 1999). Morial looked to remove the monument completely, but the City Council stepped in and did not allow monuments to be removed without their expressed consent (Levinson, 1999). However, Morial did achieve a minor victory with the council agreeing to remove the offensive plaques of 1934 and place granite slabs over them (Levinson, 1999).
The debate over Liberty Place picked up again in the late 1980s, when the city’s second black mayor, Sidney Barthelemy attempted to get rid of the monument for good (Levinson, 1999). At the time, there was riverfront construction going on around Canal Street, so the monument had to be removed from its location for the time being (Levinson, 1999). The news spread and Barthelemy was met with intense backlash from preservationists, historians, and white supremacists. A follower of David Duke’s even sued, stating that it was illegal to remove the monument (Chadwick, 2012). In February of 1993, the monument was taken out of storage. However, the city stated that it be removed from its prominent location on Canal Street and moved nearby, “to Iberville Street, between railroad tracks and the entrance to a parking garage” (Chadwick, 2012; see Figure 4). The monument remained near Canal Street due to federal historic preservation laws, which declared that the monument must remain near the battle (Levinson, 1999). There was a plaque added to the monument that included the names of the Metropolitan policeman who died and the message: “In honor of those Americans on both sides of the conflict who died in the Battle of Liberty Place. A conflict of the past that should teach us lessons for the future” (Levinson, 1999, pg. 55; see Figure 5).

IId. Rededication, David Duke, and Protests

Once the legal issues were resolved with Liberty Place, the monument had to be put in its new location on Iberville Street. While some wanted the memorial silently put away and left in its quiet corner, others called for a rededication ceremony. One person and group calling for a rededication ceremony was David Duke and the Ku Klux Klan (Maxson, 2019).

David Duke is a former Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan who also won a seat in the Louisiana legislature and ran un成功fully in a handful of other elections (Cook, 2012). Duke was no stranger to the Liberty Place monument and had held white supremacist rallies there in

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the past (Cook, 2012). Liberty Place was used for many white supremacist rallies, including a
Hitler Fest in 1985 (see Figure 6). Duke got involved in the conflict of Liberty Place, when one
of his supporters sued the city for the monument to be returned (Cook, 2012). Then a group
called the “Friends of Liberty Monument” put together a rededication ceremony to be held on
March 3rd, 1993 at the monument’s new location (Maxson, 2019). David Duke was one of the
invited speakers who agreed to attend (Maxson, 2019).

On the other side, the opposition would not let these groups celebrate a symbol of white
supremacy without having their voices heard. Leading a group of protesters was Reverend Avery
Alexander who was a state representative in Louisiana, a veteran of the civil rights movement,
and was eighty-two at the time (Cook, 2012). Alexander’s intention was to disrupt Duke and the
rededication ceremony. They did this, “by shouting slogans and singing spirituals, drowning out
speakers.” The protesters also chanted things such as, “Down with white supremacy!” (Maxson,
2019, pg. 62). Soon tensions got heated and the protesters began clashing with police. The
protest reached a peak when a police officer put Alexander in a chokehold and dragged him
away (Maxson, 2019). Put around arrest were Alexander in addition to several others, and the
ceremonies continued (Cook, 2012). A photographer for the Times-Picayune, Kathy Anderson
took a picture of the arrest which shows Alexander in a chokehold by a white police officer with
the confederate flag and Liberty Place in the background (Maxson, 2019; see Figure 7).

IIe. Ultimate Removal

Ultimately, the monument was removed on April 24th of 2017, and taken away to storage
(Advocate Staff, 2017). Liberty Place was the first of four Confederate monuments to go with the
Logically, it made sense for Liberty Place to be the first monument to go, being widely seen as
the most offensive (Adelson, 2017). The mayor of New Orleans, Mitch Landrieu said, “of the four we will remove, this is perhaps the most blatant affront to the values that make New Orleans and America strong today” (Adelson, 2017).

