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Cover Page Footnote

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Antebellum Myth and Memorials

The existence of Confederate monuments provides U.S. society a unique challenge regarding the manner in which diverse communities define themselves. The display of memorials and monuments commemorating historical Southern attitudes regarding the American Civil War create tension among contemporary citizens who are divided regarding their meaning. One portion of the population views the Confederate monuments within the lens of memorial acknowledging those who made sacrifices to uphold an honorable cause. However, other groups believe these same memorials celebrate a time in which marginalized people were exploited to sustain an economic system that was both racist and ultimately benefitted white privilege (Donaldson, 2008). The stark contrast between these two schools of thought show how cultural, social, regional, political values, biases and beliefs influence and shape the way people discuss and construct solutions to public issues. Wineburg, (2001) and VanSledright's (2014) approach to thinking provides the potential to discuss Confederate monuments in meaningful ways.

This article shows one way to use Confederate memorials as a vehicle to strengthen students' historical thinking skills. The overall aim of the activity is to deconstruct the divergent meanings within Confederate monuments. These analysis processes help students to examine history through a "warts and all" approach (VanSledright, 2016). The activity featured in the article is focused upon a mural located within Jefferson County Alabama's courthouse commissioned in 1931 called *The Old South* that the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) has recently demanded to be removed. First, the author provides a brief overview of using Confederate monuments and memorials as a teaching tool. Then he gives the steps and resources to implement an activity using this mural for the high school social studies classroom.

Brief Overview of Confederate Monuments and Memorials

There are more than 1,700 Confederate monuments and memorials that adorn cities and towns throughout the Southern United States (SPLC, 2018). Construction of Confederate monuments occurred in two historical eras. The first memorials were erected in the latter part of the 19th century. Building the structures were largely inspired by residents who lived through the Civil War and Reconstruction. They attempted to honor family members, and townsfolk who lost their lives during the Civil War (Clark, 2003). Other memorials were built and dedicated in the first part of the 20th century. Those structures were motivated by a quest to mythologize the Antebellum period (Currey, 2003).

More than 718 of Confederate monuments are structures that can be described as a statue or concrete marker to commemorate people and/or groups who were directly involved in the U.S. Civil War (Wineberry, 2015). Similar to

Antebellum Myth and Memorials

other memorials, some of the statues can be an elaborate depiction of a soldier in battle or reflect religious themes. Other monuments can be as simple as a plaque or an artist rendering of a battle scene like that displayed in the battle scene of Atlanta located at the Cyclorama to the Atlanta History Center (Loewen, 1999). Still others like the one featured in this article are murals that are homages to the Antebellum period usually expressing “romantic” views of the time period that are not always historically accurate. This quixotic perspective of the racist period is an effective way to inspire historical thinking within the classroom.

With historical thinking activities, students critically examine and classify different sources, contextualize different documents, utilize close reading activities, and corroborate evidence among different sources (Wineburg, 2001, Monte-Sano, 2012; Monte-Sano, De La Paz, 2014; VanSledright, 2002, 2014). This is a critical step for students because the evaluation of primary documents lays at the heart of historical thinking and provides learners a model for active participation as a citizen in a democracy (Clabough, 2017; Parker, 2015; Valbuena, 2015). The activity also attempts to help students build reasoning skills through the utilization of primary documents to support a particular position (Monte-Sano, et al, 2014). Finally, the activity is created with contextualization buried deeply within its DNA, requiring what Bruce VanSledright calls “mental heavy lifting,” (VanSledright, 2014) that should be at the heart of genuine history education. In the next section, the author provides an activity that builds students’ analysis skills by examining a Confederate mural.

Confederate Mural Activity

This activity aligns with the National Council for the social studies (NCSS) C3 framework (D2.His.1.9-12) where students evaluate how historical events and developments were shaped by unique circumstances of time and place as well as broader historical contexts (NCSS, 2013b, p. 46). This activity will require between 180 to 225 minutes or five 45-minute periods. For the African-American perspective of the activity, students must have a good working knowledge of slavery.

Throughout the steps in this activity, students explore two essential questions. The first question centers upon the motivation that inspired the creation of Confederate monuments and memorials. Students are directed to dig deeply within the so-called “romantic” attitudes that many people living in the early 20th century had regarding the Antebellum period. The second question centers upon how the 21st century should contend with Confederate monuments. Students are provided an opportunity to engage within a problem-based project to seek a solution. This reflects the important goal of analysis and manipulation of real

Antebellum Myth and Memorials

world problems through student discovery and reflection regarding conflict (Oliver & Shaver, 1966).