Although many believed the monument had to go, this was not an easy process. Calls for removal came from Mayor Landrieu in 2015 following the Dylann Roof shooting and public debate soon followed (Litten, 2017). Six months of debate culminated in a 6 to 1 City Council vote in favor of removing the monuments (Advocate Staff, 2017). The Council declared the monuments to be, “nuisances that promoted racial discord because of their ties to a movement known as the Lost Cause, which sought to rehabilitate the image of the Confederacy after the Civil War and to reestablish white dominance in Southern states.” (Adelson, 2017). However, it took time for the removal to occur due to the city getting tied up in court battles that lasted until 2017 (Adelson, 2017). A ruling came from U.S. District Judge Carl Barbier, who “dismissed claims made by several groups led by the Monumental Task Committee, ruling that the plaintiffs had not shown they could succeed on the merits. Among their arguments was that the committee should have a say in what happened to the monuments because it had done work over the years to clean and restore them” (Adelson, 2017). The judge allowed the city to go forward with the removal of the monument.

The removal of the monument took place early on April 17th around 1:30am (Adelson, 2017). The monument was removed secretly due to fears of violence and protests. The City Council said that contractors who expressed interest in the job were receiving threats so they did not want to publicize the event (Advocate Editorial, 2017). The Police were at the removal with SWAT and K-9 dogs and the contractors blacked out their logos and wore bullet-proof face masks, helmets, and vests (Adelson, 2017). The removal was done with a crane lifting the
obelisk up in different pieces, and all that remained was the pedestal (Adelson, 2017; see Figure 8). Although there were supporters and opposers of the event, the process was largely peaceful and no one was injured (Adelson, 2017).

Both supporters and opponents of the removal had an issue with how the removal of the monument was done. Malcolm Suber, an organizer of the “Take ‘Em Down NOLA” movement was upset with how the process was done and would have liked “the statues to be removed in the daylight, with advance notice and a public celebration” (Adelson, 2017). Joey Cargol, a man who opposed the monument’s removal went up to Suber and said although they were on opposing sides “they could agree the removal itself should have been handled more transparently” (Adelson, 2017). Citizens hoped for a more transparent announcement where people could gather in either support or opposition (Adelson, 2017). Suber looked at the city’s decision to remove the monument in the middle of the night with a police presence and said, “Why should that be necessary in a democratic society?” (Adelson, 2017).

After its removal, the monument was moved to a city-owned warehouse where it is up for debate as to what should be done. People discussed leaving the monument in the warehouse or placing it in a museum. There are also questions about what to do with the sites where the memorials were. Whatever the city decides to do, it will be a difficult decision filled with debate from citizens. Talking about the future of the monuments, Mayor Landrieu said, “we can remember these divisive chapters in our history in a museum or other facility where they can be put in context -and that's where these statues belong” (Litten, 2017).

III. Methodology

Part of the methodology that will guide the analysis is the concept of dramatism. Kenneth Burke created the concept and first mentioned it in his book “A Grammar of Motives” (1945;
Cohrs, 2002). Burke has shaped a great deal of the communication theory that we know today and dramatism is his most well-known theory (Cohrs, 2002). Burke describes dramatism as “a technique of analysis of language and of thought as basically modes of action rather than a means of conveying information” (Burke, 1985). Dramatism sees us all as active players in the world and our actions represent a social drama (Allen, 2017). This view sees language as a strategic response to a situation (Brock, 1989). As people, we assess the “human situation” and select strategies which represent symbols and reflect our attitudes. Burke sees rhetoric as, “the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or to induce actions in other human agents” (Brock, 1989, pg. 184).

Language can reveal our motives and selecting one phrase over another shows a speaker’s attitude (Brock, 1989). Human society is a dramatistic process with elements such as hierarchy, acceptance and rejection, and guilt, purification, and redemption (Brock, 1989). The unequal distribution of power creates a hierarchy where people and groups have authority over others (Brock, 1989). This gives society structure and establishes relationships between people and groups. People accept their role within a given hierarchy which brings order and shapes the dramatistic society that we live in (Brock, 1989).

Another important element is acceptance and rejection. Throughout our lives, we have the opportunity to accept and reject different options. For Burke, rhetoric is based around our acceptance and rejection of situations and how we symbolize the reactions (Brock, 1989). People have the opportunity to accept or reject their position in a hierarchy and can reject the hierarchy completely (Brock, 1989). People also make decisions that reject or violate the rules of the hierarchy, and this leads to the cycle of guilt, purification, and redemption.
Wrapping up the dramatistic process is the cycle of guilt, purification, and redemption (Brock, 1989). Rejecting a hierarchy or a role within it causes a person to “fall” which leads to guilt (Brock, 1989). Rejection is inevitable for human beings who cannot satisfy every rule of a hierarchy. Dealing with this guilt a person will seek redemption which is achieved through purification. Purification can be done either through mortification or victimage (Brock, 1989). Mortification involves expressing remorse for one’s actions and apologizing through admitting wrongdoing. On the other hand, victimage involves using a scapegoat and blaming something else for their guilt. There must be a balance between purification and guilt (Brock, 1989). The purification must balance out with the guilt felt from the action in order for one to achieve redemption.

Another area within dramatism is the concept known as “the dialectic of tragedy”. Burke looked at the “dramatistic route to knowledge” and how we learn through suffering (Anderson and Prelli, 2018, pg. 185). In this “the suffered is the learned” and there are three steps that capture this process (Anderson and Prelli, 2018). For a tragedy to occur, there must first be an action or a poiema (Anderson and Prelli, 2018). After the action comes the opposite which is suffering or pathema (Anderson and Prelli, 2018). The action combined with suffering leads to the third step which is mathema or “that which is learned” (Anderson and Prelli, 2018, pg. 185). Simply put an action occurs, there is a consequence to that action, and the action is fixed through what was learned. Through this process, a person learns to take different steps and widens his knowledge and arrives “at a higher order of understanding” (Anderson and Prelli, 2018). Our lives are drama and we learn through suffering which means that the dialectic of tragedy “shapes our actions and interactions in our daily personal dramas of human relations” (Anderson and
We interpret our experiences as ritual dramas like the process of guilt, purification, and redemption (Anderson and Prelli, 2018).

Moving on, the act of rituals plays an important role in our lives and the structure of hierarchy. Rituals represent an expression of social order and they evoke a sense of hierarchy (Butterworth, 2005). Rituals can be understood in dramatistic terms where in a society, we use symbols to act or go against a given hierarchy (Butterworth, 2005). When there are doubts about a hierarchy people will look to rituals as a way of purification (Butterworth, 2005). For example, when things are bad in the world, one may turn to a religion and its rituals. Rituals take a victimage approach where a scapegoat emerges and wrongdoings are placed on them (Butterworth, 2005).

A key feature of rituals is that they are evoked in response to a crisis or drama (Butterworth, 2005). People turn to rituals which work as a controller and container of social action and keep people within the hierarchy and allow us to achieve redemption (Butterworth, 2005). Rituals are powerful and work to establish a hierarchy and reaffirm norms (Butterworth, 2005). The problem is that this can go too far and those in power can use rituals to exert control over a society. Fear and intimidation play a role, where one may feel like they have to participate, or they will be an outcast and fall in the hierarchy (Butterworth, 2005).

However, with rituals, although in some instances it can feel like participation is no longer voluntary, there is only the option to not participate. Humans can reject a particular hierarchy or ritual. A ritual can only work if there is active participation (Butterworth, 2005). If enough people reject a ritual then it no longer holds power.

Finishing up the methodology is the work of Sanford Levinson on memorials as it relates to a political order. Levinson looks at how different governments and regimes will try to use
monuments and public space to create a public psyche (Levinson, 1998). The central question that Levinson looks at “is how those with political power within a given society organize public space to convey (and thus teach the public) desired political lessons” (Levinson, 1998, pg. 10). Public space shows what a government values and who they deem fit for public honor. Public space changes with different political regimes and decisions are made on what to do with the old monuments and symbols of the old regime.

A new political regime will decide if any of the “heroes” of the old regime should still be honored and what kind of national consciousness they want to evoke (Levinson, 1998). One approach that new regimes will take is the destruction or changing of old symbols (Levinson, 1998). For example, when Hungary experienced a regime change in 1956 they toppled a Stalin statue (Levinson, 1998). An important question Levinson asks is if there is a more respectful way to move forward and acknowledge the past (Levinson, 1998). Looking specifically at Confederate monuments, what are we to do as a society when the monuments no longer reflect our current views? Do we have a duty to the past and should we continue to give sacred public space to monuments that represent the lost cause of the Confederacy and slavery? (Levinson, 1998).