In pairs, students read chunked pages (Mills, 2003, pp. xv; xvii; Clark, pp. 48-54; Zipf, p. 27; Currey, pp. 133-135) from *Monuments to the Lost Cause: Women, Art, and the Landscapes of Southern Memory* (Mills & Simpson, 2003). They are provided a guided-reader graphic organizer and answer each question. This allows students to organize the beliefs that inspired the creation of Confederate monuments throughout the South. Students are also directed to consider African Americans' perspectives about these monuments and memorials (Clark, 2003). While the students are answering these questions, the teacher walks around the classroom to assist students where needed.

After the pairs complete the reading assignment and answer the questions in the graphic organizer, there should be a class debriefing. Students add onto their graphic organizers based on peers' responses. Through guiding this discussion, the teacher's focus is on having students support their responses with evidence. The teacher may also ask students some extension questions designed to help them gain a deeper understanding regarding perspectives of a segment of White citizens who support the moments and memorials and the perspectives of African American's who view the commemoration as racist. Some possible extension questions may include the following:

Graphic Organizer (T-Chart) for the inspiration to build Confederate Monuments		
Based upon: <i>Monuments to the lost cause: Women, art, and the landscapes of southern memory.</i>		
Question	White Citizens View	African American Citizens <u>View</u>
Why did citizens want Confederate memorials built?		
How did citizens describe the Antebellum period?		
What was the response to African Americans efforts to memorialize the period?		
What role did opposition to federal authority have in creating the monuments?		

1. What motivation does each group ascribe the ultimate inspiration of the Confederate monuments and memorials? Why do think each party believes this?

Antebellum Myth and Memorials

2. What does each groups' solution regarding the Confederate monuments and memorials say about the core beliefs regarding memorializing the Confederate cause?

These two questions enable students to gain a better understanding of the core beliefs of those supporting Confederate memorials as well those who object to them. This class discussion allows students to gain experience engaging in meaningful dialogues with contemporary issues (Blevins, LeCompte, & Wells, 2016). The teacher needs to emphasize the importance of enumerating students' answers with text evidence. Ask for text evidence not only gives the instructor evidence of the students' thinking enumerated in the C3 Framework by the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS, 2013) but is an effective evaluative tool that will help with the formative assessment described later in this article. The questions in the graphic organizer and those addressed during the debriefing enable the students to gain a better understanding of the core beliefs of the Confederate memorialists and African Americans. Students also see the root origins for these two groups' perspectives about Confederate monuments and memorials.

Next, students examine, evaluate and interpret a mural entitled "The Old South", by artist John Warner Norton. David Conrad (1995) argued the use of murals is an essential instructional device insisting the artwork represents democratic expression demonstrating the capacity to strengthen and expand multicultural understanding. Within this activity learners encounter a historical lens that attempted to express a vision that advocated the Antebellum myth of White superiority.

The mural was constructed early in the 20th century. While there are many Confederate monuments that can be studied, the mural painted in the early 1930's within the Jefferson County Courthouse is particularly compelling. The artwork depicts African American slaves toiling in a cotton field. White overseers are situated high above the plantation scene on horseback gazing down at the workers. Critics argue the artwork promotes racial division by advancing the myth that the Antebellum period might be redeemed (Woodward, 1951; Cynthia Mills 2003). They maintain such memorials are an abiding reminder of an



Ryerson & Burnham Archives Archival Image Collection at the Art Institute of Chicago

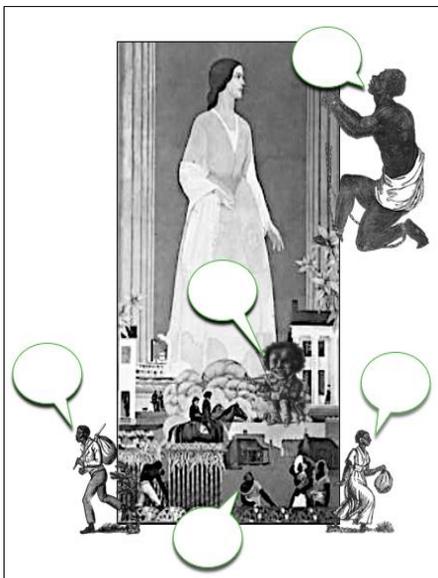
Antebellum Myth and Memorials

effort to acknowledge Antebellum values that the white majority of the day insisted must be honored.

Working in pairs students unpack the intention of the memorial by exploring the layers of meaning within the mural. Utilizing newspaper articles as well as an application to the United States Department of Interior Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service students attempt to describe how each layer of the mural depicts a memorialist view of the Antebellum period. The activity provides learners the opportunity to decide how historical figures should be commemorated or criticized (Waters & Russell, 2013). The teacher demonstrates to students how to study the mural urging them to evaluate the layers of meaning within the image of the wall painting. Students are directed to examine the various images that are highlighted within the mural. A check-list is provided giving students “look-for’s” from which to achieve the task:

1. What are the people doing at the bottom of the mural?
2. What are the houses that are located behind the cotton field?
3. Who are the people sitting on horses?
4. How are the houses different above the riders?
5. What is the purpose of the Steamboat?
6. Why is the woman painted so large?
7. How does the painting portray the Antebellum period?