Looking more broadly, monuments do not emerge out of thin air and are built by people in power who want to impose a particular hierarchy and seek the consent of the public (Levinson, 1998). Those in power seek to assign meaning to a monument and get the public to share their view. Robin Winks says that “almost always a monument is an attempt to interpret an event in which those who have erected it take pride” (quoted in Levinson, 1998, pg. 65). People are placed in hierarchies by those in power through words, symbols, and images (Levinson,
1998). Political orders use public space as a way of controlling the public and telling them what to think and who to praise (Levinson, 1998).

IV. Analysis

When the Liberty Place monument was erected in 1891 it was to honor White League members who lost their lives. This drama led to rituals which held power and instilled a sense of hierarchy in New Orleans. Since their creation, rituals were manipulated, and the memory of the battle was shaped to support the views of the White League. The upper-white class of New Orleans tried to create solidarity among citizens through rituals and framing the White League members as brave men who stood up against a corrupt government.

The power of the rituals grew with the memorial. This gave people a physical symbol to rally around and a location to gather. Through the monument and rituals, the upper-class were able to control social action and enforce hierarchy (Butterworth, 2005). The monument functioned rhetorically to enact a sense of unity among white citizens. The creation of an “us,” as well as a “them,” surfaced, enabling a victimage ritual where a scapegoat emerged. Scapegoats included the old Republican government, Reconstruction, or black people. The cause of the crisis and guilt was an unjust government that the citizens had a duty to overthrow. Those men lost their lives because of the government and its threat to their way of life.

Moving forward to the additions in 1934, we see a story similar to that of 1891. There is a strong culture developed around the monument, what it stands for, and means to the city. The monument functioned as an explicit symbol of white supremacy and as a ritualistic site for white supremacist groups. Through this, a culture developed around Liberty Place that supported racist groups like the White League and later the KKK. These rituals not only evoked a sense of
hierarchy but also discouraged dissenting opinions. The white upper-class dominated society and the government supported their views.

During this period, key rhetorical changes happened with the additional plaques. These plaques functioned rhetorically as showing white dominance in both the city and the government. It showed the political order may have changed, but the beliefs had not. During this period, whites got a stronger hold on the government, and more blacks were being disenfranchised. The hierarchy is reflected in the fact that “the Commission Council of the City of New Orleans called for the formation of the Board of Commissioners of Liberty Place” (Maxson, 2019, pg. 56). Furthermore, this Board of Commissioners was made up of people who took part in the Battle of Liberty Place (Macson, 2019). The city wanted to make it clear what the monument symbolized and stood for.

The Battle of Liberty Place monument functions rhetorically to give a racist interpretation of the event supporting white dominance. It is clear in the plaques, that the Board of Commissioners of Liberty Place wanted to display a particular interpretation. This is the case with monuments where they are “an attempt to interpret an event in which those who have erected it take pride” (Levinson, 1998, pg. 65). The old government was framed as corrupt, and the White League as heroes who overthrew them and installed a righteous government. The plaque also recognized the changing political orders and what it represented. Although the Republican government was placed back in power, the November 1876 elections “recognized white supremacy and gave us our state”. This both acknowledged that the government put into place was racist and enacted an us versus them mentality.

The 1970s showed us the beginning of change with the monument and political orders. The rhetorical changes made to the monument reflect a new political order that sees Liberty
Place differently. At this time, we see a hierarchy dominated by whites and the upper class, but black Americans are gaining more rights. The work of black protesters and the NAACP Youth Council showed that no longer is only the white voice heard. We see the emergence of two opposing sides in a social drama over which symbols to support or reject.

The NAACP and black protesters played an active role in the dramatic society by rejecting the hierarchy and norms. This caused alienation, but the groups sought redemption through action being taken on Liberty Place. Mayor Moon Landrieu felt the pressure and enacted a new plaque. This plaque acknowledged the battle as an insurrection and that the statements about white supremacy do not represent present-day New Orleans. These rhetorical changes represent a turning point in the political orders and their treatment of the Liberty Place monument. The government is no longer perpetuating the myth that this was a justified rebellion. It also no longer supports white supremacy and further states that those opinions go against present-day New Orleans. This acknowledges the change in the city’s viewpoint which shows the government undergoing purification and seeking redemption for their mistakes of the past.

Although the rhetorical changes reflected a positive shift, the purification was not enough and further action needed to be taken. The government used the scapegoat that the monument is an important part of history. This functioned as an excuse to not take further action and for the government to avoid controversy. This decision created an unequal balance between the guilt and purification and redemption was not achieved.

In 1981, we saw a change in the political order, and increased action taken. The first black mayor, Ernest Morial, tried to remove the monument but was stopped by the City Council. They enacted a law stating that the monument could only be removed with their expressed permission (Powell, 1990). The issues of hierarchy are still present and there are those in power
that support the Liberty Place monument. Having elected a black mayor reflected political and societal change. However, a white-majority City Council showed that the social hierarchy of the past had not gone away (Powell, 1990). Here we see a changing government that is still conflicted on the fate of the monument. Although the removal was blocked, the City Council did agree to remove the offensive 1934 plaques.

In the late 1980s, mayor Sidney Barthelemy attempted to get rid of the monument while the area within which it was placed was under construction. With these calls for removal, it is important to look at the responses it generates. Whenever conflict arises with Liberty Place its supporters come flooding out. They protest and say that it is illegal to remove the monument and that it is a historical monument. The rituals of Liberty Place are motivated in response to a crisis. Throughout the years, the traditions of Liberty Place would die out, but the conflict would bring people back to the memorial. After the additional plaque in 1974, gatherings at Liberty Place increased (Powell, 1990). People revert back to this monument because “moments of crisis often lead to a turn toward nostalgia” (Butterworth, 2005, pg. 113).

Barthelemy, faced intense backlash for his calls of removal, but the monument was moved from its prominent location on Canal Street to Iberville Street. The government stated that due to federal historic preservation laws, the monument had to be in the vicinity of the battle. There was a victory in the monument being moved to a less prominent location. Public space holds prestige and power, and this decision showed the government viewed the monument as something of the past and that it is not deserving of prominent public space.

An additional plaque was added that honored the Metropolitan Policeman who had lost their lives and stated that the battle was “A conflict of the past that should teach us lessons for the future”. Here once again we encounter rhetorical changes to the monument and what it
symbolizes. The government sought purification and to frame Liberty Place and its values as something of the past.

The crisis around Liberty Place potentially being removed brought out supporters. One supporter who spoke at the ceremony was David Duke. The rededication ceremony on March 3rd, 1993, put on display the alternating perspectives and agonistic dialectic surrounding Liberty Place. Reverend Avery Alexander’s group clashed with police and supporters of the monument. The event showed what Liberty Place symbolizes and that moving it to a less prominent location would not stop its supporters.

The government hoped to side-step the issue again, but this was something the public would not ignore. Supporters defend it for the established hierarchy and white dominance it represents. Others see it as an explicit symbol of hate that represents white supremacy. By continuing to keep the monument on display, the government was sending a message. It showed that white supremacists and their symbols would still be given public space. In our dramatistic society, selecting one decision over another reveals our attitudes. Continuing to appease supporters of Liberty Place reveals the attitudes of the government. Those affected by white supremacy see that their views are not supported and that they must deal with rejection and alienation in the social hierarchy.

At this ceremony, a picture was taken of Reverend Avery Alexander being put in a chokehold by police officers. This showed the issues with the political order. The supporters of Liberty Place would be protected and allowed to hold their hateful rallies. This image showed what Liberty Place symbolizes with a black man being oppressed, the white crowd in the background, and a Confederate flag. A conflict like this shows how the meaning of a memorial can be lost over time and altered. This was originally meant to honor people who had lost their
lives. Over time and through the work of those in power the meaning was changed. The debate was no longer about the history of the monument, but about protecting a symbol of white supremacy.