Then, pairs share their research findings with the class. Class members add to their notes. Students benefit from this activity using resources from the arts, humanities, and sciences (NCCS, 2008). This exercise encourages students to broaden their understanding of historical thinking beyond the printed word with manipulation of art. This activity highlights art as a method of constructing a position regarding Confederate monuments and memorials.



For the next phase of the instruction, students are broken into groups of five. Utilizing the notes from study of “Old South” they interpret the mural through an African American’s perspective. This step allows students to consider how groups may interpret a Confederate mural differently. Using historical caricatures portraying slavery, students provide a counter-narrative to this mural within cartoon bubbles.

For example, a slave portrayed in chains speaks to the giant white overseer within the painting while a caricature of Dredd Scott converses with the wealthy

Antebellum Myth and Memorials

overseers. At the bottom of the graphic two escaped slaves converse with a slave who continues to work on a plantation.

The teacher and students work together to reimagine dialog that could have occurred reflecting the efforts of all people who made contributions to the Antebellum period. The students are urged to evoke the emotion of the African Americans' who provided the hard work to build the Antebellum structure.

Upon completion of the cartoon bubble step, groups present their ideas to the whole class. The teacher facilitates a discussion concerning how Confederate memorials and monuments can serve as a vehicle to strengthen students' historical thinking skills. The debriefing is offered as an important transition to the culminating exercise and to clarify any lingering questions.

Within the culminating step of the activity, students create a new mural in an attempt to provide a counter-narrative. The class remains assigned within the same groups earlier. The primary instruction given is for students to create a new mural with layers of meaning similar to Norton's "The Old South." A key requirement is for students to provide a depiction that gives voice to those who may feel marginalized by the "Old South." The counter-mural is a summative assessment in the form of a faux primary source that is designed to demonstrate students' understanding of the complexity of tensions surrounding interpretation of Confederate monuments. A faux primary source is a student-centered exercise that allows students to assume the role of a historical figure and create a representation of a particular view about an issue of a time period. Some faux primary resources that students can create include a during a newspaper article, diary entry or a political cartoon. (Bickford, 2012a; Clabough & Hamblen, 2012; Clabough & Turner, 2014; Clabough, Turner, Russell & Waters, 2016). An example of a student faux mural is provided here.



Student Created Faux Mural

Alternative Monument as Faux Historical Document

The steps within this activity demonstrates how Confederate monuments as a teaching tool can strengthen students' historical thinking skills. The first graphic organizer provides students a structure from which to outline differing points of view regarding Confederate monuments and memorials. Students benefit by taking notes highlighting the layers of meaning that are emphasized within the

Antebellum Myth and Memorials

“Old South” mural (Wineburg, 2001; Schramm-Pate & Lussier, 2004). Students critically examine and classify the art by contextualizing and corroborating evidence from historic research to help build their reasoning and argument skills (Monte-Sano et al, 2014). They use word bubbles to express how African Americans might converse with “Old South” mural, which strengthens their historical thinking skills. Finally, the students create an alternative faux primary source providing them the opportunity to decide how to properly view and articulate their understanding of the Antebellum period (Bickford, 2012b; Clabough, 2015; Waters & Russell, 2013).

Conclusion

The activity utilized in this article serves as a gateway to instruct students about controversial issues. The study of Confederate monuments provides students a mechanism of discussing key social issues because these structures and visuals gives them a more complete picture of a time period (VanSledright, 2016). Crafted instruction using Confederate monuments allows students to develop visual literacy and an understanding of multiple perspectives from those who are both supportive and critical of Confederate monuments. Utilizing the student evaluation of conflicting evidence regarding the inspirations of controversies, and the practice of weighing differing perspectives about the use of Confederate monuments helps students to develop their own beliefs (Carano & Clabough, 2017).

The use of Confederate monuments as an instructional tool provides a mechanism to build students’ civic identities. The development of students civic identities is an essential for social studies because the ultimate goal of our discipline is to prepare our students to be future citizens (Engle, 1960; Barr, Barth & Shermis, 1977; Hess, 2015; NCSS, 2015). Political discussions in 2018 are often heated rhetoric that too often fails to provide a model of conversation within democracy that students should emulate. Providing learners an alternative method of dialogue offers a better option than what fuels much of today’s conversation about Confederate monuments and memorials. Utilizing instructional strategies like the one proposed in this article allow students to examine and empathize with different perspectives about Confederate monuments and memorials.

Antebellum Myth and Memorials

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Antebellum Myth and Memorials

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Antebellum Myth and Memorials

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