In 2017, the Liberty Place memorial underwent its final rhetorical change when it was removed from Iberville Street and placed in storage. It represented a complete turn in political orders from the government back in the 1890s. There were no more half-measures to avoid the issue and attempt to appease both sides. The climate had shifted due to events like the mass shootings leaving America with difficult questions about Confederate monuments. New Orleans was finally able to show through their actions that the values of Liberty Place did not reflect the present-day views of the government and the people of New Orleans. Removing an offensive monument like Liberty Place shifts the hierarchy and shows those who have felt rejected that they do have a place in society, and it is the monument that has no place.

The act of the removal showed the government at last expressing mortification for its actions. There were no more scapegoats or reasons that the monument could not be removed. The action of removing the monument represented genuine mortification as well as statements made by Mayor Mitch Landrieu that reflected a desire to move forward and regret for what the monument stood for.

Although it was a victory to have the Liberty Place memorial removed, the process could have been improved. To eradicate Liberty Place and what it symbolizes, it needed to be done proudly. This should not have been done under the cover of nightfall. They needed to remove the monument during the day and make a statement saying that this monument was a thing of the past and does not represent who we are. When a political order is seeking to change public space and send a message to its citizens it needs to do so clearly. Otherwise, a confusing message is
sent to the public. A changing political order needs to attempt to form a new consciousness and public space should be used to impart lessons and show who or what is worth honoring.

V. Conclusions

Finally, thought will be given to Liberty Place overall and the rhetorical changes it experienced through ever-changing political orders. The changing political orders resulted in rhetorical changes to the Liberty Place monument and ultimately led to its removal. In addition, the saga of Liberty Place represented ritual and social drama and showed how people interact in a dramatistic society. I believe Liberty Place and New Orleans have gone through the guilt, purification, and redemption cycle as well as the dialectic of tragedy.

Looking over the major events and analyzing them, I do believe that the memorial underwent rhetorical changes due to shifting governments. These changes ended with a political order with new values and goals. The progress leading to its removal was not linear and was a difficult process as is the case in a dramatic society. In the early years, the changes made to the memorial reflected the rich white hierarchy ingrained in society. The political order at the time was supportive of the monument and looked to instill a particular meaning in people’s minds.

The government and supporters were successful, and the monument functioned rhetorically to represent more than its original intention. In the 1930s, changing political orders benefited the memorial and made it more powerful and its message to citizens stronger. However, over time, the monument would not have the full support of the government and the hierarchy shifted. In the 70s, black Americans were gaining rights and political power and continued to reject the hierarchy and the white-dominated society that the memorial stood for. Shifting in political offices and the culture of the city allowed these voices to be heard, which resulted in rhetorical changes to the monument. However, these changes were not enough,
although they attempted to mitigate the symbol of white supremacy, it was still ingrained in the monument.

In the 1990s, we again saw the political order shift and society be ready for the monument’s removal. However, there were supporters who came back strong in an attempt to restore the rituals around Liberty Place and its symbol of white dominance. Again, the government is unsuccessful and takes a half-measure that results in rhetorical changes but does not solve the far-reaching issues.

Finally, in 2017 we see the ultimate removal of the monument and a government that is ready to move forward. These changes were possible through an evolving society and values that led to the memorial no longer holding a place in the city. The government had moved to a place where the monument had to go and the city needed to move towards a new future predicated on a different view of the past.

Looking at the timeline in terms of the dialectic of tragedy, I believe the city of New Orleans was able to learn through suffering. Looking broadly, the initial action (poiema) that created the suffering was the city creating a monument to honor the White League members who lost their lives. This then led to the suffering (pathema) which were the consequences of the memorial. These were conflicts between groups, violence, protests, court cases, demonstrations, and ceremonies. All of this plagued the city of New Orleans, and they faced the recalcitrance from their action of enacting the monument. However, the action combined with the suffering faced led the city to eventually reach the point of what is learned (mathema).

The city arrived at a higher order of understanding and was able to widen its knowledge. New Orleans learned how monuments affect a society and how they can perpetuate a hierarchy that disenfranchises and alienates citizens. They saw that Confederate memorials were a thing of
the past and that what they represented were no longer in line with the city's views. To complete
the process, the city took what it had learned and revised their initial action by removing the
memorial. The city of New Orleans is a representation of “the suffered is the learned” and
through their experience learned the correct action to take and arrived at a higher order of
understanding.

Shifting over, New Orleans dealt with pushback from citizens over the memorial that led
to guilt. The guilt then led to purification where the city had to express remorse for what it had
done with the monument. When seeking purification, up until 2017 the government used the
victimage and scapegoat approach. There was always a “but” and a plaque would be added, but
they could not go further because of a law. The monument was put into storage but was taken
back out due to historical preservation laws. In 2017, New Orleans took a new approach and
expressed mortification and did not deflect and got rid of the monument and apologized.

Although the city of New Orleans learned through their suffering, I do not believe that
they achieved redemption. The acts of purification were not equivalent to the degree of guilt.
This monument was around for over 100 years and the city continually allowed it to stand.
Although they made the right decision, it should have been done sooner. Besides removal, the
city could have taken more steps to express mortification and try to move forward. In addition,
the removal of the monument missed the mark and should have been done in a public
celebration. Therefore, the purification did not equal the guilt that the monument created and the
city of New Orleans will move forward, but did not achieve redemption.

To look more broadly, this is an ongoing issue in our country. Monuments across the
country and the world are facing a moment of reckoning and it is up to governments and political
powers to determine what should be done. The important thing is that those in power listen to
their citizens and try to understand all perspectives. For a hierarchy and a society to function, people need to feel accepted and their voices heard. Attention needs to be paid to the future and what kind of country we want to be. When old monuments come down new ones emerge. How will we occupy public space, what will the monuments symbolize, and what values will they project? Public monuments are built by those with official power and as citizens, we need to keep a watchful eye. People must not underestimate the power of symbols, monuments, and public spaces. The future values of our nation, the heroes we will honor, and what will occupy “sacred” public space are unknown. As a nation, let us hope we will learn from our past and look towards a bright future.
VI. References


Figure 1 (Scott Threlkeld, “The Advocate”, 2017).
UNITED STATES TROOPS TOOK OVER THE STATE 
GOVERNMENT AND REINSTATED THE USURPERS 
BUT THE NATIONAL ELECTION NOVEMBER 1876 
RECOGNIZED WHITE SUPREMACY IN THE SOUTH 
AND GAVE US OUR STATE.

Figure 2 (Trowbridge, “TheClio.com”, 2017).
This monument was erected in 1874 by the white civic leadership of New Orleans. The only inscriptions originally placed on the monument were the names of those who died in the “Battle of Liberty Place,” and the date on the base. All additional inscriptions were added in 1933 by a commission appointed in that year by the then-mayor of New Orleans.

The “Battle” which the monument commemorates was, in fact, an armed uprising against the city and state governments of the Reconstruction period and was led and financed by the white league, composed of white New Orleans citizens. Arms were secretly imported and the planning took place at a local social club.

The goal of the league was to restore its leaders to command of local government. After winning the battle, they appealed to President Ulysses S. Grant for recognition. Federal troops had played no part in the battle of Liberty Place, however; President Grant refused to extend recognition to the new group, and they vacated the government posts they had seized.

Although the “Battle of Liberty Place” and this monument are important parts of New Orleans’ history, the sentiments in favor of white supremacy expressed therein are contrary to the philosophy and beliefs of present-day New Orleans.

February 1976

Figure 3 (Cook, 2012).
Figure 4 (Trowbridge, “TheClio.com”, 2017).
Figure 5 (Chadwick, “Neworleanshistorical.org”).
Hitler Fest 85

Saturday, April 20th

SIDEWALK MARCH:
Time: 10:00 a.m.
When: April 20th, 1985
Where: Liberty Place at the foot of Canal Street in New Orleans, La.

Pot Luck PICNIC:
Time: 12:00 noon
When: April 20th, 1985
Where: Lafrenier Park off of Veterans

For More Information Call:
833-4031

WHITE VICTORY

Figure 6 (Chadwick, “Neworleanshistorical.org”).
Figure 7 (New Orleans Times-Picayune, Kathy Anderson, 1993).
Figure 8 (Scott Threlkeld, “The Advocate”, 2017).